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## Exploring the Relationship Between Music and Art through Paint and Performance

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Exploring the Relationship Between Music and Art through Paint and Performance

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Honors Project

Submitted to the Honors College  
at Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for graduation with

UNIVERSITY HONORS SPRING 2020

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## Honors Project Reflection

### Exploring the Relationship Between Music and Art through Paint and Performance

The planned performance and presentation of my Honors Project was originally supposed to take place on April 25 of this year. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, my oral defense took place via a video conference on May 15 instead. Despite the unusual circumstances, I did my best to work around this predicament and maintain the nature of my project to the best of my ability. My goal was to combine my violin performance major with my art minor by creating a painting for each piece on my senior recital, as required by the College of Musical Arts. Through the process of focused brainstorming and abstracting those thoughts into a visual language, I discovered meaningful methods of translating each piece onto canvas.



My first piece of repertoire is Violin Sonata No. 1 in G minor, BWV 1001 (1720): III. Siciliano, IV. Presto by J.S. Bach (1685-1750). The painting on the left is the Siciliano. This type of movement is pastoral, meaning it evokes a springtime landscape. I have created a blurred pastoral scene using spray paint for the background. Though centuries old, music

students in the Western Art world always study Bach at some point in their career. It is constantly being reinterpreted and analyzed, hence the use of such a modern medium as spray paint. The squares represent the different voices of the piece (orange is the melody, purple is the bass, and pink and yellow are harmony voices). This piece is written for solo violin, but Bach is famous for

his treatment of material. Not only is there constant “spinning out” of material, but he also arranges the notes in a way that produces very distinct melodic and accompanimental voices on a single instrument. These voices are overlapped and rounded out on a string instrument, which explains the transparent overlapping and curved corners in the colors. Bach also comes with the pressure of playing perfectly, though not humanly possible, as it has been performed countless times. The square shape aims for perfection, while the imperfect color application shows the reality.



The above painting is to be paired as a diptych with the painting on the left. This piece represents the Presto, a fast movement of almost all sixteenth notes. Though written in 3/8, the measures are grouped in pairs. I demonstrated this through the use of two colors in several squares. Bach uses the same kinds of voicing in this movement, though it is

done through arpeggios. To show this, I treated my rows as pairs, demonstrating how he quickly navigates through the voices. A unique element of this movement is Bach’s usage of slurs – to ensure the whole piece doesn’t sound like a perpetual motion, he changes the number of slurred notes depending on his desired phrasing. Visually, I showed this by leaving groups of two or less notes as the pure color, adding the complementary color to neutralize the hue for groups of three notes slurred together, and adding a very noticeable black to groups of 4 or more notes since it is very distinct to the ears. I have also added white to the end of the first half. The movement is in the minor mode, but he ends the first half with a Picardi Third, meaning he ended on a major chord.

My next piece is Violin Sonata No. 1, Op. 12 No. 1 (1798): I. Allegro con brio, II. Andante



con moto, III. Allegro by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827). I treated the whole piece as a triptych, focusing on the interplay between the piano and violin as well as the structure of each movement. The first movement can be seen to the left. The

background represents the constant ebb and flow of rising and falling notes. The triadic opening is very regal, so my voices are represented by fleur de lis-inspired figures. These shapes constantly twist and turn around each other, taking turns as melody and accompaniment. Structurally, this movement is in sonata form. The exposition states the main ideas, the development explores all the possibilities these ideas hold (this is shown through the decorative marks in the middle section of the painting), and the recapitulation returns to the original ideas but in a more finalized manner. Beethoven is also known for his unexpected harmonies and sudden shifts in dynamics, so I have placed unexpected yellow swirls in each section.



The painting to the left was made for the second movement: a calm, elegant theme and variations. The idea of the swirl shaped voices interacting with each other still exists, though smoothed out this time. The green is for the violin,

while the blue is the piano. The theme lies in the middle of the composition, each voice evenly sharing the melodic and accompanimental role. The first variation in the top left gives the melody to the piano, emphasizing the dotted rhythm throughout. This is displayed as a large and small pattern in the blue while the green lies underneath as the accompaniment. The violin takes over in

the second variation on the bottom left. This variation is mostly sixteenth notes, so the shapes are smaller and condensed into an evenly spaced matrix. The piano's role in this variation is to highlight the melody, so it decorates the bottom of each green figure. The third variation in the top right is in the minor mode and is the most intense part of this movement. The voices are even again, though I have added black to show the change in mood. The final variation in the bottom right corner is the most delicate, so I have decreased the opacity by adding a gel medium to my paint. This variation's key feature is syncopation, so the even voices are displaced rather than one on top of the other.



The final movement of this Beethoven sonata is in rondo form. Each section is represented by a different row (A B A C A B A). The last movement of a sonata is often playful, and that is reflected in the simplicity of the brightly

colored swirls. Beethoven also displaces the accent in a joking manner, so I have given each swirl an accented circle. The A section is a pure color to show the main musical idea in its pure form. The idea is expanded and experimented with in the B section, so I have added gel medium to give it a different texture and opacity. The C section goes into the minor mode and is the loudest part of the movement. To show this, I added red to both colors to increase the vibrancy and intensity against the green background.

My next piece is Zigeunerweisen, Op. 20 (1878) by Pablo de Sarasate (1844-1908). The



title means “Gypsy Airs.” It is divided into two sections, the first taking up about two thirds of the whole piece. Sarasate wrote in the style of gypsy violinists, composing with the intention of rhapsodic flair and improvisatory talent. The piece is slow at first, but the violin part gets more intense as the measures go on, hence the cool to warm gradient background. In this slow section, the melody is written to sound improvised, so my mark making in the upper two thirds is sporadic and energized. The accompaniment, which is a piano reduction of the original orchestral accompaniment, is simple and condensed, merely existing to provide an underlying

chordal basis for the soloist. This is demonstrated as a drop shadow beneath the wild lines. The fast section in the last third of the piece is extremely difficult. It is played almost episodically, with several sections each displaying a unique violin technique. In order to impress the audience, these techniques must be mastered and played as effortlessly as possible, and mistakes must be hidden very well. I have translated these difficult episodes into circles of intricate designs. From far away, they seem rather simple. When viewing them up close, however, it is clear to see little discrepancies and imperfections.

The next piece is Europa (1976, arranged 2004) by Carlos Santana (b. 1947), arranged by Tracy Silverman (b. 1960). Originally a soulful rock ballad, electric violinist arranged it for his



six-string violin, performing with a loop pedal and guitar effects. I have loved this piece for years and have wanted to learn it, so I transcribed Silverman's arrangement and adjusted it for a regular four-string acoustic violin. Silverman has a classical background, and his arrangement treats the opening like a movement of solo Bach, utilizing the idea of different voices on one instrument. This is shown in my background of transparent, overlapping Bach squares. This piece has a very psychedelic and electronic background, so I played with this concept to form the waves of brightly colored space. About halfway through the piece, Silverman creates a percussive loop to play over through a technique

called chopping. I simplified the pattern of percussive sounds and chords to become the square and triangle pattern in each sound space gradient. Because this piece has a history in rock and roll music, there are moments of distorted sound. I do not own a distortion pedal, so I created the sound by playing sul ponticello, meaning close to the bridge of the violin. This muddies the sound and makes my notes sound scratchy. To show this, I used the complements purple and yellow in fast, close strokes. The colors cancel each other out in their collisions, much like a distortion pedal does with notes.



My final piece is *Stomp* (2011) by John Corigliano (b. 1938). This piece was written for the contestants in the Tchaikovsky Competition in Russia. It is written *scordatura*, a very difficult method of playing, where the violin strings are tuned differently than normal Western tuning. Each performer was given the *scordatura* part, meaning the music was notated as the player would normally place their fingers on each string, and they were required to decipher how to play the piece with the correct fingerings and notes. I learned from the version for Laura St. John, which has the *scordatura* part as well as the sounding pitch written out.

The piece itself borrows from fiddle and jazz styles. Because of the tuning, it can sound rather jarring to the common ear. The E string is tuned down to an Eb, creating the extremely dissonant tritone with the A string. The G string is tuned down to an E. This creates a dissonant minor seventh with the D string, though the ear is more accustomed to it than a tritone. I have chosen red to represent the A string and dark blue to represent the D string, the two strings with the standard tuning. The E string is a vibrant light blue that vibrates jarringly against the red. The G string is a pink that creates a smaller visual dissonance with the darker blue. The different incorporated styles are shown in the accents: the light green accents between the A and E strings are the accelerated 123 123 12 pattern that begins the piece, the yellow accents are the fiddle accents that highlight the first of every four notes or every other

note, and the darker green accents show the heavy downbeat of the swing rhythm. This swing rhythm is shown in more depth in the dark purple lines. The background represents the “bridge” of the piece, which is a calm, expansive break from the constant sixteenth notes. I pictured this as a void during my practicing, so I have painted a dark void to ground the chaos in the foreground. The blue and orange scratches of paint are complements acting in a similar manner to the purple and yellow in Europa – there are moments of scratchy, distorted tones throughout. The most unique element of this piece is the reason for its name. Harking back to the old-time fiddle tradition of stomping while playing, the soloist is supposed to stomp with the heel of the foot or tap their toe in certain sections of the music. To show this, I made two stamps out of a sponge and used them to press paint on top of the different patterns.

My biggest challenges during this project were mostly based in the nature of online learning. Virtual violin lessons sacrificed the sound quality of my playing and made it nearly impossible to critique the tone of my playing. Two of my pieces require a pianist, so my accompanist Abigail Maser had to record herself playing her part so that I had something to play with. Prior to the switch to online learning, my meetings about the designs had been in person. After the switch, every discussion was through email, which made it difficult to express my ideas and receive timely feedback. I also had to be very creative with my painting at home. I have a large family, so finding the space to work on five large paintings was challenging. I had to work around the daylight for the best lighting and use guitar stands as drying racks.

Aside from the online learning challenges, I did experience some difficulty within the scope of the project itself. Each of my recital pieces had unique challenges, some of the most difficult being the Stomp foot coordination and my intonation and bow control in the Bach. Artistically, experimenting with drying time and tape usage took some time. I also had trouble conceiving

design concepts for a few pieces, particularly the Beethoven. This sonata was the last piece I learned, so I was less familiar with it than the rest of my repertoire. After several weeks of intense practicing and listening, however, I finally came up with the idea of interwoven swirl-like figures.

Despite the difficulties, this has been one of the most fulfilling projects I have ever completed. Through this process, I have learned how to enunciate what it was I truly wanted to express in every piece of repertoire that was supposed to be on my recital. I used color harmonies and vibrations to show consonances and dissonances in the music. I created a code for representing the articulation of voices through shapes (for example, nearly perfect squares for Bach, improvisatory strokes in the rhapsodic portion of *Zigeunerweisen*, the interlocking swirls to show the relationship between the piano and violin in the Beethoven). I translated rhythms and piece structures into a visual composition (for example, the sixteenth notes in the Bach *Presto*, *Stomp*, and the Beethoven *Theme and Variations* are shown through tight-knit, even rows of the corresponding shapes). The process of designing and physically painting gave me time to meditate on these ideas, thus forming the most intimate and understanding relationships that I've ever had with my repertoire. My musical and fine art skills have almost become synonymous. This project has given me a new way to approach future pieces in order to know them better and feel more comfortable playing them.