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Pedagogical and Performance Aspects of Three American Compositions for Solo Piano: John Corigliano's Fantasia on an Ostinato, Miguel del Aguila's Conga for Piano, and William Bolcom's Nine New Bagatelles

Tse Wei Chai

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**Pedagogical and Performance Aspects of Three American Compositions for Solo Piano:
John Corigliano's *Fantasia on an Ostinato*,
Miguel del Aguila's *Conga for Piano*, and
William Bolcom's *Nine New Bagatelles***

Tse Wei Chai

**A Doctoral Research Project submitted to
The College of Creative Arts
at West Virginia University**

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**Doctor of Musical Arts
in
Piano Performance**

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**Keywords: John Corigliano, *Fantasia on an Ostinato*, William Bolcom,
Nine New Bagatelles, Miguel del Aguila, *Conga for Piano*, Performance, Pedagogy**

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ABSTRACT

Pedagogical and Performance Aspects of Three American Compositions for Solo Piano: John Corigliano's *Fantasia on an Ostinato*, Miguel del Aguila's *Conga for Piano*, and William Bolcom's *Nine New Bagatelles*

Tse Wei Chai

This research document focuses on three American compositions: John Corigliano's *Fantasia on an Ostinato*, Miguel del Aguila's *Conga for Solo Piano*, and William Bolcom's *Nine New Bagatelles*. These three pieces fall into the category of standard contemporary works which require pianists' advanced technique, sound exploration, and imagination. The intention of this research is to provide guidance for pianists and piano instructors who want to learn, perform, or teach any of these contemporary pieces.

There are five chapters in this document. Chapter One highlights the existing literature regarding these three pieces. Chapter Two, "John Corigliano," has three main sections. Section one includes a biography of John Corigliano. Section two focuses on how Corigliano has used minimalist technique, music quotation, and aleatoric elements in his *Fantasia on an Ostinato*. Section three highlights the major technical challenges and their possible solutions in the *Fantasia on an Ostinato*. It includes discussions of "Bebung" effect, metric modulation, aleatoric elements, hand shifting, and dynamic control.

Chapter Three, "Miguel del Aguila," also consists of three main sections. A biography of Miguel del Aguila is presented in section one. Section two provides a brief history of "Conga" as the Cuban drum and also as the Conga dance. Miguel del Aguila's inspiration in writing the *Conga Line in Hell* is also discussed in section two. Section three focuses on the structural analysis and the performance concerns of this Conga. Clave pattern, distorted rhythms, salsa-like pattern, tango rhythm, glissando, tempo, dynamics, wrist movement, body posture and balance are discussed in section three.

Similarly, Chapter Four, "William Bolcom," has three main sections. A biography of William Bolcom is presented in section one. Bolcom's significant piano solo works are discussed in section two, together with the placement of his *Nine New Bagatelles* among his piano solo works. Section three provides brief structural analysis of each bagatelle as well as the performance concerns of tempo, articulation, pedaling, division between hands, trills, dynamics, tone quality, balance of sound, and voicing in the *Nine New Bagatelles*.

The summary is presented in Chapter Five.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

American keyboard music started to gain popularity in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century, especially with pieces like Gottschalk's *Bamboula* (1844-1845), Mac Dowell's *The Woodland Sketches* (1896), Scott Joplin's *The Entertainer* (1899) and Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924). Most of these compositions represent elements of Nationalism, a movement when composers drew on idiomatic fragments of folk songs, dances, legends, history and other nationalistic materials in their compositions. American music became more diverse with the emergence of total serialism, postmodernism, minimalism, electronic music, and aleatoric music after World War II. Despite this diversity, American music has not gained widespread popularity among college students who are given a chance to choose their own repertoire. This concern was raised by John Warthen Struble who writes:

Private music students... are still consistently trained in the standard European keyboard, vocal, and instrumental literature, which is endorsed to the near exclusion of American music ...Such students generally enter college knowing nothing of American music beyond an occasional piece by Gottschalk or Copland...America, in the global culture of the post-World War II era, flatters itself with the delusion that it has achieved overall musical independence from Europe, yet we have still failed to devise a system of music education that seriously integrates American classical models into its curriculum or takes account of our own musical vernacular in any meaningful way.¹

It cannot be denied that the compositions of Debussy, Ravel, Bartok, Scriabin, Eric Satie, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich are among the popular choices for students when selecting twentieth-century literature to perform. This may be seen as a reflection of the failure of music educators to broaden students' knowledge of American music.

¹ John Warthen Struble, *The History of American Classical Music* (New York: Facts On File, 1995), xvi.

In this past century, American music has gained in stature around the world. Thus, music educators should take responsibility and encourage students to explore more of the diverse styles and sounds offered by American music. This is supported by Helen Marlais, a faculty member at Iowa State University, in the article entitled "A teacher's guide to early advanced piano works of the American twentieth century," where she emphasizes,

*It is the teacher's responsibility to forge new directions and awareness of American music by motivating, persuading, and inspiring students to learn these works. If piano teachers show enthusiasm for twentieth century music, this excitement will be instilled in their students, as the pianist Ursula Oppens commented, 'you certainly do not want to be a restaurant to put the same sauce on every plate.'*²

² Helen Marlais, "A Teacher's Guide to Early Advanced Piano Works of the American Twentieth Century." *American Music Teacher* 46, no. 5 (April 1997): 30.

(I) Purpose and Limitations of the Study

To address the concern described above—to promote better understanding and performance of American music—the purpose of this study is to provide pedagogical and performance suggestions of three selected American piano solo compositions: John Corigliano's *Fantasia on an Ostinato* (1985), Miguel del Aguila's *Conga for Piano* (1994), and William Bolcom's *Nine New Bagatelles* (2006). These three pieces are appropriate for both undergraduate and graduate students at the collegiate level who would like to perform American music for solo piano. Each piece incorporates different musical styles, demands a strong technical approach and requires performers to play expressively.

However, this study is not intended to be a thorough theoretical analysis of each piece. Instead it focuses on developing a good understanding of the different musical styles and on cultivating a strong imaginative approach to these works. I plan to discuss pedagogical and performance problems of rhythm, melody, harmony, dynamics, articulation, tempo, pedaling, texture, form, sound projection, and technical approaches in each of these pieces. Although there is no single interpretation for each piece, it is hoped that this study will provide an aid for teaching and performing these pieces.

(II) Literature Review

This literature review focuses on the available sources—books, dissertations, interviews, journals and articles—related to the biography of three living composers: John Corigliano, Miguel del Aguila, and William Bolcom as well as on the specific works to be researched for this study.

(A) John Corigliano

A keyword search of “John Corigliano” produced three biographical articles in *Grove Music Online*,³ The Encyclopedia Britannica,⁴ and “*LGBTQ America Today: An Encyclopedia*.”⁵ In addition, the book *John Corigliano* which was written by Mary Lou Humphrey in 1994, is very informative.⁶ It includes nineteen pages devoted to biography, a list of compositions, and discography.

There is one dissertation written about John Corigliano’s *Fantasia on an Ostinato* by Beverly Simms, who mentions there are two twentieth-century techniques presented in the *Fantasia on an Ostinato*: 1) borrowed material and quotation, and 2) minimalistic passages which are based on the theme from the second movement of Beethoven’s *Seventh Symphony*.⁷

³ Mark Adamo, "Corigliano, John." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed December 26, 2014.

⁴ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "John Corigliano," accessed December 26, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/www.libproxy.wvu.edu/EBchecked/topic/760560/John-Corigliano>

⁵ Veronica Marian. "John Corigliano (1938–)." *LGBTQ America Today: An Encyclopedia*. Ed. John C. Hawley. Vol. 1. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 264-265, accessed December 26, 2014. <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CCX2449500167&v=2.1&u=morg77564&it=r&p=GVRL&sw=w&asid=dad61a2c056482122171fbac4424b43a>

⁶ Mary Lou Humphrey, *John Corigliano* (New York, NY: G. Schirmer: Associated Music Pub., 1994)

⁷ Beverley Simms, “The Solo Piano Works of John Corigliano Etude Fantasy (1976) and Fantasia on an Ostinato (1985).” (D.M.A. diss., University of North Texas, 1990.)

The formal structure, based on these two twentieth-century techniques, is the main focus in this dissertation.

In addition, an article entitled “Reinventing the Past” presents an interview with John Corigliano and is focused on two Corigliano’s pieces: *Fantasia on an Ostinato* and *Etude Fantasy*.⁸ In this article, Corigliano remarked that a composer would not be able to move to a higher level if the past is neglected and not studied.⁹ *Fantasia on an Ostinato* and *Etude Fantasy* are examples of using techniques from the past as a point of departure. Corigliano discussed briefly how the elements of fantasy as seen in his *Fantasia on an Ostinato* were taken from the second movement of Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 7*. In this symphony, the ostinato is repeated for five minutes with different instrumentations. Corigliano also pointed out there are parallels in the formal structure of Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 7* and his “Fantasia.” Both pieces are written in binary form.¹⁰ Corigliano mentioned that the first part of his “Fantasia” explored the ostinato rhythm and harmonic implications while the second part included the climax and the return of the theme of the second movement in Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 7*. Corigliano also provided some performance guidelines in the preface “Color, variety, and imagination are essential and performer’s sense of fantasy and the duration for the repeated pattern which is intended to vary in each performance will influence the work’s final shape.” This article is very helpful in order to understand Corigliano’s approach of “Reinventing the Past” in his *Fantasia on an Ostinato*.

In his review of *Fantasia on an Ostinato*, David Burge began by mentioning that there have been various arguments and strong opinions of minimalism since 1960.¹¹ Burge pointed out

⁸ Robert Rimm, "Reinventing the Past," *International Piano* no. 47 (Sep, 2006): 32-37.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹ David Burge, "Fantasia on an Ostinato for Solo Piano (1985) by John Corigliano," *Notes* Volume 46, no. 4 (1990): 1074.

that Charles Wuorinen and George Perle expressed their thoughts regarding minimalism in interviews with Los Angeles Times in 1989. Charles Wuorinen argued that “People have stopped trying to be civilized. What we have is...the need for instant self-gratification. And that accounts for this utterly unchallenging, un-provocative kind of music.”¹² Perle commented that minimalism uses “the most superficial aspect of an old music language.”¹³ In his article, Burge pointed out that the American composer, Eric Salzman, agreed that “minimalism is hardly an intellectual exercise.”

Despite all these negative opinions, composers still continue to be attracted to minimalism. Corigliano’s first experiment in minimalist technique is reflected in his *Fantasia* describing it as having “excessive repetitions...lack of architecture, and ... overall emotional sterility.”¹⁴

(B) Miguel del Aguila

A search for “Miguel del Aguila” in the *Grove Music Online* and The Encyclopedia Britannica yield no information. However, a short biography of Miguel del Aguila can be found in his personal website.¹⁵ Aguila’s biography also can be found in Chapter Three of Yew Choong Cheong dissertation, “An Introduction to the Solo Piano Works of Three Latin American Composers: Miguel Del Aguila, Tania Leon, and Juan Maria Solare.”¹⁶ Cheong also included edited email correspondence with Miguel del Aguila.¹⁷ Both provide valuable information on

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1075

¹⁵ Miguel del Aguila, “Biography,” accessed March 31, 2016, <http://www.migueldelaguila.com/biography.html>

¹⁶ Yew Choong Cheong, “An Introduction to the Solo Piano Works of Three Latin American Composers: Miguel Del Aguila, Tania Leon, and Juan Maria Solare.” (D.M.A. diss., West Virginia University, 2009), 38-40.

¹⁷ Ibid., 144-145.

Aguila's family background, musical life, inspiration from Latin American folklore and musical styles (particularly rhythm) and his compositional goals. In the interview with Aguila, the composer mentioned that the formal structure of his *Conga for Piano* is an ABA form. The fourth beat in the ostinato rhythmic pattern in section A is anticipated and accented. This rhythmic cell is distorted into an asymmetrical time signature throughout the whole piece. Cheong's study does not contain a complete analysis of *Conga for Piano*. However, he provided a short history and discussed the distinctive stylistic traits of the piece.

Another important interview with Miguel del Aguila was presented by Robert Schulslaper in the magazine entitled *Fanfare*.¹⁸ Aguila, born in Uruguay in 1957, immigrated to California in 1992. After graduating from the San Francisco Conservatory, he studied in Vienna, where twelve-tone music was favored at that time. However, he preferred to compose music in the native styles of Latin American. Aguila's compositions—*First Piano Suite*, *Salon Buenos Aires*, *Clocks*, *Presto II*, *Charango Capriccioso*, *Conga Line in Hell*, and *Life is a Dream*—were briefly discussed in the interview. The title, *Conga Line in Hell*, was questioned by Schulslaper as the title sounds humorous, macabre, and frightening. Aguila replied that he had dreamed of his friend who passed away with mental problems. In the dream, Aguila was looking for him in Hell and he saw fire and many people. *Conga Line in Hell* was composed and performed by Aguila in the dream. The people in Hell were asked to dance in a conga line. It was Aguila's hope, to make them feel happy.

¹⁸ Robert Schulslaper, "Composer Miguel Del Aguila: Rhythm, Romance, and Reality," *Fanfare: The Magazine for Serious Record Collectors* 33, no. 5 (May, 2010): 162-167.

(C) William Bolcom

With respect to the biography of William Bolcom, *Grove Music Online*¹⁹ and the Encyclopedia Britannica²⁰ provide important and relevant articles. In addition, there are many dissertations regarding other piano pieces of Bolcom including Andria Rachel Fennig's "A Performance Guide to William Bolcom's Twelve Etudes (1971) and Twelve New Etudes (1988)," Dan K McAlexander's "Works for Piano by William Bolcom: A Study in the Development of Musical Postmodernism," David Scott Murray's "Irony and Satire": The Nine Bagatelles of William Bolcom," Henry Scott Jone's "William Bolcom's "Twelve New Etudes for Piano," and Justin Douglas Krueger's "An Exploration of Conceptual Teaching in Piano Study: Pedagogical Analysis of Three Selected Intermediate Piano Works by Two American Composers, William Bolcom and Lowell Liebermann," which discuss Bolcom's biography as well as his works.

However, no thesis or dissertation has been written on William Bolcom's *Nine New Bagatelles*. Nevertheless, there is one page review of William Bolcom's *Nine New Bagatelles for Piano Solo* written by Virginia Marks in an article in the *American Music Teacher*.²¹ Marks mentions that these nine new bagatelles with imaginative titles are suitable for advanced pianists who enjoy fascinating sounds. In Mark's opinion, this music is marvelous and can be performed

¹⁹ Steven Johnson and Lars Helgert. "Bolcom, William." Grove Music Online. Oxford Online. Oxford University Press, accessed December 26, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2248409>

²⁰ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "William Bolcom", accessed December 26, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/www.libproxy.wvu.edu/EBchecked/topic/71965/William-Bolcom>

²¹ Virginia Marks, "Nine New Bagatelles for Piano Solo," *American Music Teacher* 56, no. 5 (Apr, 2007):92.

as a set or in smaller groups of piece in a recital program. She believes it takes a high level of musical sophistication and strong technical background to play these pieces.

(III) Layout of the Study

This study is written in five chapters: (1) Introduction, (2) John Corigliano's *Fantasia on an Ostinato* (1985), (3) Miguel del Aguila's *Conga for Piano* (1994), (4) William Bolcom's *Nine New Bagatelles* (2006), and (5) Conclusion. Following this introduction in Chapter One, there are three main sections in each of Chapter Two, Three, and Four. Each chapter starts with a brief summary of the composer's biography, followed by the history and stylistic traits of the pieces researched, and ends with pedagogical challenges and suggestions for performance. Chapter Five provides a summary of the research.

CHAPTER TWO

JOHN CORIGLIANO

(I) Biography

*One of the most talented composers on the scene today- the real thing.
His music is individual, imaginative, expertly crafted, and aurally quite stunning.*²²

(Aaron Copland)

*John Corigliano is unquestionably one of the great music voices of our time,
speaking from heart to heart without bypassing the brain.
His musical gestures are often huge, dramatic, and dynamic: yet underneath will be subtlest
nuance- a harmonic twist, a melodic contour- which forms deeply and sometimes painfully
touching music. And few composers are as memorable: you cannot walk away from a Corigliano
piece, it lingers, delighting or disturbing, long after the performance is over.*²³

(Stephen Hough)

A living American composer who is recognized internationally, John Corigliano (b.1938), has written a variety of genres. These include chamber music, symphonies, operas, concertos, film scores, and works for voice and solo instruments. He has received numerous honors and awards. The most significant are a Guggenheim Fellowship, three Grammy Awards, an Academy Award, and the Pulitzer Prize. His *Symphony No. 1* (1991), the *String Quartet* (1997), and the *Concerto for Percussionist & String Orchestra* (2014) received a Grammy Award. In 1999, he won an Academy Award for his fourth film score, *The Red Violin*. In 2001, his *Symphony No. 2* won the Pulitzer Prize.²⁴

²² John Corigliano, "Biography," accessed January 2, 2015, <http://johncorigliano.com>

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

John Corigliano was born into a musical family on February 16, 1938 in New York City. His father, John Corigliano Sr., was a concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra from 1943 to 1966; his mother, Rose Buzen was a pianist. He was largely self-taught when he was young and exposed to classical music when his mother taught piano at home. He gained the ability of orchestration when he began to analyze scores while listening to recordings.²⁵

Although Corigliano was discouraged by his family from pursuing music as a career, he studied musical composition at Columbia University with Otto Luening from 1955 to 1959. He also studied privately with Paul Creston. From 1962 to 1963, he studied at the Manhattan School of Music with Vittorio Giannini. Corigliano was actively involved in the music industry as a music director for the New York Times radio station, produced recordings for Columbia Masterworks, and directed the Corfu Music Festival. During this time, he also worked with Leonard Bernstein on the Young People's Concerts series for Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS).²⁶

Corigliano taught at the Manhattan School from 1971 to 1986. From 1987 to 1990, he served as the first composer-in-residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Since 1992, he has taught at the Juilliard School and also the Distinguished Professor of Music at Lehman College of the City University of New York (CUNY).²⁷

Corigliano's compositions fall into two periods: early works composed before 1975 and works composed after 1975.²⁸ Corigliano described the early period as a "tense, histrionic

²⁵ Beverley Simms, "The Solo Piano Works of John Corigliano Etude Fantasy (1976) and Fantasia on an Ostinato (1985)" (D.M.A. diss., University of North Texas, 1990), 4.

²⁶ Ibid., 5.

²⁷ John Corigliano, "Composer," accessed April 26, 2016, <http://www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer/short-bio/John-Corigliano>

²⁸ Beverley Simms, "The Solo Piano Works of John Corigliano Etude Fantasy (1976) and Fantasia on an Ostinato (1985)" (D.M.A. diss., University of North Texas, 1990), 20.

outgrowth of the ‘clean’ American sound of Barber, Copland, Harris and William Schuman, rather than a descendent of the highly chromatic, super-Romantic German School.”²⁹ Most of the early works are tonal and there is use of dissonance, irregular rhythm, and constant change of meter. Compositions from the early-period are the *Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1963); the *song cycle: The Cloisters* (1965) based on four poems by the playwright William M. Hoffman; *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* (1968); the *Choral Symphony for Chorus, Soloists and Orchestra*; A Dylan Thomas Trilogy (1960–1976); and *Gazebo Dances* for piano four hands (1972) and for orchestra (1974).³⁰

Since 1975, Corigliano’s compositions have become more eclectic. He includes quotations from other musicians as well as various styles and compositional techniques. This eclectic concept is often called postmodernism. Corigliano once mentioned:

*I don’t think of style as the basic unifying factor in music like many composers do today. I feel very strongly that a composer has a right to do anything he feels is appropriate, and that stylistic consistency is not what makes a piece impressive...I also appreciate the more recent idea of mixing different styles in one piece, of using style as a technique that like orchestration, provides the composer with a wider expressive palette.*³¹

Between 1975 and 1985, Corigliano composed many pieces in the postmodernist style. The *Etude Fantasy for Solo Piano* (1976) is a set of five virtuosic etudes, combines fantasia and percussive elements. Other pieces such as *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra* (1977), *Promenade Overture* (1981), and *Fantasia on an Ostinato* (1985) have borrowed materials from Giovanni Gabrieli, Haydn’s *Farewell Symphony* and Beethoven’s *Seventh Symphony*, respectively.³²

²⁹ Mary Lou Humphrey, *John Corigliano* (New York, NY: G. Schirmer: Associated Music Pub., 1994), 3.

³⁰ Simms, 7-9.

³¹ Ibid., 8.

³² Ibid., 10.

In addition, Corigliano also composed music for three film scores which are highly praised. They are *Altered States* in 1980, *Revolution* in 1985, and the *Red Violin* in 1998.³³ Other film work that includes theme music for television programs are *Bacall on Bogart* (1988) and *A Table at Ciro's* (1985).

The *Symphony No. 1* (1989), commissioned by the Chicago Symphony, was composed as the memorial to the victims of AIDS. Its companion choral work, *Of Rage and Remembrance* (1990), is an homage to his friends lost to AIDS; it was a motive from the third movement of *Symphony No. 1*. The opera (*The Ghosts of Versailles*) was Corigliano's first venture in operatic writing. It was commissioned by New York's Metropolitan Opera and premiered in 1991.³⁴

There are many significant compositions composed by Corigliano after 1990. The *Guitar Concerto, Troubadours* (1993), contains a series of free variations on a twelfth-century troubadour melody. Other important compositions include *Fanfares to Music* (1993) which was based on Schubert's *An die Musik*; the Grammy-winning *String Quartet* (1996); Pulitzer Prize-winning *Symphony No. 2* (2000); *Symphony No. 3: Circus Maximus*, commissioned by the University of Texas at Austin Wind Ensemble (2014); a solo violin piece, *Stomp*, commissioned for the International Tchaikovsky Competition (2010); a four- movement song cycle for voice and orchestra premiered by the New York Philharmonic in September 2011.³⁵

In 2015, a new orchestral version of *Stomp* was commissioned and premiered by the Houston Symphony Orchestra. The new production of the opera, *The Ghosts of Versailles*, by

³³ Simms, 6-14.

³⁴ John Corigliano, "Composer," accessed April 26, 2016, <http://www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer/short-bio/John-Corigliano>

³⁵ John Corigliano, "Composer," accessed April 26, 2016, <http://www.johncorigliano.com/index.php?p=item5>

Los Angeles Opera received great recognition in 2015. It was staged by Tony Award-winning director, Darko Tresnjac.³⁶

(II) History and Stylistic Traits of Corigliano's *Fantasia on an Ostinato* (1985)

John Corigliano's *Fantasia on an Ostinato for Solo Piano* was commissioned for the Seventh Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in 1985. It is based on the ostinato passages in the second movement of Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony*. The ostinato of Beethoven's refers to the repetitions of the rhythmic phrase that was heard throughout the whole second movement in Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony* (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Quotation of the Ostinato of Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony* (second movement) in Corigliano's *Fantasia on an Ostinato*

In the program notes for the work, Corigliano mentioned that Beethoven's near-minimalist style in this passage has attracted him to write the *Fantasia*. Corigliano's *Fantasia on an Ostinato* is a piece with intense emotional expression combined with the hypnotic quality of minimalism.

I believe that Corigliano's *Fantasia* can be regarded as an example of postmodernism as various styles are incorporated within the compositions. According to John Struble,

³⁶ John Corigliano, "Composer," accessed April 26, 2016, <http://www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer/short-bio/John-Corigliano>

postmodernism in music refers to the American composers and some Europeans whose music reflects a general return to tonal organization and a backing off from radical experimentation.³⁷ This is supported by Mark Evan Bonds when he writes, “Postmodernists often look back to the past in an eclectic manner by incorporating mixture of styles in the compositions without neglecting the traditional tonality, forms, and genres.”³⁸ George Rochberg (1918-2005), the founder of postmodernism in music, incorporated quotations of earlier European tonal music in his work in the mid-1960s.³⁹ According to Bonds, American composers after Rochberg such as David Del Tredici, John Corigliano, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Jacob Druckman, Joan Tower, John Harbison, William Bolcom, Bernard Rands and Joseph Schwanter are also considered post-modernist.⁴⁰

As a postmodernist, Corigliano remarked that *Fantasia on an Ostinato* was his only experiment with minimalist technique by using the ostinato passages of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony. Besides the minimalist technique and musical quotation, Corigliano also incorporated aleatoric elements providing the performer a greater freedom and space by leaving the elements of medium (instrumentation), expression (dynamics, etc.), duration (rhythm and tempo), pitch, and form to the performer.⁴¹ In Corigliano’s *Fantasia*, the aleatoric elements occur in two ways: (1) the performer determines the number of repetitions in some repeat signs, (2) the performer is given the freedom to decide the duration of the repetition when the horizontal lines occur (Figure 2.2).

³⁷ John Warthen Struble, *The History of American Classical Music* (New York: Facts On File, 1995), 304.

³⁸ Mark Evan Bonds, *A History of Music in Western Culture* (New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2010), 604-605.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 305-306.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁴¹ Stefan Kostla, *Materials and Techniques of Twentieth-Century Music* (New Jersey: Bud Therien, 1999), 283.

Figure 2.2: Aleatoric element

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(III) Pedagogical and Performance Aspects of John Corigliano's *Fantasia on an Ostinato* (1985)

The form of Corigliano's *Fantasia on an Ostinato* is rounded binary (ABA'). The original ostinato passage of Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony* appears at the end. The composition starts with two opening chords, which are followed by the repeated G-sharps in the right hand part with *tenutos* and slurs (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3: Repeated G-sharps

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The number of the repetitions for the G-sharps shown in Figure 2.3 with the repeat signs and (*2) can be varied. For the G-sharps with *tenutos* and slurs, Corigliano wants the second G-sharp to sound softer than the first. He also indicates that the specific fingering (4-3) that has to

be used for these slurred G-sharps. This fingering was used by Beethoven in the Adagio of his *Piano Sonata in A-Flat Major*, Op. 110 to create a “Bebung effect,” a technique often practiced on the clavichord. The tone can be given trembling effect when the finger shakes on the key after the player depresses and holds the key.⁴² In a modern piano, the vibrating motion of the finger on the key that after it is struck will not produce any change of the sound because the hammer does not return to the string. The “Bebung effect” is used by Corigliano in the *Fantasia* to produce an echo-effect. The performer will hit the first G-sharp with fourth finger and use the third finger to half-strike the second G-sharp by not allowing the key to fully rise back to the top after the first G-sharp is struck.⁴³

Later, the ostinato rhythm of Beethoven’s *Seventh Symphony* is augmented in multiple places (Figure 2.4). The ostinato also receives rhythmic diminution with eighth notes and sixteenth notes marked *marcato* (Figure 2.5).

⁴² Arnold Dolmetsch, *The Interpretation of the Music of the 17th and 18th centuries* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2005), 208.

⁴³ Michael Daniel Deall, “Part I: The Role of Style in John Corigliano’s Film Score to the *Red Violin* (1999) and Part II. *White Shirts: Suite for Symphonic Orchestra* (2007)” (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 2008), 73.

Figure 2.4: Augmentation of ostinato rhythm

Figure 2.5: Diminution of Ostinato rhythm

Figure 2.6: Metric modulation and suggestions of tempo marking

The image displays two systems of musical notation for 'Fantasia on an Ostinato'. The first system is in 3/4 time, with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 66$. It features a bass line with a steady eighth-note ostinato and a treble line with chords. A dynamic marking of *pp* is present. The second system shows a metric modulation where the tempo changes to $\text{♩} = 99$, indicated by a 'rall. e dim.' marking. This is followed by a section with a tempo of $\text{♩} = 198$ and a 'marc.' (marcato) marking. The third system returns to a tempo of $\text{♩} = 66$, marked '... a tempo'. It includes a 'sub. *ff*' (subito fortissimo) marking and continues with the ostinato in the bass and chords in the treble.

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Towards the end of Section A, there is a challenge concerning the control of dynamics when the right hand has to repeat the G-sharp until it has no sound while the left hand has to repeat the A minor chords with the dynamics increasing from *pianissimo* to *mezzo piano* (Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7: Challenge of dynamics control in both hands

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In the program note to the Fantasia, Corigliano described the B section as follows:

The second part develops and extends the ostinato's second half, transforming its pungent major-minor descent into a chain of harmonies over which a series of patterns grows continually more ornate. This climaxes in a return of the obsessive Beethoven rhythm and, finally, the appearance of the Beethoven theme itself.

The B section presents a total change of mood when it starts the chorale-like texture with serenity marked *pianissimo*. Corigliano transformed the second half of Beethoven's ostinato with sequential modulations in major-minor mode as depicted in Figure 2.8. The bass line in Figure 2.8 shows the descending chromatic line from note C4 to C3 with rapid change of meters between 4/4, 3/4, 3/8, and 3/2. It is very interesting to compare Figure 2.8 and the second half of Beethoven's ostinato in Figure 2.9 where the chromatic line of Beethoven's ostinato is hidden in the middle voice (E-D#-D-C#-C-B).

Figure 2.8: Chorale-like texture in Section B

C:I B:I i Bb:I i A:I i C:I⁶ V F#:I

I F:I i E:I i C:V⁴ V/V ii Fr.6 I

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Figure 2.9: Second half of Beethoven's ostinato

C: I V/iii

A: V/V ii vii°6 I

a: i i V6 i V i

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The aleatoric part that follows is based on the harmonic progression of the chorale-like texture shown in Figure 2.8. A long chromatic line is presented in the lowest voice. It starts from C5 and descends to C4 (C5-Cb- Bb- A- G- F#-F-E-D-Db-C4.)

The long, dark horizontal line in this aleatoric section directs the performer to repeat the short motives (Figure 2.10). The performer is given freedom by Corigliano to decide the number of repetitions of these short motives.

Figure 2.10: Dark horizontal lines indicating that repetitions are needed

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In the program note, Corigliano commented that the sense of fantasy and duration for these repeated patterns will affect the final shape of the performance. Therefore, color, variety, and imagination are essential.

In this fantasy section, the performer also needs to decide whether the right hand should play above the left hand or vice versa, because the notes are very close to each other. Figure 2.11 shows an example of the hands' shifting.

Figure 2.11: Hand shifting

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A part exchange happens in the middle of Section B during the appearance of (♩ = 112). The repeated E and G notes at the top in Figure 2.10 are now shifted to the bottom of Figure 2.12. The notes C-G-A in the lowest voice of Figure 2.10 are presented as the top line in Figure 2.12. Tone color receives the emphasis when Corigliano places the staccato touch with a long pedal (Figure 2.12).

Figure 2.12: Staccato touch with long pedal

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The grace notes in *fortissimo*, the appearance of sixteenth notes, the sextuplets, the quick repeated chords, and the expanded range of both hands in Section B create a great intensity. The passage rises to the climax when the ostinato reaches the tempo of ♩ = 132-138 with a long pedal for the repeated chords with accents marked *forte* (Figure 2.13).

Figure 2.13: climax of the Fantasia

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After the climax, Corigliano includes an actual quotation of Beethoven's ostinato at the end. The music dies away with the repeated G-sharps and two long held chords marked *pianissimo* and *pianississimo*.

Corigliano's Fantasia is not intended to be a virtuoso piece but rather a piece to demonstrate the performer's imagination and musicality.⁴⁴ However, the performer still needs good finger work to project all the subtle nuances as indicated by Corigliano. In 1987, Corigliano was commissioned to arrange an orchestral version of the work by the New York

⁴⁴ John Corigliano, "Fantasia on an Ostinato," accessed Feb. 6, 2016, <http://www.johnorigliano.com/index.php?p=item2&item=63>

Philharmonic Orchestra.⁴⁵ Corigliano revised it and extended as well as modified the middle B section of the work. The solo pianist is encouraged to compare the written out B section of the orchestral version with the piano version. This will help the performer to understand how to play the unmeasured section with mounting intensity and excitement as requested by Corigliano in the piano score.

⁴⁵ Deall, 73.

CHAPTER THREE

MIGUEL DEL AGUILA

(I) Biography

*Wonderfully expressive and dramatic music...with a fine sense of direction and drama.*⁴⁶

(American Record Guide)

*A strong individual and vibrant voice that communicates with extraordinary power...
His command of the orchestra is extraordinary and his sense of structure and direction
create works that are compelling and memorable...one of the most significant voices in
our compositional landscape today.*⁴⁷

(JoAnn Falletta, conductor of Buffalo Philharmonic and Virginia Symphony)

A promising Uruguayan-born American composer, Miguel del Aguila (b. September 15, 1957), was nominated for “Best Contemporary Classical Composition” for his work, *Concierto En Tango* in the Latin Grammy Awards in 2015.⁴⁸ It was commissioned by the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra for principal cellist Roman Mekinulov. In 2010, his CD *Salon Buenos Aires* (five chamber works) and the piece, “Clocks” from the same album was honored with two Latin Grammy nominations.⁴⁹ Other significant awards include The Lancaster Symphony Orchestra Composer’s Award (2009), the Peter S. Reed Foundation Award (2008), Meet the Composer Magnum Opus/Kathryn Gould Award (2008), the Copland Foundation Award (2005),

⁴⁶ Miguel del Aguila, “Press Quotes,” accessed March 30, 2016,
<http://www.migueldelaguila.com/press-quotes.html>

⁴⁷ Miguel del Aguila, “Program notes,” accessed March 30, 2016,
<http://www.migueldelaguila.com/program-notes.html>

⁴⁸ Miguel del Aguila, “Long Biography,” accessed April 26, 2016,
<http://www.migueldelaguila.com/biography.html>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

the Argosy Foundation for Contemporary Music (2005), and the Kennedy Center Friedheim Award (1995).⁵⁰

When Aguila was only five years old, he joined a children choir in Montevideo, Uruguay. He received lessons in piano, composition, and music theory lessons at the conservatories in Montevideo. However, in 1978, Aguila and his family moved to United States due to the suffering and torture that occurred under the civic-military dictatorship of Uruguay.⁵¹

After he graduated from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Aguila studied at University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. Although the twelve-tone music was favored in Vienna when he was there, he preferred to compose music in the native styles of Latin America. During the ten-year stay in Vienna, Aguila was actively engaged in teaching, composing, and conducting.⁵²

In 1992, Aguila returned to United States and now lives in Los Angeles, California. He has served as the music director of the Ojai Camerata in California (1996-1999), Composer-in-Residence at the New York's Chautauqua Institution (2001-2004) and Composer-in-Residence with the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra through a Meet-the-Composer's Music Alive Award (2005-2006).⁵³

As an internationally recognized composer, Aguila's commissioned works are regularly performed around the world in major venues such as New York's Lincoln Center, London's Royal Opera House, and in Moscow, Vienna, Zurich, Budapest, Prague, Tokyo, and Rome. Most

⁵⁰ Miguel del Aguila, "Long Biography," accessed April 26, 2016, <http://www.migueldelaguila.com/biography.html>

⁵¹ Yew Choong Cheong, "An Introduction to the Solo Works of Three Latin Composers: Miguel del Aguila, Tania Leon, Juan Maria Solare" (D.M.A. Dissertation, West Virginia University, 2009), 38.

⁵² Robert Schulslaper, "Composer Miguel Del Aguila: Rhythm, Romance, and Reality," *Fanfare: The Magazine for Serious Record Collectors* 33, no. 5 (May, 2010): 162-167.

⁵³ Miguel del Aguila, "Long Biography," accessed April 26, 2016, <http://www.migueldelaguila.com/biography.html>

of his compositions are published by Peermusic Classical and his catalog of compositions has reached 112 works in all genres, including works for orchestra, piano solo, organ/harpsichord solo, vocal chamber, opera, dance, film, and television. His works are currently available on thirty CDs released by labels such as Bridge, Dorian, Telarc, New Albion, Albany, Eroica, Centaur, and Sony-Austria.⁵⁴

(II) History of Aguila's *Conga for Solo Piano*, Op. 39 (1993)

According to Aguila, *Conga for Solo Piano*, Op. 39, was expanded from the final movement of his *Organ Fantasy*, Op. 38. Both were written in 1993. There are two chamber versions, *Conga-Line in Hell*, Op. 40 and Op. 43, composed in 1993 and 1994 respectively. Op. 40 was written for flute, two clarinets, harp, piano, percussion, and eight cellos. It was premiered in Los Angeles by the Lo-Cal Composers Ensemble. Op. 43 was written for sixteen players that include wind, brass, string quartets, harp, piano, and percussion. It was commissioned by the New Julliard Ensemble and was premiered in New York City. The full orchestral version, *Conga*, Op. 44 commissioned by Ventura Symphony Orchestra was premiered in Ventura, California in October 1994.⁵⁵

In general, the term, “Conga,” usually refers to the tall and single-headed Cuban drum in three different sizes.⁵⁶ They are Quinto (small drum), Conga (medium drum), and Tumbadora (large drum). However, Conga also refers to the street processions that originated from the

⁵⁴ Miguel del Aguila, “Recordings Discography,” accessed April 26, 2016, <http://www.migueldelaguila.com/recordings---buy.html>

⁵⁵ Miguel del Aguila, *Conga for Solo Piano*. (New York: Peer International Corporations, 1993), preface.

⁵⁶ John H. Beck, *Encyclopedia of Percussion* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), 20.

African social activities and slave processions for religious ceremonies.⁵⁷ From 1900 to 1937, the processions were banned by white Cuban society due to the wildness presented in the singing and dancing. However, the congas were reintroduced in late 1930. They were popular in the clubs and social groups of both whites and blacks.⁵⁸

The Conga dance was normally performed in a line with the dancers holding the waist or shoulders of the people in front them while dancing to a four-pulse rhythmic pattern. They move forward, backward, left and right to the syncopated rhythm of the music.⁵⁹ In the program notes as explained earlier, Aguila mentions that the music of *Conga* and *Conga Line in Hell* came from a dream he had. In the dream, Aguila was looking for his friend who passed away with mental problems.⁶⁰ He heard the music and he saw an endless line of dead people dancing through the fire of hell in his dream.⁶¹ As Aguila's remarks, the music is to entertain and ease the pain of those poor souls in the dream.⁶²

⁵⁷ George Torres, *Encyclopedia of Latin American Popular Music* (California: Greenwood, 2013), 105.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Robert Schulslaper, 166-167.

⁶¹ Miguel del Aguila, "Program Notes," accessed March 30, 2016, <http://www.migueldelaguila.com/program-notes.html>

⁶² Ibid.

(III) Pedagogical and Performance Aspects of Aguila's *Conga for Solo Piano, Op. 39*

In the program notes for *Conga for Solo Piano*, Aguila writes that the American critic, Bernard Holland, commented that *Conga* is a piece of minimalism as it is full of rhythmic repetitions and melodic sequences.⁶³ Miguel del Aguila described his *Conga* as below:

*The music is humorous, sarcastic, grotesque, sensuous and at times also terrifying. I rely mainly on the dramatic and expressive qualities of rhythm to convey the evil forces that govern my imaginary hell. After the sensuous middle section the work rushes frantically toward the end to explode in a dramatic finale.*⁶⁴

Structural Analysis

To avoid a monotonous performance without musical direction, it is very important to understand how the fascinating dance rhythms and thematic ideas are incorporated in Aguila's *Conga*. The basic structure of the *Conga* is a ternary (ABA') form with an introduction and a coda section. It is interesting to note that the thematic materials in section A and A' are presented in a reversed order: (AI → AII → AIII) becomes (A'III → A'II → A'I). The middle B section functions as the center of the mirror image of section A and section A'. Figure 3.1 shows an overview of the basic form of the *Conga* and it is followed by a detailed thematic analysis of the *Conga*.

⁶³ Miguel del Aguila, "Program Notes," accessed March 30, 2016, <http://www.migueldelaguila.com/program-notes.html>

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Figure 3.1: Basic structure of *Conga for Piano, Op. 39*

Introduction	A	B	A'	Coda
	(I → II → III)		(III → II → I)	
mm. 1-22	mm. 23-139	mm. 140-193	mm. 194-355	mm. 356-381

The *Conga* starts with a twenty two-bar introduction. This section sounds like a music box as it is written in the high register and is held with a long pedal for the entire twenty two measures (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Introduction, mm. 1-6

The musical score for the introduction of *Conga for Piano, Op. 39*, measures 1-6, is shown. The score is in 4/4 time. The right hand plays a high register melody consisting of a series of eighth notes, with a dashed line indicating a continuation of the pattern. The left hand plays a sustained bass line, with a dashed line indicating a continuation of the pattern. The tempo is marked *p tranquillo* and the dynamics are marked *p* and *pp*. The score is labeled *15 ma* and *8 ma*.

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In mm. 23-40, the repeated rhythmic figure that is heard throughout is labelled as Theme AI. It is called *clave* (Figure 3.3).⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Yew Choong Cheong, 55.

Figure 3.3: Theme AI (Clave)

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Clave has two different meanings. First, it can refer to a pair of resonant hardwoods that are performed in many genres of Afro-Cuban music such as mambo, rumba, and conga. The player will hold one clave in each hand and strike the clave that is held in the middle of the non-dominant hand. This will create a resonate sound.⁶⁶ Second, “clave” can refer to the repeated rhythmic patterns. It functions as a timekeeper throughout the piece.

Usually, there are four main types of clave pattern:⁶⁷

i) 3/2 Son Clave

ii) 2/3 Reverse Clave

⁶⁶ John H. Beck, 253.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 254.

iii) Rumba Clave

iv) 6/8 Clave

However, Aguila does not use any of the above clave pattern; rather, he adopted the idea of a clave pattern in a more stylized manner. Figure 3.4 shows the idea of Aguila's clave pattern and its elaboration in mm. 23-26.

Figure 3.4: Clave

i) Clave pattern

ii) Elaboration of the clave pattern in mm. 23-26 :

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Section AII occurs in mm. 41-70. This section has three important thematic ideas. First, the clave rhythm is distorted into a 13/16 pattern with sequences and fast leaps (Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5: Distorted rhythm, mm. 41-45

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Second, the clave of Section AI in m. 23 reappears in mm. 46-51 with louder dynamics and bass chords (Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6: Clave, mm. 46-47

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Third, the salsa-like pattern appears in mm. 61-70 (Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7: Salsa, mm. 61-64

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This salsa-like pattern in Figure 3.7 is one of the most important thematic ideas in Aguila's *Conga*. It continues throughout Section AIII from measure 71 to measure 139 (Figure 3.8).

Figure 3.8: Salsa in Section AIII, mm. 71-74

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Alan Kozinn, the American music critic for the New York Times, commented that mm. 71-139 contains the flavor of jazz and salsa.⁶⁸ There are three prominent features of the salsa-like section in mm. 71-139. They are (I) repeated rhythm, (II) call and response, and (III) increasing tempo for excitement:

⁶⁸ Miguel del Aguila, "Program Notes," accessed March 30, 2016, <http://www.migueldelaguila.com/program-notes.html>

- (I) The rhythm is repeated with rapid change of meters (8/16, 7/16, 9/16) as shown in Figure 3.9.

Figure 3.9: Frequent change of meters, mm. 95-98

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- (II) The call and response feature is created by the quick leaps with the echoing effect created by *forte* and *piano* (Figure 3.10).

Figure 3.10: Echoes in mm. 118-123

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- (III) The salsa-like section also produces an exhilarating moment for the listeners when the tempo is increased from the (♩ = 138) to (♩ = 160) from mm. 71-132.

Section B appears in the middle section (mm. 140-193). Section B starts with an abrupt change of mood from the loud, fast, salsa-like pattern in measure 139 to a slow, soft, and tango-like pattern in measure 140 (Figure 3.11).

Figure 3.11: Abrupt change of dynamics and tempo from Theme AIII to Theme B, mm. 132-140

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Figure 3.12 shows the basic rhythmic pattern in a tango dance while Figure 3.13 shows how Aguila has incorporated the basic tango dance rhythm into the composition.

Figure 3.13: Tango rhythm in Aguila's *Conga*, mm. 140-141

Figure 3.12: Basic Tango rhythm

Aguila's tango-like section has three independent lines (Figure 3.14). This three-line texture is similar to the basic instrumentation of tango music: bandoneon, string instrument, and piano.

Figure 3.14: Tango-like texture with three independent lines, mm. 142-146

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At the end of the B section, the performer needs to do a quick right hand *glissando* at measure 185. The playing of *glissando* also appears in mm. 284-285 and measure 355 (Figure 3.15).

Figure 3.15: Glissando in m. 185, m. 284-285, and m. 355

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Section B functions as the center of a mirror image of Section A (mm. 23-139) and Section A' (mm. 194-355) as the thematic ideas in Section A (AI → AII → AIII) are reversed in Section A' (A'III → A'II → A'I).

In section B, Theme A'III (salsa-like) appears in mm. 194-270. In mm. 194-210, Aguila wants the performer to perform this section like a music box, very softly, with only one long pedal held throughout (Figure 3.16).

Figure 3.16: Salsa in A'III, mm. 194-197

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The three thematic ideas of Section AII (Clave, Distorted rhythm, and Salsa) can be found in the section of A'II (mm. 271-348). A new element is added in Section A'II when a cadenza-like passage appears in measure 335 (Figure 3.17). Aguila indicates that the running scales in the cadenza should be played as fast as possible.

Figure 3.17: One-bar cadenza

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The clave of Section AI in mm. 23-40 is elaborated in Section A'I (mm. 349-355) with more frequent change of dynamics and thicker texture in the left hand part (Figure 3.18).

Figure 3.18: Clave in Section A'I, mm. 349-351

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The final glissando of the right hand in measure 355 leads to the Coda (measure 356 to the end). The coda section is especially dramatic when the clave pattern reaches the extreme range of the piano in both hands. The clave in measure 381 has to be repeated many times until it fades away without *rallentando* at the end (Figure 3.19). This symbolizes the dream is fading away in Aguila's *Conga Line in Hell*.

Figure 3.19: Clave in the Coda section is fading away, measure 378 to the end

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Pedagogical and Performance Aspects

In my opinion, there are four main challenges in learning and performing Aguila's *Conga for Solo Piano, Op. 39*: (I) Tempo, (II) Dynamics, (III) Wrist movement, and (IV) Body posture and balance.

(I) Tempo

There are specific indications of tempo written by Aguila in each section.

The performer is encouraged to follow all tempo markings and not differ too much from the required tempo. The most challenging part for the performer happens in Section A'III (m.224) to the cadenza in m.335. A strong, steady, and precise dance rhythm in this section require good finger work from the performer as the tempo increases from *piu mosso* (♩ =138) to *poco piu mosso* (♩ =160) and to *piu presto possibile* at the candeza.

There may be a tendency for the performer to play the introduction of mm.1-22 in a faster tempo than required. However, this is not encouraged unless the performer can execute the

extremely fast tempo as the tempo increases. Also, if a wrong note is hit in the introduction, it will be carried for the entire twenty two bars by the long pedal (Figure 3.20).

Figure 3.20: Pedal indication in measure 1

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(II) Dynamics

The dynamics of *Conga for Solo Piano, Op. 39* range from *pp* to *fff*. *Pianissimo* appears in many places but only one *fortississimo* appears in the coda section in measure 380 (Figure 3.21). The performer has to ensure that all the loud dynamics appearing before measure 380 do not overpower the *fortississimo* in measure 380.

Figure 3.21: *fortississimo* in measure 380

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Besides, abrupt change of dynamics is another major element in the piece (Figure 3.22).

The performer needs to move both hands very quickly to the new position and play with the indicated change in dynamics.

Figure 3.22: Examples of abrupt change of dynamics

(i) mm. 120-123

(ii) mm. 139-140

(iii) mm. 317-318

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(III) Wrist movement

To play all the repeated notes in a fast tempo, a fast down-up wrist movement is crucial. The performer should neither lock the wrist nor use only finger movement for the fast repeated notes. This could cause hand injury if the wrist and forearm are not loose and flexible. This is exemplified in the *Presto molto agitato e staccato* in mm. 285- 287 (Figure 3.23).

Figure 3.23: *Presto molto agitato e staccato* with down-up wrist movement, mm.285-287

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(IV) Body posture and Balance

Before the performance starts, the performer is required to adjust the bench to a good distance from the piano. This is to allow both hands to reach the extreme range of the music. (Figure 3.24).

Figure 3.24: Extreme range on the piano

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There is also a critical problem that may be encountered by the performer in practice for mm. 1-78. Back pain may be caused by bending of body to the right for these seventy eight measures. As the notes in mm.1-78 are written within the range as shown in Figure 3.25, the performer is advised to sit in front of C5-F5 for mm. 1-78 and move quickly to C4-F4 in measure 79.

Figure 3.25: Notes range of mm. 1-78

CHAPTER FOUR

WILLIAM BOLCOM

(I) Biography

*I know I was going to be composing, it all makes sense in retrospect. But you don't know while you are in the process of improvising your life.*⁶⁹

(William Bolcom)

*Elden is William Bolcom's middle name, but it might just as well be Eclectic. He's perhaps the most versatile "serious" composer now at work in America and he's spread himself over more musical genres than even he is aware of.*⁷⁰

(John von Rhein)

A notable twentieth-century American composer, William Bolcom, was born in Seattle, Washington on May 26, 1938. He has composed symphonies, concertos, chamber works, piano solos, sonatas, song cycles, operas, string quartets and cabarets and popular songs. His *Twelve New Etudes* for piano received the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. The 2004 recording of his two hour and forty minute song cycle, *Songs of Innocents and of Experience* for soloists, chorus, and orchestra, has won four Grammy awards: Best Classical Album, Best Choral Performance, Best Classical Contemporary Composition, and Best Producer of the Year, Classical. Other awards Bolcom received include the National Medal of Arts, a Koussevitzky Foundation Grant, two

⁶⁹ William Bolcom, "William Bolcom Quotes," accessed April 26, 2016, http://www.azquotes.com/author/45604-William_Bolcom

⁷⁰ John von Rhein, "William Bolcom," accessed April 26, 2016, <http://articles.chicagotribune.com/keyword/william-bolcom>

Guggenheim Fellowships, and an award from the America Academy of Arts and Letters. He was named Composer of the Year by *Musical America* in 2007.⁷¹

Bolcom's musical talent was well nurtured in his youth. At the age of eleven, he studied composition with George Frederick McKay and John Verrall at the University of Washington. He also studied piano with Madame Berthe Poncy Jacobson and earned his Bachelor of Music at the University of Washington in 1958 and received his Master's Degree at Mills College in Oakland, California in 1961. He studied composition with Darius Milhaud at Mills College and later with Oliver Messiaen at the Paris Conservatoire. In 1964, he completed his Doctor of Musical Arts degree at Stanford University with Leland Smith.⁷²

Bolcom has served in many prestigious professional positions throughout the United States. He was a visiting professor at the University of Washington from 1965 to 1966 and a member of the music faculty in Queens College of the City University of New York (CUNY) from 1966 to 1968. Later, he served as the Composer in Residence at Yale University Drama School and New York University School of the Arts from 1968 to 1970. Bolcom also developed as a ragtime pianist and a performer of theater music in the 1970s when he traveled with his wife to perform American art songs and popular music. In 1973, he joined the faculty of the University of Michigan's School of Music and in 1974 was named as the Ross Lee Finney Distinguished University Professor of Composition. He retired in 2008.⁷³

⁷¹ William Bolcom, "Honors and Awards," accessed April 26, 2016, <http://williambolcom.com/honors-and-awards>

⁷² William Bolcom, "Biography," accessed April 26, 2016, <http://williambolcom.com/bio>

⁷³ Kyle Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schiermer Books, 1997), 243-244.

(II) Placement of William Bolcom's Nine New Bagatelles (2006) in his Piano Solo Works

William Bolcom has composed more than fifty pieces for solo piano since 1959. His piano music shows a variety of techniques and influences from serialism to vernacular music. He has been described as an eclectic composer whose compositions draw from pre-existing styles. Bolcom's stylistic influence have been identified in a DMA dissertation by Davis S. Murray:

*Bolcom mature compositions encompass everything—from the Impressionism of Debussy to the folksiness of Ives, the brittle sounds of Boulez to early American parlor styles—often within the same piece.*⁷⁴

Bolcom's Pulitzer prize-winning piano solo piece, *Twelve New Etudes* (1977-1986), is composed with tonal and atonal mixture.⁷⁵ It also contains elements from ragtime and contemporary techniques that require the pianist play on the piano with forearm glissandos and palm clusters. It also asks the pianist play inside the piano, for example to depress the notes silently and plucking the strings with the fingernails. Doing this will produce harmonics from piano. The double trills in the tenth etude, *vers le silence*, shows the influence of Olivier Messiaen's.

Bolcom is also regarded as a great ragtime composer after Scott Joplin. In 1999, he compiled his favorite piano rags in a volume called *Complete Rags. The Serpent's Kiss* in the *Garden of Eden Suite* (1969) is a popular rag piece that requires the performer to slap the piano, to whistle and to click the tongue. It is a virtuoso Rag Fantasy.⁷⁶ Another idiomatic rag music,

⁷⁴ Davis S. Murray, "Irony and Satire: The nine Bagatelles of William Bolcom" (D.M.A. diss., Arizona State University, 2002), 1.

⁷⁵ Maurice Hinson and Wesley Roberts, *Guides to the Pianist's Repertoire* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2014), 163.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 162.

Graceful Ghost Rag, was composed in 1970, in a memory of his father. It contains sad and elegant melody with syncopations and chromatic harmony.⁷⁷

Bolcom also composed two sets of pieces, accessible to young pianists. They are *Monster pieces* (1980) and *Seven Easy Pieces for Piano “for Joan”* (2010). The *Monster Pieces* is a set of ten short pieces designed to introduce contemporary keyboard sonorities to the young pianist. Each of them has a different title: The Bad Mister, Badminton, Big Bad Mr. Monster Strike, Big Mountain, The Bitty Town, A Boating Tune, The Glad Minister, The Mad Monster, The Plaid Miss, and The Sad Monster. The *Seven Easy Pieces for Piano* was composed for his wife to play in her piano lessons.⁷⁸ It is appropriate for students at beginner and intermediate levels.

Other significant pieces for piano solo include *Romantic Pieces* (1959); *Fantasy Sonata* (1961); *Dream Music* (1965); *Garden of Eden* (Old Adam, The Eternal Feminine, The Serpent’s Kiss, and Through Eden’s Gates-1969); *Dead Moth Tango* (1983-1984); *Three Dance Portraits* (*Dead Moth Tango*, *Knock-stuck*, *Abbacadabra*- 1986); *A Haunted Labyrinth* (1994); *A Sixty Second Ballet for Chickens* (1997); *Bird Spirits* (1999-2000); *New York Lights* (2003); *Ballade* (2007); *A little Night Fughetta* (2010). In 2011, Bolcom rearranged a piano solo entitled “Capricious Harlem” that had been originally written by Eubie Blake in 1950.⁷⁹

There are two sets of bagatelles composed by Bolcom. The first set is entitled *The Nine Bagatelles* and was commissioned in 1997 by the Tenth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. Bagatelle is a short piece of music without specific form.⁸⁰ The first keyboard

⁷⁷ “William Bolcom,” accessed April 25, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Bolcom>

⁷⁸ “Seven Easy Piano Pieces - For beginner and intermediate piano solo by William Bolcom—music book—Hal Leonard 00220188,” <http://www.piano-pal.com/BolcomWm/7easypianopieces/>

⁷⁹ William Bolcom, “Keyboard,” accessed April 26, 2016, <http://williambolcom.com/keyboard>

⁸⁰ Maurice J.E. Brown, “Bagatelle,” Grove Music Online: Oxford University Press, accessed February 17, 2016.

composer who used the term “Bagatelle” was François Couperin. In 1717, the *rondeau* in his tenth *ordre* for harpsichord was given the title, “Les bagatelles” in 1717.⁸¹ After Beethoven’s three sets of *Bagatelles Op. 33, 119 and 126*, composers such as Liszt, Smetana, Saint Saens, Sibelius, and Bartok also composed sets of bagatelles for piano. Bolcom’s *Nine Bagatelles* combine the traditional concept of bagatelle with twentieth-century tonal idioms.⁸²

Nine New Bagatelles is the second set of Bolcom’s bagatelles. It was commissioned by the “Friends of Today’s Music” program of the Music Teacher’s Association of California in 2006. Bolcom’s *Nine New Bagatelles* have descriptive titles placed in parenthesis at the end of each bagatelle. A performance note written by William Bolcom is also included in the preface of the music score. Each bagatelle portrays different kinds of moods and characters. It requires a performer’s advanced technique and musicality to project the imaginative sound for each bagatelle. In the seventh bagatelle named *Valse Oubliable*, Bolcom used the pre-existing vernacular melody, “Home on the Range” as the inspiration. Bolcom’s innovation and humor is shown in the transformation of the original melody of “Home of the Range” as a forgotten melody with a lot of pauses and contemporary sound in *Bagatelle VII*. Table 4.1 is a listing of Bolcom’s *Nine New Bagatelles* with their descriptive titles.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Davis S Murray, 23

Table 4.1: Bolcom's *Nine New Bagatelles*

No.	Title
I	(... <i>"and Then What Happened?"</i>)
II	(... <i>What happened</i>)
III	(... <i>A Bird Comments-to Another Birds?</i>)
IV	(... <i>Lord Lovell's Trunk</i>)
V	(... <i>A Little Story</i>)
VI	(... <i>Take no Prisoners</i>)
VII	(... <i>Valse Oubliable</i>)
VIII	(... <i>Benediction</i>)
IX	(... <i>Pavane for the Dead/Hope's Feathers</i>)

(III) Pedagogical and Performance Aspects of William Bolcom's *Nine New Bagatelles*

Bagatelle I

Bagatelle I is comprised of four sections. Sections I, II, and III contain two contrasting ideas –*Grazioso* and *Scherzando* –that appear alternately and are lengthened in each section. However, the *Scherzando* is missing in the final section (Figure 4.1.1). The climax of *Bagatelle I* appears in the lengthiest *Grazioso*, which lasts for fourteen measures in section III (mm. 19-32). The climax has thicker texture, the addition of sharply dotted rhythms, and Bolcom's indications of *rubato* (move forward and relax).

Figure 4.1.1: Formal Structure of *Bagatelle I*

Section I (mm. 1-7)	<i>Grazioso</i> and <i>Scherzando</i>	4 bars +3 bars= 7 bars
Section II (mm. 8-18)	<i>Grazioso</i> and <i>Scherzando</i>	6 bars +5 bars =11 bars
Section III (mm. 19-39)	<i>Grazioso</i> and <i>Scherzando</i>	14 bars + 7 bars =21 bars
Section IV (mm. 40-46)	<i>Grazioso</i>	7 bars

The difficulty of *Bagatelle I* lies in the ability of the performer to “tell a story” through the performance, as indicated by Bolcom in the preface. In addition, the constant changes of character between *Grazioso* and *Scherzando* must be handled well by the performer. One seeks to stimulate the listeners' curiosity in respond to the title, “...and then what happened?”

There are four important performance and pedagogical challenges that will be discussed for *Bagatelle I*: (I) tempo marking, (II) articulation and fingering, and (III) pedaling.

(I) Tempo marking

Bolcom specifies the required tempo for the abrupt change of character—*Grazioso* and *Scherzando*—in the first seven measures (Figure 4.1.2).

Figure 4.1.2: *Grazioso* and *Scherzando* mm. 1-7

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In the *Grazioso* section, it is advisable to practice with the metronome in the subdivision of (♩ = 168). This is to establish a steady eighth-note beat at the beginning without performing the upbeat sixteenth notes as thirty-second notes. However, Bolcom’s marking of *Grazioso*, (♩ = 56), *with flexible tempi* suggests freedom of rubato is allowed in the performance. For example, the performer can consider applying *poco rit.* and *decresc.* from the first beat in measure 3 to the second eighth rest in measure 4 to produce an echo effect. This is also to produce a surprising change of the character from the *Grazioso* to the *Scherzando* section.

In the middle of measure 4, Bolcom added two dotted lines. These lines indicate to the performer the exact entry of the *Scherzando* in section I (Figure 4.1.2). The manipulation of the

quick change of tempo from (♩ = 56) to (♩ = 144) can be done with ease if the subdivision of the eighth-note beat is felt from the beginning.

(II) Articulation and fingering

The joyful character in *Scherzando* is distinguished by a faster tempo, rapid slurs, *staccato*, *leggero*, *forte*, and faster harmonic rhythm (Figure 4.1.3).

Figure 4.1.3: *Scherzando* in mm. 4-7

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The primary challenge for the performer is the difficult right hand material. The performer has to find a suitable fingering that allows the hand to execute the fast changing gestures. To overcome this, it is beneficial to practice the melody in block chords and to notice how the placement of the right hand changes in each new chord position (Figure 4.1.4). The suggested fingering is based on the geography of the chords on the keyboard and allows the performer to play the chords with efficiency and convenience.

Figure 4.1.4: Simplification of melody in block chords with suggested fingerings, mm. 5-9

Suggested	4	4	4	4	4	3	5	4	2	2
Fingering	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	1	2
	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		

In mm. 6-9, the *staccatos* with *accents*, *tenutos*, *fz.*, and *rit.* in mm. 6-9 are placed in the proportion of 3 → 2 → 1 (Figure 4.1.5). This highlights the climax—the tied F—in the *Scherzando* in mm. 7-8.

Figure 4.1.5: Simplification of melody in blocked chords with accents, *tenutos*, *rit.*, and *fz.*, mm. 6-9

Grazioso

3 2 1

fz. *espr.* *p*

(III) Pedaling

There are two types of pedals marked precisely by Bolcom in the score: *sostenuto* pedal (S.P. = middle pedal) and damper pedal (*Ped.* = right pedal).

As the *sostenuto* pedal is not commonly used as often as the damper pedal, it is necessary for the performer to know how to manipulate the *sostenuto* pedal. According to Banowetz, there are several concerns in manipulating the *sostenuto* pedal:⁸³

1. The note or notes to be caught by the *sostenuto* pedal must be played and held by the fingers until the *sostenuto* pedal is fully depressed...If a note or chord once caught and held by the *sostenuto* pedal is repeated, it is not necessary to re-catch it with a renewed change of the pedal.
2. The *sostenuto* pedal must be kept completely depressed during its use, since even a slight amount of release will immediately result in the catching of other unwanted tones.
3. Use the right foot for the damper pedal and the left foot for both the *sostenuto* and left pedals, except when no right pedal is used at all. Then the right foot can manipulate the middle pedal, while the left foot works the left one.

⁸³ Joseph Banowetz, *The Pianistic Guide to Pedaling*, (Indiana: Bloomington, 1992), 91-92.

In this bagatelle, the *sostenuto* pedal is used to sustain the long-held notes while playing other keys far away (Figure 4.1.7).

Figure 4.1.7: *Sostenuto* pedal mm. 1-4

I. Grazioso, ♩ = 56, with flexible tempi
cantabile

mf *mf* *f*

S.P. *pp* dry S.P.

Scherzando ♩ = 144

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To sustain the dotted-half notes, the *sostenuto* pedal has to be pressed immediately after each dotted-half note. Also, the *una corda* (left pedal) is recommended while playing the Bb and C notes. This is to produce a *pianissimo* and dry sound as required. In this situation, the right foot will manipulate the *sostenuto* pedal and the left foot will manipulate the *una corda* pedal. Figure 4.1.8 provides guidance as to when the *sostenuto* pedal and the *una corda* should be depressed.

Figure 4.1.8: *Sostenuto* pedal and added *una corda* in mm. 1-4

The musical score for measures 1-4 of "Nine New Bagatelles" by William Bolcom is presented in 6/8 time. The tempo is marked "Grazioso, ♩ = 56, with flexible tempi cantabile" and "Scherzando ♩ = 144". The piano part features a sostenuto pedal and an una corda pedal. The dynamics are marked as *mf*, *pp dry*, and *f*. The score is written for piano and includes a sostenuto pedal and an una corda pedal.

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In mm. 17-20, the *una corda* is not used but the damper pedal (right pedal) and the *sostenuto* pedal (middle pedal) are used. In this section, the right foot has to press the damper pedal and the left foot has to press the *sostenuto* pedal (Figure 4.1.9).

Figure 4.1.9: Damper pedal and *sostenuto* pedal, mm. 17-29

The musical score consists of three systems of piano and bass staves. The first system (measures 17-18) shows a transition from a forte (*ff*) passage to a piano (*pp*) section, then to a mezzo-forte (*mp*) and forte (*ffz*) section, ending with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) section. The second system (measures 19-24) features a piano (*p*) section with a 'dry' quality and a 'move forward' instruction. The third system (measures 25-29) includes a piano (*p*) section with a 'relax' instruction, followed by a 'poco cresc.' section, a mezzo-forte (*mp*) section with a 'molto legato' instruction, and a ritardando (*rit.*) section. Pedal markings include a damper pedal (*ffz*) and a sostenuto pedal (*p dry (S.P.)*).

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According to Figure 4.1.9, the markings of the *sostenuto* pedal and damper pedal are added for specific purposes. For example, the *sostenuto* pedal is added to sustain the sound of the dotted quarter notes, allowing the right hand to move quickly to the next chord without destroying the legato line in the melody. This coordination between hands and foot has to be carefully practiced because split-second timing is crucial.

On the other hand, the performer can explore and employ different pedaling techniques such as quarter-, half-, three-quarter pedaling, and full pedaling to help to enhance different dynamic levels.⁸⁴

Bagatelle II

Bagatelle II appears to be the most energetic and violent piece in this set of bagatelles. It requires great endurance and strong fingers from the performer to play the repetitive chords in loud dynamics, especially the *ffff* at the end. Also, Bolcom's marking of tempo, (♩ = 124) in *Bagatelle II* may cause injury to the performer's wrists and arms if perpetual chords and leaps are not practiced in a correct way. Here, I will be focusing on how to execute the playing of two musical elements: (I) successive blocked chords with leaps, and (II) scales in clusters.

⁸⁴ Banowetz, 14-15.

(I) Successive blocked chords with leaps

Bagatelle II begins with successive blocked chords and large leaps marked *fortissimo*, *staccato*, and with *accents* (Figure 4.2.1).

Figure 4.2.1: Successive blocked chords, mm. 1-4

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According to Jacobson, simultaneous vertical and lateral arm motions need to be mastered to play successive blocked chords.⁸⁵ Fingers and upper arm muscles will be involved in playing repeated chords in vertical motion. To play the successive chords with leaps will involve shoulder and back muscles.

Another good way to approach chords with leaps is to understand the inertia. According to Jacobson,

Inertia refers to the tendency of an object in motion to stay in motion and the tendency for an object at rest to stay in rest. An understanding of Inertia facilitates effortless piano playing. Any movement of a pianist is easier if his or her body is already in motion from a previous task. This is a follow through and preparatory motion.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Jeanine M. Jacobson, *Professional Piano Teaching, Volume 2: A Comprehensive Piano Pedagogy Textbook*, ed. E.L. Lancaster and Albert Mendoza (California: Alfred Music, 2015), 137.

⁸⁶ Jacobson, 110-111.

Regarding the concept of inertia, the gesture of “preparation—execution—follow through” has to be used constantly while playing successive chords. This is to avoid stiffness of the wrist and tightening of the muscles in the forearm and upper arm.⁸⁷ For example (Figure 4.2.1), when the left hand A-flat major chord in measure 1 is played, treat the downward wrist and hand movement at the A-flat major chord as a springboard to bounce to the next E-minor seventh chord. This follow-through movement of the A-flat major chord will become the preparation for the E-minor Seventh chord. Then, to play the next A-flat major chord, the preparatory motion that counters the inertia must be applied again on the E-minor seventh chord. The realization of the gesture “preparation—execution—follow through” is very important as it happens throughout *Bagatelle II*.

In addition, slow practice is a crucial step for the performer in order to feel how the fingers, wrists, hands, arms, shoulders, and the whole body react together in playing the succession of chords. Fatigue and stiffness should not be found in any part of the body.

There are also some technical principles written by Jacobson for playing successive blocked chords:⁸⁸

- (a) Initiating the playing of motion rather than muscles guard against unnecessary tension
- (b) Blocked chords should be played by the fingers and arm as a unit
- (c) Blocked chords should not be preformed.⁸⁹
- (d) Fingers should be more flat than curved
- (e) Chords are to be played with oblique (downward and forward) motion of the arm

⁸⁷ Ibid., 109.

⁸⁸ Jacobson, 137.

⁸⁹ Jacobson, 103. Preforming is the tightening of the hand into a fixed position before playing...Students sometimes overly prepare by tightening the hand. Rather than preforming, students must consciously decide to relax. They can form mental images of the proper finger positions and notes to be played, waiting to form the chords or intervals until the last moment—just as their fingers touch the keys. The touching contributes to relaxation since, at that moment, tension is significantly less and much easier to eliminate than when preforming occurs

- (f) The arm should feel loose during the descent of the note
- (g) Fingers required to play should be touching the surface immediately prior to depressing the keys
- (h) Tension should be released immediately as the sound is made
- (i) The lateral motion required for successive chords should catapult the arm from one chord to the next
- (j) When playing repeatedly successive chords, the motion should feel as though the arm is “shaking it out,” bouncing or rebounding.
- (k) When successive chords change direction, the arm must compensate by making vertical, lateral, or rotational adjustments.

In contrast to Jacobson’s statement (c) stated above, Leschetizky had a different view on the preparation of fingers before playing the chords:

To make sure of striking a chord clean, it must be prepared before taken. To prepare, place the fingers on their respective keys, as if to take the measure of the chord down; now, try to take its measure away from the keys, in the air, and keep on until the correct stretch is learned. By dint of practice, the hand finally learns to prepare the chord rightly at sight of the notes-to recognize its physiognomy, as it were. This is of peculiar value in taking the chord-leaps in modern virtuoso piece.⁹⁰

I agree with Leschetizky that the hands must catch the shape of the new chord in the air before hitting it. This will allow a secure playing of the chord compared to the last minute grasp of the chord in the hand. In addition, I also agree with Jacobson’s approach of forming the mental image about the interval distance of the new chord before hitting it. These two concepts can always be applied in playing the successive chords with leaps in *Bagatelle II*.

Figure 4.2.2 shows my suggested fingering in mm. 1-2 which is based on the topography of the notes on the white and black keys. The suggested fingering aims to help the performer to achieve the accuracy and eases of the hands in playing all of these chords in the tempo of

(= 144).

⁹⁰ Malwine Breé, *The Groundwork of the Leschetizky Method*, trans. Dr. TH. Baker (New York: Haskell House Publishing Ltd., 1969), 33.

Figure 4.2.2: mm. 1-2 with editorial fingerings.

Rough & brutal (♩ = 124)

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The time signature changes from 4/4 to 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Rough & brutal' with a quarter note equal to 124 beats per minute. The dynamic marking *ff* is present in the treble staff. The bass staff has a marking 'Ped. only for *fz*'. Editorial fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes. In the bass staff, there are also some markings like '1 3 5' and '1 2 3 5' under specific chords.

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Another technical challenge is shown in mm. 32- 42. The performer has to place both hands at the furthest distance on the piano and to execute the succession of chords with the dynamics from *ppp* to *ffff* (Figure 4.2.3).

Figure 4.2.3: Dynamics from *ppp* to *fff*, mm. 32- 42

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For chords in *pppp*, less extended and lower wrist movement will be needed.⁹¹ However, for chords in *forte*, *fortissimo*, or greater level of dynamics, the wrist movement must be greater and more vigorous. The down-up wrist movement is very important in playing the passage of mm. 32-42. The contact between the key surface and the fingers will be treated as the pivot point for the down-up wrist movement.

Breathing is also very important in lessening the stiffness on the wrists and arms while creating this vigorous gesture at mm.32-42. The performer can try to take a quick inhalation in the *ffz* eighth note in measure 31 and exhale slowly throughout the final eleven measures. During

⁹¹ Brée, 34.

the exhalation, direct the breath towards those contracted muscles and to relax the tightening muscles at the same time.

(II) Scales in clusters

In mm. 9-16 and mm. 22-31, the scales in tone clusters are constructed from modes, whole tone scales, and major scales (Figure 4.2.4).

Figure 4.2.4: Scales in clusters, mm. 9-10

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Figure 4.2.5 shows the analysis of the modes used in mm. 9-16 and mm. 27-31.

Figure 4.2.5: Modes used in mm. 9-16 and mm. 27-31

As the modes change very quickly and rapidly, it is important to practice Figure 4.2.6 in different articulation and rhythmic patterns. This will train the hands to be familiarized with rapid chord change and to develop strong fingers.

Figure 4.2.6: Practice in different rhythmic patterns

In addition, mm. 9-16 and mm. 27-31 can be simplified by extracting the outer voice. This is to improve the voicing and control of dynamics in these passages (Figure 4.2.7).

Figure 4.2.7: Outer voice in mm. 9-16

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It is wise to practice Figure 4.2.7 with articulations of legato, staccato, and mixture of both, following Bolcom's specified dynamics markings. Also, notes with *fz* and *ffz* need a touch of the damper pedal to highlight the peak of each scale in contrary motion.

Bagatelle III

The descriptive title of *Bagatelle III* is "a bird comments—to another bird." The music depicts a conversation between two birds. Bolcom has used different musical elements in distinguishing the characters of the birds. Bird One has a distinctive "Motive A" as shown in measure one (Figure 4.3.1). It has four accented sixteenth- notes in *fortissimo* and an accented half note in 3/4 time. Motive A is bold with a quick tempo (= 104).

Figure 4.3.1: “Motive A” of Bird One

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Bird Two has the opposite character of Bird One. The “Motive B” of Bird Two is shown in the right hand part of mm. 2-3. It is fragmented, softer, and slower in tempo (♩ = 84). The absence of a time signature also suggests freedom and flexibility (Figure 4.3.2). The long left hand trill in mm. 2-3 suggests Bird One is still commenting softly while listening to Bird Two’s speech.

Figure 4.3.2: “Motive B” of Bird Two in the right hand and trill of Bird One on the left hand

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In measure four, motive A appears vigorously in *fortissimo* with accents. It is developed and expanded from the high register to the low register of the piano in mm. 4-8. The dynamics change from *fortissimo* in measure 4 to *pianissimo* and a *fermata* in measure 8 (Figure 4.3.3).

Figure 4.3.3: Motive A moves from high register to low register, mm. 4-8

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After the silence in measure 8, a surprise mood change of motive A occurs from mm. 9-11. It becomes soft, tender, and *cantabile* before leading to motive B in measure 12 (Figure 4.3.4).

Figure 4.3.4: Soft and tender motive A, mm. 9-12

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In mm. 13-16, a new kind of communication appears between the two birds. There is also a new time signature (2/4). Both birds are commenting pleasantly to each other with similar character (Figure 4.3.5).

Figure 4.3.5: Two birds commenting to each other, mm. 13-16

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They are soft, tender, and slow in tempo (♩ = 50). The identity of both motive A and motive B are hard to differentiate in mm. 13-16 because they are blended harmoniously. In mm. 14-16, both motives are moving in the same rhythmic pattern. Motive A in mm. 14-16 has

transformed to a slow eighth-note motive but it maintains the same melodic contour (down- down- up) as in measure 1 (Figure 4.3.6).

Figure 4.3.6: Transformed motive A in mm. 14-16

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Motive B in mm. 14-16 is also transformed. The consecutive harmonic intervals of major 3rds in mm.14-16 are derived from the melodic interval of major 3rd formed by the notes F-A-F in measure 2 (Figure 4.3.7).

Figure 4.3.7: Transformed motive B in mm. 14-16

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Bagatelle III ends with motive A presented with decreasing terraced dynamics (*mf-mp-p*) and a relaxation of tempo (*Tempo I - rit.- fermata*). It fades away with a tiny glimpse of motive B—the major 3rd (F and D-flat) in the left hand—in mm.19-20 (Figure 4.3.8). At this point, the

performer can assume Bird One has stopped its forceful and energetic speech. It has changed to a more loving character at the end.

Figure 4.3.8: Major 3rd in motive B, mm. 19-20

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There are two major performance and pedagogical challenges in *Bagatelle III*: (I)

Division between hands in motive A and (II) Trills.

(I) Division between hands in motive A

It is very logical for the performer to play motive A in measure 1 with the fingering and the division between hands as shown in Figure 4.3.9.

Figure 4.3.9: Motive A in measure 1

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However, I would encourage the performer to use a different division of hands in playing motive A in measure 1. My advice is to play the first two sixteenth notes with the right hand, the next two sixteenth notes with the left hand, and the final half note with the right hand (Figure 4.3.10).

Figure 4.3.10: New division between hands, measure 1

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The distance between the G-flat and F is very close in measure 1. If the performer chooses to follow Figure 4.3.9, tension might occur in the left hand. By playing the final note in measure 1 in the right hand, a *fortissimo* and the accent are more easily achieved.

(II) Trills

It is very common for composers to use trill passages to resemble a bird's singing. *Bagatelle III* has examples of birds' trilling in mm. 2-3, and mm. 11-14. The playing of trills involves two kinds of motions, finger motion and forearm rotation. For the finger motion, there should be no movement in the wrist and arm, only the fingers move. For forearm rotation, the forearm should rotate to make the fingers move without stiffness. The performer is advised to practice the trills in these two separate ways to experience how finger action and forearm rotation function individually. Although the trills can be performed by only finger action, it is not encouraged because locked a wrist and forearm will cause inflexibility. I would suggest the performer use a combination of the finger movement and forearm rotation. This will help to play a smooth and even trill.

To start the trill, the hands must be relaxed and minimum arm weight should be applied. Keep the fingers close to the keys and maintain a rounded hand shape for a rapid trill. Choosing a good fingering for the trills will be another major concern. One of the most common fingerings used to play the trills is 1-3. Using the 1-3 fingering provides a good balance in the hand and helps to improve flexibility. Sometimes, the position of the trilled notes on the piano will also help the performer in deciding which fingers are better for greater control.

In measure 2, it is wise to use the left hand 1-3 to play the trill on the notes F and G-flat. It is more effective to use the longer third finger for the G-flat black key note. Practice the trill by rotating the forearm without stiffness. The same fingering should also be applied to play the trill

for the notes B and C-sharp in mm. 11-12. For the left hand trill on the notes F-sharp and G, 3-1 fingering is considered the best.

The right hand trill E-flat and F in measure 12 is better if played by 2-4 fingering. Better control of the combination of finger motion and forearm rotation for the trill can be achieved using this fingering.

Finally, the performer may need to think about the mood created by the trills in this bagatelle—is it graceful, light or energetic? To allow the trill to sing naturally, the performer is encouraged to start slowly in the long melodic trill and gradually increase the speed.

Bagatelle IV

In the preface of the *Nine New Bagatelles*, Bolcom included the story that provided the title for *Bagatelle IV*, “Lord Lovell’s Trunk”. Bolcom wrote, “The reference is to a famous English tale of a young bride playing hide-and seek from her elderly new husband, Lord Lovell; hiding in a trunk, she succeeds too well and is only discovered decades later, a skeleton in a bridal dress.”⁹²

The structure of *Bagatelle IV* is carefully crafted by Bolcom. The two part contrapuntal technique is clearly presented when the left hand answers the right hand’s material one bar later in an inversion. This is similar to the compositional style of Johann Sebastian Bach’s Two Part Inventions. Through the inversion technique, both hands are moving away from D4 in measure 1

⁹² William Bolcom, *Nine New Bagatelles* (New York: Edward B. Marks Music Company and Bolcom Music, 2006), preface.

to the extreme sides of the piano by the end of the piece. The right hand ends on D6 in measure 24 and the left hand ends on D1 in measure 25.⁹³ This motion portrays the story of “Lord Lovell’s Trunk” perfectly. It symbolizes the hide-and seek game where the husband, Lord Lovell will never meet his departed bride after the tragedy.

Bolcom’s indications of “Ghostly,” (= 69), and “like a phantom harpsichord” shows that the performer has to imitate the sound of the harpsichord in performing this bagatelle. I would like to discuss three main pedagogical and performance concerns in this bagatelle: (I) Dynamics, (II) Articulation, and (III) Trills.

(I) Dynamics

To depict the “Ghostly” character, the pianist has to make sure the dynamics of *pp*, *sempre pp al fine, non crescendo, diminuendo possibile*, and *ppp* are followed. The performer also needs to imitate the sound of a phantom harpsichord. To achieve this sound quality, understanding of the musical response of a harpsichord is very important.

The sound of the harpsichord is produced by plucking the strings. It is not dynamically-touch-sensitive. Richard Troeger warns, “By applying more or less energy when striking the keys on the harpsichord will not provide any dynamic change.”⁹⁴ On the other hand, the piano functions differently. It is dynamically-touch sensitive. Therefore, the performer has to be very

⁹³ D4, D6, and D1 are the musical notations that indicate the location of the notes in a piano with eighty-eight keys. The numbers appear after the notes refer to which octave the notes appear on the piano when it is counted from the left side of the piano. By counting the notes from the lowest key at the left side of the piano, D4 is the fourth D note, D6 is the sixth D note, and D1 is the first D note appear on the piano.

⁹⁴ Richard Troeger, *Playing Bach on the Keyboard* (New Jersey: Amadeus Press, 2003), 26.

sensitive when striking the keys on the piano, as a faster attack on the piano keys will produce a bigger sound quality.

As there is limited dynamic range used in playing *Bagatelle IV*, strong rhythmic shaping and articulation will become the primary modes of expression in performing this piece.

(II) Articulation

According to Troeger,

*In the broad sense, articulation refers to musical enunciation in general: phrasing, legato, staccato, dynamics, and so forth. In the narrower sense, the word is often used to refer to separation of notes. Many subtle gradings are possible along the continuum of connected, barely connected, and detached notes.*⁹⁵

The most common problem in interpreting the articulation of this bagatelle is “should the piece sound *legato*, barely connected, or detached?” To answer this question, the performer has to study the music score thoroughly.

Bolcom’s compositional style in this bagatelle is similar to the style of Bach’s *Two Part Inventions*. Both are contrapuntal pieces with two voices. Bach treats his *Two Part Inventions* as a kind of exercise to develop his students’ *cantabile* playing style. However, in *Bagatelle IV*, Bolcom wants the performer to be able to produce the sound of “*very even, but not heavily legato*.” This indicates the excessive *legato* touch is not appropriate for this bagatelle.

I agree with George Kochevitsky’s explanation of playing Baroque *legato* on a modern piano, “It should be a rather thin one and should never sound like a lush, ‘fat,’ almost overlapping legato sound.”⁹⁶ Also, the statement, “Play without putting your bodily weight in the keys” in the

⁹⁵ Ibid., 107.

⁹⁶ George A. Kochevitsky, *Performing Bach’s Keyboard Music* (New York: Thomas P. Lewis, 1996), 38.

preface of Bolcom's *Nine New Bagatelles* suggests more finger work is needed. Bolcom's directions in the bagatelle, "*but not heavily legato*," also gives the performer some freedom in the interpretation of articulation. I would suggest that the performer detach some notes in appropriate places to avoid excessive legato sound.

First, the performer can play the note preceding a big leap with a detached touch. This occurs in mm. 11-14 (Figure 4.4.1).

Figure 4.4.1: Detached notes suggested in brackets, mm. 11-14

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I would also suggest the performer to detach the repeated notes before the slur. This happens in mm. 2-3 (Figure 4.4.2).

Figure 4.4. 2: Detached articulation in mm. 2-3

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In mm. 22-23, the performer can detach the sixteenth notes to permit the shifting of position (Figure 4.4.3).

Figure 4.4.3: Detached notes suggested in mm. 22-24

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I also recommend that a slur can be placed in mm. 8-10 to highlight the motive. See the indications of slurs in Figure 4.4.4.

Figure 4.4.4: Slurs suggested in mm. 8-10

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In this bagatelle, Bolcom has included two accents in mm. 6-7 and five *tenutos* in measure 4, mm. 15-16, and mm. 24-25. I suspect a *tenuto* is missing in the left hand C# in measure 5. According to Troeger, the musical enunciation of the accents requires constant variation in articulation,⁹⁷ explaining the performer should not emphasize the accents with hard attacks, but accents are most effective when created by subtle dynamics or with time and duration.”⁹⁸ I would suggest that the performer play the accents and *tenutos* as dynamic accents to highlight the syncopated feel (Figure 4.4.5). The dynamics accents can illustrate the anxiousness of the bride when she is peeking quickly to check if Lord Lovell is chasing her.

⁹⁷ Troeger, 112.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Figure 4.4.5: Accents and *tenutos*, mm. 4-7

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Besides articulation, evenness of notes is another important aspect in performing this bagatelle. Bolcom mentioned that a very even tone quality is necessary. I found that Kochevitsky's discussion on how to produce a somber and very even tone by fingers is very useful for the performer:

*The pianist should strive to achieve a bright, slender-yet-elastic, distinctly clear and sober tone with a kind of silvery quality. With this kind of tone color, the polyphonic line may stand out clearly. It can be achieved by touching the very tips of well-curved fingers while playing extremely evenly.*⁹⁹

(III) Trills

For the trills in *Bagatelle IV*, I would encourage the performer to play the trills on the beat and to start the trills on the written notes as indicated by Bolcom. As the piece moves fast in 3/8 time, I would suggest the performer follow the written-out realization of the trills as shown in Figure 4.4.6.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 40.

Figure 4.4.6: Trills in mm. 11-18

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Piano techniques to practice the trills are discussed in *Bagatelle III*. It is not wise to accelerate the trills, as the goal is to execute them evenly and to maintain a strict rhythm from the beginning to the end except in the *poco rit.* at the final bar.

Bagatelle V

Bagatelle V is a short nostalgic character piece. This miniature is composed with the title, “a little story,” included at the end of the piece. In the preface, Bolcom states that *Bagatelle V* has to be played expressively and lyrically, in strong contrast to *Bagatelle IV*.

The structure of *Bagatelle V* is shown in Figure 4.5.1. *Bagatelle V* has two periods; Period I lasts for four measures and Period II lasts for five measures with a *fermata* included at the end. Each period has an antecedent phrase (A) and a consequence phrase (B).

Figure 4.5.1: Structure of *Bagatelle V*

Period	Period I		Period II	
Phrase	A (Antecedent)	B (Consequence)	AI (Antecedent)	BI (Consequence)
Measure number	mm.1-2	mm.3-4	mm.5-6	mm.7-9
Key and Cadence	I ----- V7 - I G major G major		I ----- i6/4 – (vii dim 4/3) V - i G Major g minor	

The tonal center of *Bagatelle V* is G. Period I starts in G major and ends in the same key in measure 4 with a perfect authentic cadence (V7-I). However, Period II starts in G major and ends in the parallel key, g minor, with the cadence of i 6/4 - (vii dim. 4/3) V– i. Also, many examples of extended harmony, secondary chords, and diminished chords appear in the piece.

This piece has four voices and the melody always appears in the top soprano line. Bolcom wants the performer to tell a story through the performance of *Bagatelle V*. Therefore, analyzing the contour of the melody may help the performer in relating it to the ebb and flow that might occur in a person's life (Figure 4.5.2).

Figure 4.5.2: Melody in mm. 1-9

Period I

A B

B C D B

Period II

A1 B1

octave higher

climax

sequence

D C B

Notes Inverted

Bb

extra bar

g: $i_4^6 - vii_3^4/v - i$

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Figure 4.5.2 shows the Antecedent Phrase AI in Period II is composed an octave higher than the Antecedent Phrase A in Period I. A change of mood to *poco misterioso* also occurs in Phrase AI.

The climax of the piece appears in mm. 5-6 as shown in Figure 4.5.3 with the appearance of the highest note, E-flat, in circle.

Figure 4.5.3: Climax in mm. 5-6

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In playing this bagatelle, it is important for the performer to make sure the change of the tone quality is based on the different mood changes indicated by Bolcom—warm, *molto legato*, and *poco misterioso*.

The main pedagogical concern in *Bagatelle V* is to perform the *molto legato* (*legatissimo*). Legato means “bound together.” According to Leschetizky, to obtain *legatissimo*, each finger should continue to hold its notes for a very small fraction of time after the next finger has struck (Figure 4.5.4).¹⁰⁰

Figure 4.5.4: *Legatissimo* by Leschetizky

¹⁰⁰ Brée, 26.

To attain a well-played legato, all the notes must be in the same tonal color and must float into each other.¹⁰¹ This is similar to the discussion of “tone-matching” by Jacobson.¹⁰² The performer must remember that once the hammer has hit the string in the piano, the sound will start to decay. The tone of the new note must match the decaying sound of the key that is struck. This is to avoid a sudden accent or softer tone in the melodic line.¹⁰³

In this bagatelle, I suggest the performer practice the single melodic line with right hand first. Apply all the techniques that have been suggested and create the beautiful *cantabile legato*. It is also helpful to sing while playing the melody.

With the help of the damper pedal in sustaining the notes and harmony, the performer must also try to connect the notes by the fingers. Finger-substitutions in some places will be necessary. Suggestions of fingerings are shown in Figure 4.5.5.

Figure 4.5.5: Suggested finger-substitutions for legato sound, mm. 3-4

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¹⁰¹ Josef Lhevinne, *Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing* (NY: Dover Publications, 1972), 37.

¹⁰² Jeanine Jacobson, 336.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 336.

Bagatelle VI

Bagatelle VI is given a special title at the end of the piece, "... take no prisoners." This idiomatic expression conveys a strong determination to achieve something. Unfortunately, other people's feelings are not taken into account.

There are many different compositional ideas found in *Bagatelle VI*. First, it has neither time signature nor bar line. The accents in both hands do not align most of the time. Repetitions of the notes without a clear melodic line make this piece hard to memorize.

Bagatelle VI is bitonal. The left hand is written in the mode of C# Dorian (C#-D#-E-F#-G#-A#-B) and the right hand is written in F pentatonic scale (F-G-A-C-D). Interestingly, the combination of the notes in the C# Dorian and F pentatonic scale includes all the pitches of a chromatic scale. In the preface, Bolcom states that the notes have to be played very evenly and as mechanically as possible. There is only one long *crescendo* (*ppp* to *ffz*) notated in the piece. All of these inventive ideas present a real challenge to the performer.

A brief structural analysis of *Bagatelle VI* is the first step in making the learning process easier. Since there is an absence of time signature and bar line, each appearance of the notes within the same accent will be used as the guidelines in understanding the structure of this piece. "Block" and "Phrase" are the terms I will use to analyze this bagatelle. "Block" is used for the notes that are composed within the same accent. "Phrase" is used to indicate the phrase structure of this bagatelle.

Phrase I has the repeated left hand- blocks of C#-D#-G#-F#-E-D# (Figure 4.6.1). Phrase II has the repeated left hand- blocks of A#-C#-G#-F#-E-D# (Figure 4.6.2). Phrase III has different notes in every left hand block. In Phrase III, all left hand blocks have six eighth-notes except the final block. It has ten eighth- notes (Figure 4.6.3).

Figure 4.6.1: Left hand- block in Phrase I

Figure 4.6.2: Left hand-block in Phrase II

Figure 4.6.3: Final left hand-block in Phrase III

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The right hand in Phrase I has two repeated sections: Section I and Section II. Each section has Block A, B, and C. Block A has the five eighth-notes that form the F pentascale scale (F-G-A-C-D). Block B uses the same notes as Block A but with an added G in the beginning. Block C uses the same notes as Block B but with an added A in the beginning. In conclusion, each block in each section has an extra note added compared to the previous block (Figure 4.6.4).

Figure 4.6.4: Right hand part in Phrase II

Phrase I		Number of eight-notes in each block							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Section I	Block A	F	D	C	A	G	A	-	-
	Block B	G	F	D	C	A	G	A	-
	Block C	A	G	F	D	C	A	G	A
Section II	Block A	F	D	C	A	G	A	-	-
	Block B	G	F	D	C	A	G	A	-
	Block C	A	G	F	D	C	A	G	A

However, the right hand in Phrase II has the same notes of Section I in phrase I but with an added Block D (Figure 4.6.5).

Figure 4.6.5: Right hand part in Phrase II

Phrase II		Number of eight- notes in each block								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Section I	Block A	F	D	C	A	G	A	-	-	-
	Block B	G	F	D	C	A	G	A	-	-
	Block C	A	G	F	D	C	A	G	A	-
	Block D	C	A	G	F	D	C	A	G	A

Phrase III is the longest of the three; the right hand has Blocks A, B, C, and D of Phrase II with the added new blocks of E, F, G, and H. One new note is added to each new block. There are ten notes in Block E. eleven notes in Block F, twelve notes in Block G, and thirteen notes in Block H.

This bagatelle has only one long *crescendo*. It starts from *ppp* in measure 1 and ends with a dissonant chord in *ffz* (Figure 4.6.6). This may imply the increased determination that is reflected in the concept of the title, “take no prisoners.”

Figure 4.6.6: Final chord

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Good fingering in both left hand and right hand is essential in playing *Bagatelle VI*. A good fingering will allow the performer to play both parts evenly and to connect each note smoothly. Touches of pedal can be applied as indicated by Bolcom. To help to create the effect of the long crescendo (*ppp* to *ffz*), the performer can apply the *una corda* (left pedal) for Phrase I and II and release it in Phrase III. To project the *ffz* more effectively towards the end, the performer can gradually increase the touches of the right pedal from the shallowest to the deepest.

The performer is encouraged to practice the left hand in blocked chords at the beginning stage. Fingerings 5-4-3-2-1 are suggested for all five-note chords except the final seven chords (Figure 4.6.7).

Figure 4.6.7: Simplification of left hand part in blocked chords

Next, the performer can add the right hand notes to the blocked chords in the left hand. The final stage will include playing of both left and right hand as written.

Lastly, Figure 4.6.8 shows the suggested dynamic plan for *Bagatelle VI* to achieve the long *crescendo*.

Figure 4.6.8: Dynamic plan

Phrase		Dynamics
I	Section I	<i>ppp</i>
	Section II	<i>P</i>
II		<i>mp</i>
III		<i>mezzo forte - ffz</i>

Bagatelle VII

Bagatelle VII has the title “*valse oubliable*.” This title reflects Bolcom’s great sense of humor. The word, *oubliable*, comes from the combination of the French word, “*oubliée*” and the English word, “forgettable” (*oubliée* + forgettable= *oubliable*.) It means forgettable waltz. I believe the title was inspired by Franz Liszt’s late works, the four *Valse Oubliée*, that were composed in 1881-1884. Bolcom’s *Bagatelle VI* also contains a motive which I think is very similar to the American folk song “Home on the Range.”

In the preface, Bolcom indicates that this piece should be perceived as if through a fog. He added, it is about the failure of memory. Fog at the earth’s surface always obscures the vision in the sky, especially the outline of the clouds, the sunlight, rainbow, flying birds, the moon, stars. This situation is similar to the unclear structure of *Bagatelle VII* when the melody of the Waltz cannot be recalled fully. Bolcom has placed a few pauses in the middle of some of the phrases to depict the failure of memory. In order to interpret the “Forgettable Waltz,” Bolcom asks the performer not to move during the *fermatas*.

Bolcom states that *Bagatelle VII* is to be performed “with a swing” and “not strict tempo.” In this bagatelle, the swing feel does not indicate that the eighth notes be performed in long short triplet feeling like in a “jazz” swing style. Rather, the swing feel in *Bagatelle VII* refers to the feeling of suspended and forward motion in the music as presented in a Waltz.

Next, I encourage the performer to practice the simplified version of the piece as seen in Figure 4.7.1.

Figure 4.7.1: Simplified version, mm. 1-9

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Then, move on to the practice of the inner parts and the bass line. At this stage, the performer has to be very sensitive to the sound balance between the bass and inner voice. Most of the first notes of each bar are to be played with *tenuto* (Figure 4.7.2). This indicates that these bass notes should sound a little louder than the inner voice.

Figure 4.7.2: mm. 1-2

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The final stage will include the playing of all voices. The balance of sound between the soprano, inner voice, and the bass lines is important. In this bagatelle, the melody on the top should always sound louder than the accompaniment. This is illustrated in measure 1 and mm. 12-13 where Bolcom indicates a *mezzo forte* for the melody and a *mezzo piano* for the accompaniment (Figure 4.7.3). Although there is no dynamic marking for the inner voice, I suggest the performer play the inner voice at the level of *piano* or *pianissimo*.

Figure 4.7.3: Indications of dynamics in mm. 1-2 and mm. 12-13

(mm. 1-2)

(mm. 12-13)

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To achieve good voicing, the performer has to vary the weight of each finger for the soprano, inner voice, and the bass line. More weight should be carried on the fingers for the melody and less weight for the others. The arm and wrist should feel relaxed.

The control of the tone color is also essential in performing *Bagatelle VII*. In the beginning, the melody has to sound *cantabile* (in a singing style). In measure 21, *con calore*

(with warm sound) is required. These indications lead to a question for the performer, “how do I produce the sound of *cantabile* and *calore* on the piano?”

A note on the violin can be beautiful because it can be controlled and made vibrant as it continues to be sustained.¹⁰⁴ However, the mechanical nature of the piano is percussive and it would be hard to achieve a “perfect” singing quality and warm sound on the piano. In my opinion, musical imagination and aural experience will guide the performer to produce the desired sound quality. Rosen suggests that, to produce a singing quality on the piano, the performer must shape the contour of the melody and make the harmonies vibrate through the thoughtful usage of the pedals.¹⁰⁵

I personally think that there is no fixed way to achieve a warm sound on the piano. Nonetheless, the warm sound can be achieved by developing the performer’s inner hearing, musical imagination, and emotional response to the music. Also, the performer should not attack the keys too fast as it will produce percussive tone.

For the pedaling in *Bagatelle VII*, Bolcom specified that only half pedaling is needed. Do not forget to press the *una corda*/left pedal as indicated by Bolcom in measure 33. The changes of tempo such as *poch. rit.*, *a tempo*, *slower*, *piu rit.*, *perdendosi* have to be observed carefully. The greatest dynamic change happens in mm. 26-27 where the performer has to execute the *crescendo* from *pp* to *forte* in three quarter- note beats.

¹⁰⁴ Charles Rosen, *Piano Notes* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 24.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

Bagatelle VIII

The title, “Benediction,” is given for this bagatelle by Bolcom. A Benediction is a blessing in a religious service. I believe this “Benediction” is a prelude used to set the mood for the Funeral March in *Bagatelle IX* which follows.

There are two performance aspects that I would like to discuss for *Bagatelle VIII*, (I) Tempo and (II) Pedal.

(I) Tempo

Bagatelle VIII has to be played very slowly as indicated by Bolcom, although he did not specify any tempo marking for this piece. In treating this bagatelle as the prelude for the funeral march (= 60), I suggest performing *Bagatelle VIII* slightly slower (= 52-54). The tempo cannot be set too slow as Bolcom mentions in an important statement in the preface, “continuous wedge of sound despite the pauses.” There must be a sense of momentum although the note values are long and there are few rests. Both the top line of the melody and the lowest bass line that moves in contrary motion should be brought out.

The next concern is whether to play the crushed notes and the arpeggiated chords before or during the downbeat. Figure 4.8.1 shows a suggested solution for this concern.

Figure 4.8.1: Suggested timing for the crushed notes and arpeggiated chords

Beat: 7 8 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 till no sound

Pedal: [wavy lines indicating pedal use]

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(II) Pedal

Figure 4.8.1 also provides a detailed suggestion for the exact time to press and release the pedal. The wavy pedal marking in the 5th and 6th beat at mm. 1-2 indicates the use of flutter pedal.¹⁰⁶ Flutter pedals require the performer to vibrate the pedal without a complete release of sound.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Maurice Hinson, 4.

¹⁰⁷ Sandra Rosenblum, *Performance Practice in Classic Piano Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 139.

Bagatelle IX

Most would anticipate the final movement of a set of pieces to be grandiose or full of excitement. However, the final movement of Bolcom's *Nine New Bagatelles* is written in the style of a Funeral March. The rhythmic figures and the mood depicted in *Bagatelle IX* sounds similar to Chopin's Funeral March in his *Piano Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor* (Figure 4.9.1 and 4.9.2).

Figure 4.9.1: Bolcom's Funeral March, mm. 1-8

The musical score for Bolcom's Funeral March, measures 1-8, is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 1-4) features a treble clef staff with a key signature of two flats and a 4/4 time signature. The bass clef staff has a key signature of one flat. Performance instructions include 'non legato' above the treble staff, 'ppp inflexible' below the bass staff, and 'pp <' above the treble staff. A '10' is written below the treble staff. The second system (measures 5-8) includes 'ppp' below the bass staff and 'mp poco cantabile' above the treble staff. The third system (measures 9-12) includes '(8va)' below the bass staff. A dashed line separates the first and second systems, with the instruction 'adjust use to retain L.H. smoothness' written below it.

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Figure 4.9.2: Chopin's Funeral March, m.1-8

The title, “Pavane for the Dead/Hope’s Feathers,” is given to *Bagatelle IX*. This Bagatelle contains a cyclic element as it ends with the recurrence of the birds’ theme from *Bagatelle III* in mm. 34-41 (Figure 4.9.3).

Figure 4.9.3: Recurrence of Birds’ theme of *Bagatelle III* in *Bagatelle IX*

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I strongly believe that there is a message that Bolcom wants to deliver to all performers and listeners in *Bagatelle IX*. To understand Bolcom’s intention in *Bagatelle IX*, the relationship between the titles of all bagatelles has to be realized (Figure 4.9.4).

Figure 4.9.4: *Bagatelle IX*, titles of all bagatelles

No.	Title
I	(... “and Then What Happened?”)
II	(... What happened)
III	(...A Bird Comments-to Another Birds?)
IV	(...Lord Lovell’s Trunk)
V	(...A Little Story)
VI	(...Take no Prisoners)
VII	(...Valse Oubliable)
VIII	(...Benediction)
IX	(...Pavane for the Dead/Hope’s Feathers)

The titles in the *Nine New Bagatelles* illustrate the variety of experience that can occur in a person’s life. These includes curiosity (*Bagatelle I-II*), great enjoyment of nature (*Bagatelle III*), memories of stories and tuneful melody (*Bagatelle IV, V, VII*), determination and strong will (*Bagatelle VI*), religious belief (VIII), and death (IX). I believe the final bagatelle is to remind us the death cannot be avoided because it is the final destination of a person’s life. However, life must have hope. Bolcom used feathers as the metaphorical description of hope. He believes that feathers that fly freely in the air is a metaphor that “hope does exist everywhere.” This is the reason of the reappearance of the birds’ theme in *Bagatelle IX*—birds have feathers and humans have hope.

I would like to quote a poem, “Hope is the thing with feathers,” written by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886).¹⁰⁸ The poem illustrates perfectly how the bird of hope sings and travels to all places despite the hardship. Perhaps this is the source of the title of Bolcom’s, “Hope’s Feathers.”

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I’ve heard it in the chilliest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

¹⁰⁸ Emily Dickinson, “Hope,” accessed April 26, 2016,
<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/cs6/hope.html>

In *Bagatelle IX*, the broken chords in thirty-second notes and the voicing are the two main pedagogical and performance concerns

These figures occur in the right hand in mm. 2-4, mm. 13-14, measure 16, mm. 20-22, and measure 27. It is very challenging to play these figures accurately because the thirty-second notes move very fast with big leaps. To execute the big leaps in a fast tempo, fast rotation and good fingering are necessary. Always put the notes in one group if they can be played in a single stroke. Figure 4.9.5 shows the suggested fingering for the right hand part in measure 3.

Figure 4.9.6: Groupings of notes in measure 3

- Practice each group individually
- Combine A + B
- Combine B+C
- Combine A+B+C

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See the suggested fingerings for other examples of fast broken-chord figures in thirty-second notes in Figure 4.9.7.

Figure 4.9.7: Suggested fingerings for the fast broken chords

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(II)Voicing

The dotted rhythmic figures in *Bagatelle IX* need good voicing. It is very important to highlight the soprano line of the dotted rhythmic figures because it is the main melody of the Funeral March. The performer has to be very careful in the counting because the dotted rhythmic fingerings contain both double dots and a single dot.

I would advise the performer to practice the melody with the right hand fifth finger, focusing on the direction of the melody, the peak of the melody, and the expression markings of *cantabile*, *crescendo*, and *diminuendo* (Figure 4.9.8).

Figure 4.9.8: Practice the melody with right hand fifth finger, mm. 5-7

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Next, add the notes that are to be played by the thumb into the practice of Figure 4.9.8. Listen carefully to the balance of the sound. The sound produced by the thumb should not overpower the melody on the fifth finger. The notes in the middle should be the softest.

In conclusion, although each bagatelle in Bolcom's *Nine New Bagatelles* is short, each requires an advanced and refined technical ability. With the help of a picturesque imagination based on the descriptive titles and sensitive ears, the performer can give an inspiring performance.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY

The three living composers from the Americas, John Corigliano, Miguel del Aguila, and William Bolcom, have composed numerous compositions in different genres for various mediums of performance. Their compositions have received nationwide recognition and are performed regularly. The three pieces discussed here, Corigliano's *Fantasia on an Ostinato*, Miguel del Aguila's *Conga for Solo Piano*, and William Bolcom's *Nine New Bagatelles*, encompass twentieth-century tonal idioms and a mixture of contemporary styles and techniques such as minimalism, postmodernism, aleatory, and Latin dance and rhythm.

Corigliano's *Fantasia on an Ostinato* is not designed to be a virtuosic piece. Nonetheless, this piece is substantial enough for the pianist to develop a sensitivity of the ears, hands, and mind to produce various tonal palettes on the piano. The performance of this piece will become monotonous if the pianist only focuses on the minimalistic and aleatoric elements without thinking how each section is linked and brought to a climax. The subtle nuances of the dynamics, articulation, performance directions, and tempo markings have to be studied carefully. Sound exploration is the utmost consideration.

In my first listening to Miguel del Aguila's *Conga for Solo Piano*, I was amazed by the motoric dancing rhythm that is heard throughout the piece. Listening to this piece will successfully and automatically activate the listener's dancing mood. The 4/4 clave rhythm of the *Conga* is transformed into irregular time of 13/16, 7/16, 8/16, 9/16. The piece contains salsa and tango-like music with many changing dynamics and sequences in big leaps. The greatest outburst of energy occurs in the coda section when the clave rhythm is played by both hands. The hands are at the

extreme range of the piano. The passage is to be performed with long pedal, at a fast tempo, and *fortissimo*. This piece concludes with great excitement.

William Bolcom's *Nine New Bagatelles* is a set of nine pieces that require not only advanced piano technique, but also great musical ability. Based on the experience of my practice and performance with these nine bagatelles, I discovered that I was directed by Bolcom into nine different musical adventures. This set of bagatelles is unique as it portrays nine totally different musical moods.

Bagatelle I (...” and then what happened?”) requires the sharp demonstration of two contrasting moods between *Grazioso* and *Scherzando*. *Bagatelle II* (... what happened) gives an impression of the unpleasant and impatient feeling when a person is presented with an unanswered question. *Bagatelle III* (... a bird comments—to another bird?) depicts the conversation between two birds. The story of the Lord Lovell's Trunk in *Bagatelle IV* (... Lord Lovell's trunk) is reflected perfectly in the music when the melody in the right hand is inverted in the left hand. Both melodies are constantly moving away from each other without a matching point. *Bagatelle V* (... a little story) is a nostalgic piece. The title “Take No Prisoners” in *Bagatelle VI* is depicted by the long crescendo (*ppp* to *fffz*) with bitonality and unmeasured bar numbers. *Bagatelle VII* (*Valse oubliable*) is unique when the performer has to pretend he/she has forgotten the melody by not moving the hands during the pauses. The slow *Bagatelle VIII* (... benediction) functions as a prelude to the funeral march in *Bagatelle IX* (Pavane for the dead/hope's feathers.) *Bagatelle IX* brings the set to a conclusion with recurring motives from *Bagatelle III*.

I hope this research project will help to promote these three American pieces and give valuable insights regarding the performance and pedagogical aspects of these pieces. Educators

should encourage college and university students learn and perform these pieces as they represent three distinctive styles. They are important contributions to the piano repertoire.

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