Paul Desenne’s Sonata for Violin Solo: A Theoretical and Practical Study

Luis M. Fernandez
University of Miami, luisviolin@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations

Recommended Citation

This Open access is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact repository.library@miami.edu.
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

PAUL DESENNE’S SONATA FOR VIOLIN SOLO: A THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL STUDY

By
Luis Manuel Fernandez

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty of the University of Miami in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

May 2011
©2011

Luis Manuel Fernandez

All Rights Reserved
A doctoral essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

PAUL DESENNE’S SONATA FOR VIOLIN SOLO: A THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL STUDY

Luis Manuel Fernandez

Approved:

Deborah Schwartz-Kates, Ph.D.  Terri A. Scandura, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Musicology  Dean of the Graduate School

Pamela A. McConnell, M.M.  Glenn D. Basham, M.M.
Professor of Instrumental Performance  Professor of Instrumental Performance

Scott T. Flavin, B.M.
Lecturer, Violin
Numerous influential composers are associated with the program known as *El Sistema* in Venezuela. Despite a richly prolific output from many of these figures, only a few are known in the United States and throughout the world. Among the most influential is Paul Desenne (b.1959), whose Sonata for Violin Solo is the subject of this doctoral essay. Throughout his youth and musical education, Desenne was exposed to an eclectic variety of musical styles and idioms. This eclecticism influenced his compositional style from the time of his earliest compositions and is also evident in his more recent works. The Sonata for Violin Solo reflects this cultural interweaving that incorporates music from Desenne’s native Venezuela and utilizes elements from indigenous tribes, Spanish settlers, and African peoples that are combined with global musical elements. This essay explores these elements from a theoretical perspective, as well from the practical viewpoint of the performer.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Deborah Schwartz-Kates, for her patient guidance on this project. I am grateful to the other members of my committee, Professors Pamela A. McConnell, Glenn Basham, and Scott Flavin, for their additional comments. Paul Desenne was kind enough to send me an electronic copy of the unpublished score, which made the inclusion of musical examples infinitely easier.

Throughout my life and my studies, I am fortunate to have been supported by my loving family and friends. I would like to thank my mother, Juliana Carlo, for the sacrifices she made for her children for so many years, and my fiancée, Anna Hersey, for her support, patience and inspiration.
LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Chapter II

Example 1: Section A (mm. 1-6) ................................................................. 22
Example 2: A2 (mm. 7-12) ........................................................................... 25
Example 3: A3 (mm. 13-19) ....................................................................... 25
Example 4: A4 (mm. 20-27) ....................................................................... 25
Example 5: Section B (mm. 28-32) .............................................................. 26
Example 6: B’1 (mm. 48-50) ....................................................................... 27
Example 7: Section C (mm. 66-71) ............................................................... 27
Example 8: Coda (mm. 120-126) ................................................................. 29
Example 9: Section A (mm. 1-5) ................................................................. 32
Example 10: Section A’ (mm. 6-8) ................................................................. 32
Example 11: Section B (mm. 9-15) ............................................................... 33
Example 12: Section C (mm. 14-20) ............................................................. 34
Example 13: Worm’s initial theme (mm. 1-4) ............................................. 39
Example 14: Recurrence of the worm (mm. 5-9) ........................................ 40
Example 15: Orchestra and worm themes (mm. 9-16) ............................... 41
Example 16: Son clave 3-2 .......................................................................... 42
Example 17: Son clave (mm. 55-56) ............................................................. 42
Example 18: Ending of section A (mm. 90-91) .......................................... 43
Example 19: Entrance to the l’orchestre du Caire, and trille gliss (mm. 112-113) ................................................................. 44
Example 20: The highest note of the movement, reached in m. 152 ......... 45
Example 21: Rhythm (mm. 81-82 and mm. 150-151) ................................. 45
Example 22: Worm’s theme accompanied by pedal tones (mm. 198-201) ............ 46
Example 23: Coda (mm. 202-205) ........................................................................ 46
Example 24: Worm’s ending theme (mm. 224-226) .......................................... 47
Example 25: Shamanic chant (mm. 1-2) ............................................................ 50
Example 26: Intervallic line and gourd rattle (mm. 7-8) ..................................... 51
Example 27: Dynamic contrast (mm. 37-40) ...................................................... 51
Example 28: The crested oropendola call and shaman song (mm. 37-40) ......... 53
Example 29: The crested oropendola call with expanded interval (m. 25-26) ..... 53
Example 30: The potoo call (A F♯) (mm.15-16) ................................................ 54
Example 31: The potoo call (A♭ F♯) (mm.32-33) ............................................... 54
Example 32: The unknown birdcall ................................................................... 54
Example 33: Alegrías rhythm pattern (m. 2) .................................................... 57
Example 34: Andante con yopo and Alegrías (mm. 57-58, and m. 1) .............. 58
Example 35: Melody in lower register with embellishments (mm. 4-5) ............. 59
Example 36: Melody with mordants nerveux (m. 6) ......................................... 59
Example 37: The rhythmic and short melody (m. 13) ...................................... 60
Example 38: The interlude melody (m. 16) ....................................................... 60
Example 39: Improvisatory melody (m. 25) ...................................................... 60
Example 40: “Creamy” melody (m. 28) ............................................................. 61
Example 41: Ending (mm. 37-39) ................................................................... 61

Chapter III

Example 42: Fingerings and bow stroke of motive A (mm. 1-6) ..................... 64
Example 43: Fingerings and bow stroke of motive B (mm. 28-32) .................. 66
Example 44: Fingerings and bow stroke of motive C (mm. 66-71) ...................... 66
Example 45: Fingerings and bow stroke of the coda (mm. 130-135)............... 67
Example 46: Fingerings and bows of Section A (mm.1-5) .............................. 68
Example 47: Fingerings and bows of Section A’ (mm. 6-8) ............................ 69
Example 48: Fingerings and bows of Section B (mm. 9-15) .......................... 69
Example 49: Worm’s initial theme (mm. 1-4) .............................................. 70
Example 50: Example 50: Recurrence of the worm (mm. 5-9)....................... 72
Example 51: Orchestra (mm. 55-64) ............................................................. 73
Example 52: Battuto secco (mm. 73-76) ......................................................... 73
Example 53: Entrance of l’orchestre du Caire, and trille gliss (mm. 112-113).... 74
Example 54: The highest note of the movement is reached in m. 152 .......... 75
Example 55: Shamanic chant (mm. 1-2)....................................................... 77
Example 56: Dynamic contrast (mm. 37-40) .................................................. 78
Example 57: Intervallic line and gourd rattle (mm. 7-8) ................................. 78
Example 58: The crested oropendola call and shaman song (mm. 37-40) ....... 79
Example 59: The crested oropendola call with expanded interval (mm. 25-26) 80
Example 60: The potoo call (A F♯) .................................................................. 80
Example 61: The potoo call (A♭ F♯) ............................................................... 80
Example 62: Andante con yopo and Alegrias (mm. 57-58 and m. 1)............. 81
Example 63: Alegrias rhythm pattern (m. 1) ............................................... 82
Example 64: Melody in lower register with embellishments (mm. 4-5) ......... 83
Example 65: Melody with mordants nerveux (m. 6) .................................... 84
Example 66: Improvisation (m. 12) ............................................................... 84
Example 67: The rhythmic and short melody (m. 13) ........................................... 85
Example 68: The interlude melody (m. 16)........................................................... 85
Example 69: Improvisatory melody (m. 25).......................................................... 86
Example 70: Creamy melody (m. 28).................................................................... 86
Example 71: Ending (mm. 37-39) ......................................................................... 87
CHAPTER I

Paul Desenne and the Cultural Integration of Venezuela

Introduction

Venezuela has gained recognition in the musical world through the success of the educational music program known as *El Sistema*. The main goal of *El Sistema* is to rescue children from poverty and give them hope through the study and performance of classical music. In *El Sistema*, children as young as two or three years old are given instruments as soon as they are able to hold them. Tuition, transportation, scores, and social support are provided in return for the young musicians' agreement to play in government orchestras. Group lessons are held, and children who have been able to understand the basic idea of the instrument are delegated to teach younger children. Peer support is fundamental; orchestral playing is part of the program from the beginning. Approximately four hours a day, six days a week, the children make music together in one of ninety music schools (*núcleos*) in Venezuela.

The success of *El Sistema* has positively affected the musical development of Latin America and the rest of the world. Today, the government maintains thirty professional symphony orchestras and has produced a growing stream of internationally acclaimed soloists and conductors such as Gustavo Dudamel (b. 1981), the music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Edicson Ruiz (b. 1985), a double bassist in the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. However, the greatest impact of *El Sistema* is upon the thousands of children—many from poor socioeconomic backgrounds—who attend music schools around the country.
Not only do the orchestral accomplishments of *El Sistema* deserve recognition, but one must also acknowledge the numerous influential composers who are associated with this program. Despite a richly prolific output from many of these figures, only a few are known in the United States and throughout the world. Among the most influential is Paul Desenne (b.1959), whose Sonata for Violin Solo is the subject of this essay.

### Historical Background

In the twentieth century, many cultural influences have shaped music composition in Venezuela. Even though Venezuelan composers were influenced by European artistic movements, nationalist expression has always existed in Venezuelan music. After World War I, Vicente Emilio Sojo (1887-1974) and Juan Bautista Plaza (1898-1965) led a movement in Venezuela to compose music based on post-Romantic and French impressionistic idioms.¹ Sojo’s music, although influenced by impressionistic composers such as Franck, Fauré, Debussy and Ravel, is based on Venezuelan folk music. He collected, arranged, and published different traditional songs.² Plaza also studied the characteristic elements of Venezuelan folklore and used them in his compositions. In his a cappella choral works, the melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic elements of Venezuelan music are featured.³

---


A strong influence of contemporary European artistic currents subsequently developed after 1936, with the end of Juan Vicente Gómez’s dictatorship. During that year, Sojo became Director of the Escuela Superior de Música “José Ángel Lamas” and one of its main composition teachers. At that time, he and other professors continued the previous compositional style that adapted French harmonies within a national idiom, but also cultivated newer approaches that related to the diatonicism of Hindemith and neoclassicism. Plaza wrote years earlier about the importance of neoclassical composers and their work. In his words:

The works of a Stravinsky or a de Falla, conceived and carried out with very modern intentions but on the basis of national folklore, are a marvel of beauty, of genuine art. Works like those of these authors are the ones that our composers should take as a model, after studying thoroughly all the riches contained in our musical folklore, [which is] perhaps less poor than is usually imagined.

One of the most important of Sojo’s students was Antonio Estévez (1916–1988); his Cantata criolla (1954) is perhaps the best-known example of Venezuelan nationalistic composition and has been performed around the world. Estévez’s nationalistic style developed around the same time that Aaron Copland and Alberto Ginastera created the same style of music in the United States and Argentina. The Venezuelan composer’s Cantata criolla is based on a popular legend in which the Devil challenges a folk singer to a duel.

---


During the 1960s, many composers started to experiment and incorporate avant-garde techniques into Venezuelan music, leading to the formation of new schools of electronic music. In 1965, the Chilean composer, José Vicente Asuar, (b.1933) established one of the few electronic music laboratories in Latin America. A new generation of composers, such as Rhazés Hernández López (b. 1918), Alexis Rago (b. 1930), José Luis Muñoz (b. 1928), and Yannis Ioannidis (b. 1930) adapted new trends into their music.\(^8\) Ioannidis, a Greek composer who lived in Venezuela for several years, taught many composers, including Miguel Astor (b.1958), Carlos Duarte (1957-2003) Alfredo Rugeles (b. 1949), Ricardo Teruel (b. 1959), and Paul Desenne (b.1959).

**Biographical Sketch**

Paul Desenne was born in Caracas, Venezuela, on December 7, 1959. He was the son of Jean-Jacques Desenne, a French doctor, and Monica Hable, an American astrologer.\(^9\) Although Desenne’s parents were not musicians, they exposed him to different genres of music, ranging from the works of Johann Sebastian Bach, Ravi Shankar, Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan. Desenne recalls Dylan as the “eternal soundtrack” of their lives.\(^10\) During his teen years, he became influenced by American pop groups, leading him to form a band similar to those he had watched on television.\(^11\) This experience of U.S. pop culture was one of the most important influences of his life at that

---

\(^8\) Béhague, “Venezuela: Art Music.”


\(^10\) Ibid., 1.

\(^11\) Ibid., 2.
time and encouraged him to become a professional musician. Before Desenne formed his group, he had tried to learn guitar. He had insisted on playing it left-handed, which seemed more natural to him. Yet, he encountered resistance from his teacher, Maurice Reyna. The frustration with his teacher over the strict playing technique of the instrument led Desenne to abandon the idea of pursuing a professional guitar career. Nonetheless, according to his own account, he continued to play the instrument as a bass guitar until he developed an even greater enthusiasm for the cello. Even though his group, “One Foot One Eye,” did not last long, it performed in different venues of Caracas and gave Desenne the opportunity to play different instruments—guitar, bass, and percussion—and to create music. Soon after the group dissolved, Desenne decided to take cello lessons with one of the members of the Venezuelan Symphonic Orchestra, and the cello subsequently arose as his principal instrument. The young composer recounts that playing the cello was not unnatural for a left-handed person. At the age of fourteen, he began to study composition under the tutelage of Yannis Ioannidis at the Universidad Metropolitana in Caracas.

Desenne moved to Paris in 1976 to complete his high school studies; however, he turned down the opportunity to attend the Hypokhâgne (a preparatory school for the École Normale Supérieure) to study philosophy. Instead, he continued his musical training in 1979 at the Conservatoire National de Région de Boulogne Billancourt. In addition, he studied at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris until 1985. In Paris, his cello teachers consisted of Michel Strauss and Philippe Muller and his composition

---

12 Ibid., 3.
13 Ibid., 3.
14 Ibid., 5.
teachers were Marc-Olivier Dupin and Luc Ferrari. Desenne also studied Venezuelan music with the criollo harpists Mario Guacarán and Gabriel Castillo, and with the singer and songwriter Guillermo Jiménez Leal, whose folk compositions used Classical or Baroque chamber forms and revealed influences of the richly multicultural Paris music scene.

Living in Paris for eleven years had a great impact on Paul Desenne. He was exposed to music and musicians from all over the world. As a young creative artist, he inhabited two different musical worlds: one, the academic music environment and two, the music that he played in the streets, in subways, at parties, and in other venues. Both academic and non-academic settings provided Desenne with different learning environments and helped him to perform and search for new types of music. He was in contact with folk, popular, and vernacular music and musicians, especially from Latin America. Desenne described his life in Paris in an article written for the Revista Número, a Colombian cultural magazine, in which he used a satiric tone, as a musician who crossed over from the academic world into the folk music scene. As Desenne recalled:

While I was studying cello in Paris, I had the opportunity to stir it up with my instrument outside of the conservatories, in the anemic environment of non-academic French music. For me, each group combination meant a new chapter, a credit in my program of off-the-wall studies. Cello with arpa llanera in the subway, which is the music of coins hunters, Guahibos of the tunnels. Cello with accordion of the vallenato in the parties of the Caribbeans who were sad about their exile and darkness. (Careful with the microphone, it is going to scratch the cello.) Cello with tumbadora. Cello with the Armenian kemanchá, with the drums and bamboo flute of...

---


Guadalupe, with the Algerian ād and darbuka. Cello with a bandoneon sick with tuberculosis from an exiled porteño.\textsuperscript{18}

The opportunity to perform different genres of music stimulated Desenne’s ability to adapt the cello to diverse musical settings. This eclectic approach, in turn, influenced his earliest compositions, in which he adapted the elaborate musical figures and ideas of South American popular music to chamber formats. Desenne wrote his first piece \textit{Quinteto del pájaro} in 1981 for flute, oboe, English horn,\textsuperscript{19} violin, cello, and the four-string Venezuelan \textit{cuatro}. He describes the piece with the statement that:

\textit{Quinteto del pájaro} is an essay on tropical Baroque music. Each of the four movements explores a different genre of Venezuelan music, expanding the formal contents of native harmonic cycles, or developing a usually simple song form.\textsuperscript{20}

Since returning to Venezuela in 1987, Desenne has become one of the most notable composers in the nation. His works have been performed around the world by important music ensembles and soloists, such as I Musici, the Kremerata Baltica, the members of the Lincoln Center Chamber Society, the Nederlands Blasers Ensemble, the Fodor Quintet, the Verdehr Trio, the Violoncello Octet of the Paris Conservatory, the New Julliard Ensemble, and the chamber group Continuum. In addition, important musical figures such as the pianist Gabriela Montero, the flutist Jacques Zoon, the

\textsuperscript{18} “Mientras estudiaba violonchelo en París tuve la oportunidad de revolcar mi instrumento en el anémico ambiente de la música no académica de Francia, en la periferia de los conservatorios. Cada combinación es para mí un capítulo, un crédito de mis estudios extramuros. Chelo con arpa llanera en el metro, que es música de cazadores recolectores de monedas, guahíbos de los túneles; chelo con acordeón de vallenato en las rumbas de los caribeños enloquecidos por el exilio y la oscuridad —ojo con el micrófono, que se me raya el chelo—; chelo con tumbadora, chelo con kemanchá de Armenia, con tambores y flauta de bambú de Guadalupe, con ud y darbuká de Argelia; chelo con bandoneón tuberculoso de exiliado porteño. “ Paul Desenne “Vientre de la vieja esfera” http://www.revistanumero.com/37vien.htm (accessed August 30, 2010). The author’s translation.

\textsuperscript{19} The oboist doubles the English horn.

clarinetist and saxophonist Paquito d’Rivera, and the violinists Alexis Cárdenas and Virginie Robilliard have performed his works.

Desenne received worldwide recognition for his accomplishments when he was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation composition grant in June 2009 and a Radcliffe Institute grant at Harvard University in 2010. He was also awarded many other sources of sponsorship from the Fundación Cisneros (2006, 2001, 2000); Civitella Ranieri (2006); El Sistema (2004, 2000); CONAC: the Venezuelan Ministry of Culture (2002, 1993); Fundación Banco Mercantil (1998); Fundación Beracasa (1998); Meet the Composer (1995); and INCIBA, the Venezuelan Institute for Culture and the Arts (1974-76).21

Style and Works

Desenne has an output of approximately sixty-nine works covering a great scope of genres and instrumentation. (For a complete listing, see Appendix 1.) Desenne has composed works for solo string instruments and piano, for small ensemble (including strings, winds, piano, as well as traditional folk instruments), and for chamber orchestra, among other combinations. In addition, he has composed large-scale symphonic and choral works such as symphonies and cantatas. Desenne has shown his aptitude for composing with a variety of instruments and ensembles. Stylistically, his works range from a traditional Baroque quartet using historical instruments to numerous pieces utilizing traditional folk instruments within classical forms.

In many of his writings, Desenne expresses the view that Latin America possesses a complex multi-layered musical language. He writes that “cultural interweaving seems

21 Desenne, “Biography.”
to have chosen this wild territory [Venezuela] to show how much diversity could spring from a handful of different seeds.”

The Venezuelan cultural interweaving to which Desenne refers is based on three distinct roots: 1) the indigenous cultures that were already present on the continent, 2) the Spanish heritage that arrived during the time of colonization, and 3) the African peoples who were brought to the New World as slaves. These three cultural influences are prominent in Desenne’s compositions. From indigenous cultures, he adopted oral traditions of Venezuelan music, such as shamanic chanting and dancing, as well as pre-Conquest percussion instruments, such as the maracas. From Spanish sources, Desenne utilized the *cuatro*, a four-stringed instrument descended from the Spanish *vihuela* and guitar families. In Venezuelan folk music, the *cuatro* is one of the most important instruments and has traditionally functioned in an accompanimental capacity. An additional Spanish influence is Desenne’s incorporation of Andalusian songs and dances. From the African countries, he used the different rhythmic patterns that were brought to South America as a result of slavery; this musical influence is of Congolese, Sudanese and Angolan origins.

Together, these Venezuelan features form a fusion with international elements from the concert music tradition. Renaissance music, Baroque forms and the counterpoint of Bach have all influenced Desenne’s works. One of the composer’s main teachers at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris was William Christie, who was

---


known for his interpretations of Baroque music, particularly French Baroque music; he was the founder of the ensemble Les Arts Florissants,25 which is one of the leading chamber orchestras of period instruments in Europe.

Desenne, in the notes of his first compact disc titled Tocatas Galeónicas (1992), wrote:

Venezuelan music contains elements taken from just about everyone who landed on its Caribbean coasts over the past five centuries... Western musicologists would be stunned to find very pure strains of European Renaissance music, almost unchanged, in many popular Venezuelan songs and instrumental forms today. Our national instrument, the cuatro, which accompanies most of Venezuelan music, is in fact a strummed four string Renaissance guitar. This persistence of musical memory is most remarkable in the descendants of non-European cultures. The treasures of African music which came with the slaves give us hundreds of rhythmic ingredients which make up the temporal skeleton of most of our music. But in many places the music stayed pure, offering extraordinary opportunities for comparative studies in African musicology with its impressively energetic and complex drumming.26

In addition to early music influences, contemporary techniques have shaped Desenne’s compositional style. For example, in the first movement of his Sonata for Violin Solo (1998), he combines a minimalist approach with rhythmic traces of the Venezuelan waltz. This approach differs from that of the second movement, which uses an impressionist style. In the third movement his approach is more classical but also includes Arabic and African elements. The first part of the last movement makes use of shamanic chants and the second part is influenced by the alegriás of Andalucía.

The cultural integration expressed in Desenne’s compositions has produced an innovative idiom, creating one of the most unique types of music in Latin America today.


26 Paul Desenne, Tocatas Galeónicas, recorded January-February, 1992, Dorian Discovery DIS-80129, compact disc.
This combination of melodic and rhythms elements from different countries provides a rich example of Desenne’s music. These unique features have led me to study his Sonata for Violin Solo as the basis of my doctoral essay.

**Review of Literature**

A detailed analysis of the score will serve as my primary source. Two doctoral essays about Paul Desenne have already appeared. Javier Montilla, in his work “The Flute Music of Paul Desenne: A Comparative Analytical Study of Representatives Works,” provides a great amount of detail about the composer’s life as well as a comprehensive analysis of each of his flute pieces.27

Tulio Rondón, in his DMA document, “Cultural Hybridization in the Music of Paul Desenne: An Integration of Latin American Folk, Pop and Indigenous Music with Western Classical Traditions,” mainly focuses on Desenne’s *Jaguar Songs* for solo cello. Rondón explains how this work represents a new path in the music of Latin America since Desenne’s music forms an integration of many cultures within his unique compositional style.28

Outside of these two doctoral papers, bibliographical material on Desenne is limited. The *Grove Music Online* has only a brief entry devoted to the composer’s life and works. Beyond that, the general articles on Latin America music in *Grove Music Online* are useful to support the analytical approach of the sonata as well the historical aspects of the evolution of music in Venezuela and its influences.

---

27 Montilla, “The Flute Music of Paul Desenne.”

Other bibliographical material is limited, but Luis Filipe Ramón y Rivera, in his book *La música afrovenezolana*, discusses the influence of African music on Latin American music, as found in the different accompanying [percussion] instruments, as well as in traditional Venezuelan melodies and rhythms.\(^{29}\) This book has musical examples and a brief explanation of the different African rhythms that occur in Venezuelan popular songs.

Dale A. Olsen, in his book, *Music of the Warao of Venezuela: Song People of the Rain Forest*, wrote that the native South American musical systems are as diverse as South American Indian languages. It is believed that there were 1,492 different languages spoken in South American when the Spaniards arrived.\(^{30}\) Also, Olsen explains the importance of shamanism in the South American rain forest cultures. A shaman acts as a mediator who communicates with the supernatural world by singing, thereby maintaining order between the mortal and immortal worlds. Desenne used two indigenous shamanic chants in the last movement of the Violin Sonata.

**Analysis**

This doctoral essay will primarily consist of a theoretical and musical analysis of the Sonata for Violin Solo of Paul Desenne. Examining the formal, structural, motivic and rhythmic aspects of the piece is crucial, since the Sonata represents a particular fusion of cultures, which is Desenne’s compositional trademark.

---

\(^{29}\) Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, *La música afrovenezolana* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1971), 12, the author’s translation.

I will include an exploration of Desenne’s use of tonality or modes; also, the rhythmic elements that he uses in each movement and their cultural influences will be examined. A comparison with the traditional music of the countries that have influenced Desenne will help elucidate how the composer uses these diverse elements and incorporates them into his compositional technique. The analysis of characteristic musical excerpts will illustrate these different cultural roots and the way that Desenne combines them to create a unique musical language. In Desenne’s own program notes, he identifies the various musical influences in the Sonata: Venezuelan modes, Japanese modes, Salsa rhythms, Afro-Cuban rhythm, indigenous chants, Andalusian music, and gypsy music.\footnote{Desenne, “Program Notes.”} It is important to compare these elements with the original sources and appreciate how Desenne adapt them into his Sonata. In addition, the form of each movement will be examined in order to understand the overall structure of the piece. Finally, it is important to acknowledge the programmatic aspects of the Sonata. Based on Desenne’s own writings, I will explore the deeper significance of each movement. Clearly, this sonata represents a complex multicultural fusion and requires a precise and in-depth analysis in order to identify these diverse musical elements. This analysis will comprise a substantial portion of my doctoral essay.

**Performance Practice**

Another significant portion of the essay will be devoted to problems and issues of performance practice. Through the process of learning to play the Sonata, I have gained a greater understanding of the piece. Although Desenne is specific in notating articulations and bow strokes, having hands-on experience with the piece has added to
my familiarity of its different musical elements. I will discuss performance issues of the Sonata in terms of the various aspects of violin technique required for its execution: elements of articulation, intonation, dynamics, bow strokes and fingerings. An understanding of the different cultural influences will also have a bearing on my interpretation of the work.
CHAPTER II

The Theoretical Study of the Sonata

Desenne’s Sonata for Violin Solo intermixes elements of Latin American folk music with traditions of Western Europe. The four movements of the Sonata represent a particular fusion of cultural elements from Venezuela, Japan, Spain, Africa, and Cuba, as well as incorporating features from indigenous communities and the Arabic world. Because of the unique integration of these diverse cultural roots, the Sonata stands as a pioneering piece in the violin repertory of Venezuela. It is indisputably an impressive and remarkable contribution to the Latin American solo violin repertoire. Its physical and technical demands are great, as are the performance challenges of the music.

The French violinist, Virginie Robilliard (b. 1970), with the support of the Carlos and Alegría Beracasa Foundation, commissioned Paul Desenne to write a sonata for solo violin.32 Desenne wrote the sonata in memory of Alegría Beracasa (1915-1989). Beracasa was one of the most important patrons of the music and arts in Venezuela, and the President of the Carlos and Alegría Beracasa Foundation. She devoted much of her life to the Venezuelan cultural movement, particularly to nurturing gifted children. In 1963, she founded the Venezuelan Association of Parents and Friends of Exceptional Children (AVEPANE), of which she served as the Honorary President for twenty-three years. In 1968, with her husband Carlos Beracasa, she founded the Carlos and Alegría Beracasa Foundation, of which the principal activity is to promote concerts, master classes, and sponsorship of many acclaimed Venezuelan and international musicians. In

July 1986, Beracasa was named Honorary Citizen of the City of Montpellier, France, in recognition of her work to promote and encourage the art of music in that city. The same year she was awarded the Silver Medal and Diploma of Honor of the Organization of American States (OAS); in May of the following year, she received the Order of Knight of the Legion of Honor of France.  Desenne dedicated the Sonata to one of the founders of the Carlos and Alegria Beracasa Foundation not only because of the financial support the organization provided, but also because of the enormous impact that Alegria Beracasa had on Venezuelan classical music.

I first heard the Violin Sonata at its première during the recital of Virginie Robilliard in Caracas, Venezuela at the Corp Banca Cultural Center in 1998. I was astonished by the performance and fascinated by the use of traditional music of Venezuela and other cultures. The inclusion of Venezuelan music was powerful and exciting and created a desire in me to learn more about Desenne's compositions. As I became more familiar with his music, I found it fascinating and complex. His music is extremely personal and forges new paths in the Latin American musical world. The Sonata was later performed at the Royal Academy of Music in London in February 1999.

I was intrigued by Desenne’s blend of elements from Venezuela, Japan, Spain, Africa, and Cuba, the Arabic world, and indigenous communities, creating a new musical language. The relationship between the meanings of each movement of their titles also

---


stimulated my interest; I wanted to understand the Sonata not only in terms of its musical aspects but also in terms of its philosophical conception.

The Sonata for Violin Solo is a lengthy piece of approximately twenty minutes and has four movements. The first movement is titled *Spiral Capriccio*; the second, *Epaves*; the third, *The Worm's Belly Dance*; and the fourth, *Andante con yopo/Alegrías*. In Desenne’s own program notes, he identifies the various musical influences in his Sonata: Venezuelan rhythmic modes, Japanese modes, salsa rhythms, Afro-Cuban rhythms, indigenous music chants, Andalusian music, and gypsy music. Never before have all of these diverse elements been combined into a single composition; this is a piece of immense significance.

Not only are the musical features fascinating in this piece but it is also interesting to observe the way the four different movements blend together to create a unified whole. Paul Desenne evokes human life and death in this sonata. He refers to these elements in his program notes. In his words, the *Spiral Capriccio* is based on the concept that life is a continuous creation of ideas similar to the spiral; hence, life is constantly evolving. Life never returns to the exact same place, and every incident stimulates growth. The literal translation of *Epaves* is “shipwreck.” The music relates to the concept of motionlessness; hence, no evolution is presented. This piece is associated with the afterlife in a state of limbo, which is a static state. *Epaves* represents a condition opposite that of *Spiral Capriccio* in the first movement. *The Worm's Belly Dance* conveys the cycle of birth and death, by evoking a dance that represents the constant rebirth of life. In the final movement, *Andante con yopo/Alegrías*, indigenous and Spanish cultures are combined in order to illustrate the journey of the spirit until it reaches the underworld.
The First movement: Spiral Capriccio

In his program notes, Desenne provides a description of the meaning of the first movement, entitled Spiral Capriccio:

It is a *moto perpetuo* that explores rhythmic modes of Venezuelan music with spiraling constructions consisting of transformations in the length and design of the motives and in the breadth of the interactions between the virtual of register extremities. The music conveys the rhythmic intensity of the quick Venezuelan *valse* form. The symbol of the spiral is also taken here as a representation of life, of the constant generation of ideas by a pulsating organism.35

We can gain insight into this movement by exploring the two parts of its title separately: “spiral” and “capriccio.” The symbol of the spiral is related to several complex concepts and they are presented in different aspects in nature.

The spiral in the mathematical world is a curve that emerges from a central point and moves progressively farther away proportionally from the origin as it revolves around the origin point. This mathematical concept is related to the construction of the motive and its series of transformations in this movement. This motive is just a series of intervals that is transformed by moving away from its first conception—in this case via the change in space between the intervals. Hence, the register is affected by these transformations.

The spiral is also related to the golden ratio. According to Jacques Bernoulli the golden ratio is associated with a particular type of spiral shape known as a logarithmic spiral. In his treatise entitled *Spiral Mirabilis* (Wonderful Spiral), he wrote that the spiral “may be used as a symbol, either of fortitude and constancy in adversity, or of the human

35 Ibid.
body, which after all its changes, even after death, will be restored to its exact and perfect self.”

Many writers have discussed the spiral. For instance, Nathaniel Hawthorne, in his novel *The House of the Seven Gables*, writes that “all human progress is in a circle; or, to use a more accurate and beautiful figure, in an ascending spiral curve.” Also, the novel *Siddhartha* by the German writer Hermann Hesse reads: “[Govinda said]: We have learned much, Siddhartha. There still remains much to learn. We are not going in circles, we are going upwards. The path is spiral and we have already climbed several steps.”

The spiral is considered a metaphorical image of transformation and evolution. Desenne stated in his program notes that the spiral exemplifies life and the constant generation of ideas.

The word *capriccio* also defines this movement. *Capriccio*, the Italian term for caprice, describes a piece of music in free form with an improvisatory character, frequently virtuosic in nature. In the violin world the term caprice is associated with Niccolò Paganini and his Twenty Four Caprices for Solo Violin, op. 1, in which each caprice examines some aspect of violin technique (such as arpeggios, double stops, trills, rapid position changes, and string crossings). The Austrian violinist Thomas Zehetmair, in the program notes of his recording of Paganini’s caprices, wrote that they “are often described as studies, because they are filled with such useful material for particular technical issues. But the really remarkable thing about them is that their artistic

---

originality far outweighs their function as didactic tools.”\textsuperscript{39} It is clear that Desenne was inspired by the nature of the caprice—a virtuosic piece. The first movement is a constant succession of sixteen notes with difficult intervallic leaps and challenging string crossings.

Another important musical characteristic in this movement is the use of an unaccompanied solo melodic line—even though Desenne wrote a few double stops they do not alter the overall nature of the movement. Desenne’s use of the melodic line is similar to the implied polyphonic style of writing in Baroque pieces for solo instruments, especially those of Johann Sebastian Bach. Some of the most important works in the violin repertoire are Bach’s Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin (BWV 1001–1006). Desenne’s writing in the first movement of the violin sonata creates a similar illusion of more than just a single voice. His polyphonic writing, with distinct lines in the soprano and bass, imply a harmonic content. Bach’s Prelude from the Partita no. 3 in E major and the Allegro assai of the Sonata no. 3 in C major exhibits these same polyphonic characteristics. Desenne, as Bach, achieves these effects by the use of extensive arpeggios in different registers. A melodic line is also embedded in the upper and lower notes of the arpeggios. The harmony is tonally conventional.

As Desenne states, the first movement is a \textit{moto perpetuo}—a title given to a piece in which fast figuration is persistently maintained—that explores different rhythmic modes within the different registers of the violin.\textsuperscript{40} The rhythmic modes are the rhythmic

\textsuperscript{39} Thomas Zehetmair. Program notes to \textit{Niccolò Paganini: 24 Capricci per violin solo, op.1}. Performed by Thomas Zehetmair, violin (Munich: ECM, 2009), CD no. 4763318.

structures produced by a combination of different notes that are underlined by the
different voices, dynamics and accents.

Desenne states in his program notes that: “The music conveys the rhythmic
intensity of the quick Venezuelan valse form.”41 His statement refers to two important
c characteristics of the genre: the form and the rhythm. The form of the movement is based
on the Venezuelan waltz, which has its origin in Europe and arrived in Venezuela in the
beginning of the nineteenth century. It arose as one of the most important Venezuelan
genres in folkloric and academic settings. Many composers wrote small waltzes, such as
Heraclio Hernández, A. Paz Abreu, and Manuel Guadalajara, but other musicians such as
Ramon Delgado Palacios, Federico Villegas and Teresa Carreño took the waltz to a
higher form, always maintaining elements of a nationalistic style. These waltzes were
written especially for the piano. Traditionally, the meter is based on three quarter notes
but, in the Venezuelan waltz, it is transformed into a quarter note, an eighth rest, an
a nth note, and a quarter note. The overall form is ternary; however, after the middle of
the century it extended to five or more sections.42 For instance, two of the best-known
waltzes in Venezuela, Dama antañona by Francisco de Paula Aguirre and El diablo
suelto by Heraclio Fernández, have an A :|| B :|| C :|| form.

The first movement of Desenne’s Violin Sonata has the form: ABA’B’CA’’B’’
C’Coda. Even though it does not employ the structure of popular Venezuelan waltzes, it
still has three different motives that are repeated. The form of this piece is clearly
defined by the different characteristics of each motive; hence, it is a nine section piece: A

41 Desenne, “Program Notes.”

42 Carlos García Carbó and José Peñin, “Venezuela: Valse,” Diccionario de la Música española e
hispanoamericana (Spain: Sociedad General de Autores y Editores, 2002), 10: 715–716, the author’s
translation.
Motive A is related to the meter of 3/4 and it is found in the opening of the piece. This first measure is a succession of sixteenth notes in which beat one and two are ascending arpeggios and beat three is a descending-ascending arpeggio (see Example 1).

Motive B (mm. 28) is related to the change of meter to 12/16 (see Example 5). This motive also consists of sixteenth notes, this time grouped in triplets, which creates the illusion of a faster tempo. Even though this musical idea is also an arpeggio, it differs from motive A since the range of intervals is smaller and has more pedal tones—a constant note which is repeated. The third motive (m. 66) is linked to the meter of 12/16; however, it has a different character. It is higher in pitch than motive B and it has sixteenth rests in between, creating a motive that is more vivid and lighter in character.

Example 1: Section A (mm. 1-6)

The rhythm is crucial in this movement since it helps to define the form of the piece. The tempo marking is Allegro, a relatively fast tempo, giving the movement a virtuosic character. However, the tempo is not the most important characteristic of the piece; it is how Desenne works with the different successions of sixteenth notes that
allows him to bring out the different rhythm combinations and the displacement of the bar line. Desenne makes reference in his program notes to the exploration of the different rhythmic modes of Venezuelan music.43 According to the Grove Music Online, a rhythmic mode is a “concept of rhythm in which the value and relative duration of each note is determined by its position within a larger rhythmic series, or mode, consisting of a patterned succession of long and short values.” The written accentuation of certain notes in different registers helps to emphasize these rhythmic modes and the movement of the bar in the music. Also, the changes of meter and the length of each motive highlights the rhythmic character of the movement.

The form of the movement is ABA´B’CA´B’’ C’ Coda, and each letter corresponds to a different section that is based on the three different motives. The division of the movement into different sections is related to each change of meter. The movement is in 3/4 and 12/16, which both contain the same number of sixteenth notes but with a different pattern of emphasis. Since the piece is basically written in constant sixteenth notes, the change of meter influences the natural accentuation of the bar. The accentuation in 3/4 is on every beat (each group of four sixteenth notes) and, in 12/16, on each group of three sixteenth notes. Every change in the meter delineates a new section in the movement even though the transitions from one to another are very subtle. The change of meter also relates to the change of the character in each section, allowing each one to become different.

Section A is twenty-seven measures long and is made up of four phrases. The phrases are not strongly defined and are simply transformations of the motive A. The first phrase, which is the first six measures and it is called A1, can be conceived as the

---

43 Desenne, “Program Notes.”
first complete musical idea (Example 1). These six measures are created by transforming the musical material of the first measure. Desenne wrote three series of arpeggios in which the second arpeggio is already a transformation of the first—one tone below—and the third arpeggio is in contrary motion than the original motive—the first arpeggio is ascending intervals while the third one is descending. The first four notes could be considered the origin motive of the movement and becomes transformed in many ways, providing new motives. The first six measures can be viewed as four measures plus two, delineated by the use of different registers. The intervals become progressively wider until the last two measures jump to the high register of the violin, completing the first musical idea.

The second phrase, A2, is also six measures long (mm. 7-12); however, the register does not go as high as in A1. Here, Desenne maintains the medium range of the instrument; mm. 10-11 are one octave lower than mm. 5-6—the original statement of the idea (Example 2). The third phrase, A3 (Example 3), can be divided into six plus one-measure groupings (mm. 13-19). Here Desenne has already expanding the arpeggios to the high register. Also, he adds an extra measure with a couple of sixteenth rests. This measure foreshadows the following phrase. A4, extending from mm. 20-27, can be viewed as six plus two measures (Example 4). The first two measures resemble the beginning of the piece, however two additional measures transition to the following section.
Example 2: A2 (mm. 7-12)

Example 3: A3 (mm. 13-19)

Example 4: A4 (mm. 20-27)
Section B (mm. 28-32) is in 12/16 and only five measures long, completing another musical idea. This section presents a new motive that has its origin in the previous section (Example 5). The agogic accentuation is linked with the ternary subdivision of the meter, providing a new dance-like character.

Example 5: Section B (mm. 28-32)

Section A’ (mm. 33-47) goes without any transition to the meter of 3/4 and is a repetition of A with some differences. The first phrase, A’1 (mm. 33-39) is a variation of the first motive and uses a 4+3 measure combination. The first four measures are fragments of A1. The last three measures form a variant of the preceding measures. A2’, (mm. 40-47), comes from elements of previous parts. Desenne includes the last two measures as a transition to the 12/16 section.

Section B’ (mm. 48-65), in 12/16, is based on the motive presented in section B. However, it is twenty-four measures long and divided into three parts. The first phrase, B’1 (mm. 48-51) contains the same elements as section B (Example 6). B’2 (mm. 52-61) further develops these elements in the upper register with ever-expanding arpeggios. B2’ may be viewed in two five-measure segments, with the arpeggios more extensively developed in the second segment. The third phrase, B’3 (mm. 62-65) is a resolution of the previous development and can be viewed as transition to the new section.
Example 6: B’1 (mm. 48-50)

The new section C (mm. 66-71) is still in 12/16 meter but a change in notation provides a different character to delineate the new section (Example 7). The new motive is dance-like and could be compared to a Venezuelan waltz. Still in ternary meter, this motive has sixteenth rests and arpeggios that are grouped as one, two or three notes. A strong dynamic change also occurs in this section, which is mostly played *pianissimo*.

Example 7: Section C (mm. 66-71)

Section A’’ (mm 72-81) is marked by the change of meter back to 3/4. The melodic line still resembles the original motive of section A; however, Desenne has transformed and combined melodic elements presented earlier, creating the illusion of new material. Only the combination and transformation provides a new meaning. A1’’ (mm. 72-75) belongs to the original motive while A2’’ (mm. 76-81) is more a combination of the first two motives (from Sections A and B). Section B’’ (mm. 82-102), in 12/16, is preceded by a suggested decrease in tempo. It can be divided in four
phrases and is nearly identical to Section B'. B1'' is from mm. 82-88; B2'' from mm. 89-93; B3'' from mm. 94-98; and B4'' from mm. 99-102, the last part serving as a transition to the new section. C'' (mm. 103-119) is still in the same meter but with a contrasting character. It is similar to section C; the melodic material is basically the same, even though the length of the section is different. Section C lasts six measures while section C'' is seventeen measures, divided into three phrases that are just developments of one another (C1'' from mm. 103-108; C2'' from mm. 109-113; and C3'' from mm. 114-119). As previously stated, the section possesses similar elements to section C; however, Desenne adds more repetitions and takes away the sixteenth rests in each part, creating a natural connection to the following section in ¾ time.

The coda (mm 120-142) is divided into four phrases. This section is still based on the motive A; however, it sounds distinct since the arpeggios are mostly in contrary motion. The first phrase (mm. 120-125) and the second phrase (mm. 126-135) both exhibit diverse transformations of the motive A (Example 8). The third phrase (mm. 135-142) is a variation of the previous part, but with the same characteristics. The last phrase appears as a resolution of this chaos, helping to provide the end of the movement. The resolution is achieved through the use of known material and a line descending to a double stop on a minor seventh. It is from mm. 143-145 and is similar to measures 118-120.
The Second movement: Epaves

In his program notes, Desenne states:

The French word “épaves” covers several meanings, beginning with the literal definition of “shipwreck.” It can also convey the idea of rests, in the sense of what is left after the wreck, or even of a ship gone astray, sailing without a course, without a crew. In total contrast to the preceding movement, this modal lentissimo combines something of a Japanese mode with an Iberian feeling to reach a state of courseless navigation, of temporal flotation. The character of the movement is meant to place the listener in a very quiet limbo.  

This movement is a contrast to the rapid and rhythmic music of the preceding movement. The first concept to which this slow movement is related is the word “shipwreck,” which symbolizes the remains of a ship that has been badly damaged or destroyed, or a ship that is sailing without direction. Desenne musically represents this image in the way how the music moves slowly and haphazardly. The tempo marking lentissimo (very slow tempo) suggests the character of the piece, as well as the thematic material. The movement is monothematic and the motive is made up of six notes (A

---

44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
B♭ D E C G). The motive is in constant development moving from register one to another; rhythmically it is altered.

Since the movement is short, slow, and monothematic, it differs from the first movement. Desenne’s French influences, which are influential in his musical development, are especially evident in Epaves. The composer creates an impressionistic atmosphere not only through the use of the motive but also by using soft dynamics and a few special effects such as harmonics and left-hand pizzicato.

Another characteristic of the movement relates to the soft dynamics notated by Desenne. In this monothematic movement, they allow the composer to achieve another distinctive feature of the piece: creating a specific atmosphere that transports the listener into a static state. Desenne writes that this movement “is intended to place the listener in a very quiet limbo.”

Catholic theologians refer to limbo as the transitory place of souls which, although purified from sin, are rejected from Heaven. In literature, limbo is sometimes used to reference a place or state of restraint, imprisonment or rejection. Shakespeare, in his play The Comedy of Errors, uses limbo as a synonym for jail when Dromio of Syracuse states: No, he's in Tartar limbo, worse than hell.”

John Milton, in Paradise Lost, defines the Paradise of Fools as “limbo large and broad.” He criticizes the society of his time by writing about human vanity:

```
A violent cross wind from either coast
Blows them transverse ten thousand leagues awry
Into the devious Air; then might ye see
```

46 Ibid.

47 Naseeb Shaheen, Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 1999), 111.

Cowls, hoods and habits with their wearers tost
And flutter’d into rags, then reliques, beads,
Indulgences, dispenses, pardons, bulls,
The sport of winds: all these upwhirl’d aloft
Fly o're the backside of the world far off
Into a Limbo large and broad, since call’d
The Paradise of Fools, to few unknown
Long after, now unpeopled, and untrod. 49

Desenne combines the concepts of shipwreck and limbo, successfully creating this unique movement. The rhythm is dictated by the character of the piece, implying a certain freedom that is not present in the preceding movement. Constantly moving eighth notes are the essence of the piece.

Desenne uses different compositional features that are not present in the previous movement, and one is the use of double stops. Desenne takes advantage of the open strings D, A, and E. At the beginning of the movement, a long note A serves as a pedal tone. Although the other line is moving eighth notes, this pedal creates a stationary effect. Later, in m. 5 the composer uses the two open strings (D and A) and the minor seventh (C) to produce a rich, open chord. Two other features are the use of harmonics and left-hand pizzicato. The harmonics create a dream-like atmosphere with their characteristic sound, while the left hand pizzicato provides a more resonant color. Desenne uses both features in an efficient way. He writes the harmonics in the low register of the instrument, providing a dark color. For the left-hand pizzicato, he uses the open strings A and E but in a soft dynamic, taking advantage of the natural resonance of the strings. Desenne also manipulates the use of vibrato by using it very sparingly, providing specific changes of colors in the melody.

Since the movement is monothematic, it does not have a form based on thematic contrast; however the transformations of the motive delineate different sections. The movement has three sections (ABC), each clearly defined by its unique characteristics. In Section A (mm. 1-8), a five-note motive (A B♭ D E C) is presented against a pedal tone on the pitch A (Example 9).

Example 9: Section A (mm. 1-5)

Desenne in m. 6 repeats motive A in harmonics, adding the left-hand pizzicato to close the section (Example 10).

Example 10: Section A’ (mm. 6-8)

This motive at m. 6, using a different color in a single line, creates a transition to the following section. In Section B (mm. 9-15) the motive moves through the different registers of the violin. It expands as it goes from the lower to the higher registers. This
section has a sense of development since the rhythm moves and the motive appears in a shorter form (Example 11). However, Desenne emphasizes that the tempo should remain \textit{sempre lentissimo} (always very slow) even though the melody is expanding. This contradiction of the moving eighth notes and the tempo marking provides the impression of being in the limbo since the melody is restricted. It moves through different registers, starting in the lowest register, then moving into a middle-high register, and finally returning to the lowest register.

Example 11: Section B (mm. 9-15)

The melody at the end of section B descends to the low register, suggesting the presence of boundaries out of which the melody cannot travel. For instance, the melody reaches a high D, but immediately moves away from it, coming back to the beginning. The last half of measures 14 and 15 conclude section B, but also form part of the new section C.

The C section (mm. 16-20) brings the movement to a close (Example 12). The notes of the motive are still present but not as clearly as before. Desenne alters the
motive by the juxtaposition of some of the notes, and alters others with accidentals in order to change the harmony. The first two notes, A and B♭ are a double stop; hence, the motive is compromised. Also, the sole occurrence of the notes A♭ and F♯ in mm. 17-18 provide a different harmonic color to the section. The last pair of double-stopped notes, the pedal A and the higher D harmonic, creates a motionless ending.

Example 12: Section C (mm. 14-20)

Desenne discusses the mode of the piece in his program note when he states: “This modal lentissimo combines something of a Japanese mode with an Iberian feeling.”

The use of a Japanese mode in this movement delivers a mystical and unique sound that fits well with some Western harmonies. The motive of the beginning is based on six notes (A B♭ C D E G) and is similar to the third form of the In-sen mode (A C D E G A).

It is important to note that the first interval of the In-sen mode should be a half step A B♭; however, the motive is still considered to be based on the In-sen since it is based in the first form: A B♭ D E F A. The difference with the third form is that the second

---

50 Desenne, “Program Notes.”
degree is altered to a minor third and the sixth is raised a whole step. The foundation
note of a Japanese mode is the third and not the first note as in Western scales—fulfilling
the Japanese concept of balance.\textsuperscript{51} Hence, in this scale A C D E G A, the root is the note
D. Desenne used this note as the last note in the piece.

Another characteristic of this movement is the “Iberian feeling.” The Japanese
mode is based on the use of the pentatonic scale and Desenne alters the mode by adding
some Iberian harmony of European origin. B\textsuperscript{♭} and later G at the beginning provide
strong sense of harmony, suggesting a g minor scale: G A B\textsuperscript{♭} C D E G, but the note F\textsuperscript{♯} is
not present until m. 18. In Section C, Desenne altered the scale to notes A\textsuperscript{♭} and F\textsuperscript{♯}.
These two notes move around the center pitch G, providing again the sense of a tonal
center in g minor.

\textbf{The Third Movement: The Worm's Belly Dance}

In his program notes, Desenne provides a clear description of the elements he uses
in this movement:

Here the worm performs a solo accompanied by an Afro-Cuban band in a
Saharian cartoon setting. The dialogue between the worm and the band
grows into a frenetic and sinuous belly dance. The climax smooths into a
meditation, after a few spasms. A \textit{salsoso} coda reminds us of the dance of
life and death, in which the worm acts as the recycling force.\textsuperscript{52}

The three most important elements in this movement are: 1) the musical
representation of the worm, 2) the Afro-Cuban band, and 3) the meaning of the worm’s
belly dance. These distinct characters are explicitly represented in Desenne’s music.


\textsuperscript{52} Desenne, “Program Notes.”
This movement is a euphoric dance and, as Desenne states, it represents the worm’s
dance of life and death. The origin of the word “worm” is related to the word “serpent,”
Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary describes the etymology of the word as:

Middle English, from Old English wyrm serpent, worm; akin to Old High German wurm serpent, worm, Latin vermis worm. First known use: before twelfth-century.53

Desenne gives the worm the characteristic of a recycling force, suggesting that it
is an Ouroboros—an ancient symbol that represents a serpent or dragon devouring its
own tail. The serpent devours itself until it reaches the end,54 when the cycle begins
again, providing a sense of eternal rebirth and the immortality of the soul. This symbol
relates to the eternal circle of life.

Plato, in his Dialogues of Plato, describes how God created the world in a perfect
circular form. Even though Plato does not allude to the Ouroboros, he still makes
references to the concept of a circular being that is perfect:

His intention was, in the first place, that the animal should be as far as
possible a perfect whole and of perfect parts: secondly, that it should be
one, leaving no remnants out of which another such world might be
created: and also that it should be free from old age and unaffected by
disease … And he gave to the world the figure which was suitable and
also natural. Now to the animal which was to comprehend all animals,
that figure was suitable which comprehend within it itself all other figures.
Wherefore he made the world in the form of a globe, round as from a
lathe, having its extremes in every direction equidistant from the centre,
the most perfect and the most like itself of all figures; for he considered
that the like is infinitely fairer that the unlike.55

---

54 Ryan Harvey, “Where Head and Tail Meet: E. R. Eddison’s The Worm Ouroboros”
Carl Jung writes about the Ouroboros in his book, *Mysterium Coniunctionis: An Inquiry into the Separation and Synthesis of Psychic Opposites in Alchemy*. Not only does the Ouroboros have a relationship to the world of alchemy, but Jung elucidates the function of alchemic symbols as a metaphoric representation of the process of human consciousness. He stated that:

In the age-old image of the uroboros lies the thought of devouring oneself and turning oneself into a circulatory process, for it was clear to the more astute alchemists that the prima materia of the art was man himself. The uroboros is a dramatic symbol for the integration and assimilation of the opposite, i.e., of the shadow. This “feed-back” process is at the same time a symbol of immortality, since it is said of the uroboros that he slays himself and brings himself to life, fertilizes himself and gives birth to himself. He symbolizes the One, who proceeds from the clash of opposites, and he therefore constitutes the secret of the prima materia which, as a projection, unquestionably stems from man's unconscious.56

Symbols are use to expressed our reality and have gone through many changes related to the process of the development of consciousness; hence, they have been accepted in different societies. As Carl G. Jung states:

Cultural symbols are those that have been used to express “eternal truths,” and that are still used in many religions. They have gone through many transformations and even a long process of more or less conscious development, and have thus become collective images accepted by civilized societies. They are important constituents of our mental makeup and vital forces in the building up of human society.57

Desenne uses the worm as “a recycling force” and the belly dance as “the dance of life and death.” The composer expresses these concepts and illustrates them in a vivid musical way.


This movement is the second in the sonata to utilize a dance. In the first movement, Desenne uses elements of the Venezuelan waltz. Here, he employs a dance of Arabic origin which was transmitted to Venezuelan culture through the Moorish occupation of Spain. At the same time, Desenne depicts an Afro-Cuban band playing *salsa*—a Cuban dance style that fuses both West African and Iberian elements and that was transmitted to Venezuela and other parts of Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s.  

The African culture arrived in Venezuela during the colonizal period and mixed with other predominant cultures in Venezuela within the context of hybridization. However, the Afro-Venezuelan culture is still evident in certain parts of the country such as the State of Miranda, especially in the region of Barlovento; the cities of Caucagua, Curiepe, Higuerote and the Río Chico on the central Venezuelan coast; and in the states of Yaracuy, Zulia, and the Federal District, where the population is predominantly Black. The most important African contributions not only consist of religious beliefs but also the instruments, rhythms, dances, and songs that enrich the Venezuelan culture. These diverse cultural influences—Arabic, African, and Cuban—are combined in this movement, which, according to Desenne, is a metaphoric representation of the concepts of life and death. The dancing worm unifies these distinct elements and defines the circular form of the movement. The return of the worm’s initial theme in the closing measures lends a cyclical structure.

---


The initial worm’s theme is monophonic—a characteristic of Arabic music, which is purely melodic. The concept of harmony does not exist in this music; it is mostly a melodic line played with a drone. Desenne wrote this theme in double stops, in intervals of a unison that provide a unique acoustic characteristic. This melody has a feature of some Arabic modes: the structure of H W H H (E F G A♭ B♭) is similar to the ajnas Kurd—it sounds very similar to the first four notes of the Phrygian mode—but transposed in E. The B♭ could be considered as an ornament which is also a characteristic of Arabic music. Trills, turns, wide vibrato and diverse slides are the most frequent embellishments. The composer also adds the expressive mark languidamente (languidly) combined with the notation cuasi glissando (almost glissando), which calls to mind the image of a moving worm (Example 13).

Example 13: Worm’s initial theme (mm. 1-4)

In contrast to this monophonic treatment, other recurrences throughout the movement depict the undulation of the worm through the use of two disjunct melodic lines. These musical ideas move out of phase with one another in intervals of a second; their notation on a rarely-used double staff reiterates the independent nature of the two lines, and also makes the notation more legible for the performer (Example 14).

Example 14: Recurrence of the worm (mm. 5-9)

The first entrance of the Afro-Cuban band occurs in measures 10-13 (Example 15). Desenne is specific in the score and clearly differentiates between the worm and the Afro-Cuban band, both musically and through the use of explicit verbal markings in French: le ver (the worm) and l’orchestre (the orchestra). The rhythm of the band is based on eighth and quarters notes with accentuations on the downbeats and off beats. This first “orchestral” entrance is simple rhythmically and lasts only two measures, in contrast with later entrances in the rest of the movement. The rhythm becomes richer with rapid sixteenth notes. The melody of the band has intervallic leaps from fifths to octaves which contrast dramatically with the worm’s theme.

The salsa music fuses African rhythms with Iberian melodic and harmonic structures. The typical salsa orchestra includes piano, bass, saxophone, trumpets, trombones and Cuban percussion. The percussion instruments are of African origins and

---

61 Waxer. “Salsa.”
the orchestra might have included small two-headed bongos, *tumbadoras*—known as *conga* drums—timbales, cowbells, claves, woodblock, and *guiro*—a notched scraper of Amerindian origin.⁶²

Example 15: Orchestra and worm themes (mm. 9-16)

The orchestral interlude at mm. 55-80 is more complex than the previous entrances. It has more repetitions of a rhythmic cell that resembles the *clave* in salsa music

(Example 16). According to the *Grove Music Online*:

The rhythmic concept known as *clave* underpins all styles played in salsa. Sometimes the rhythm is overtly stated on the claves [percussion instrument consisting of a pair of short cylindrical hardwood sticks] More often it is not played but rather implied in the arrangement of every instrumental part in the ensemble; the rhythm of the tune and the accompanying figures, breaks, and solo improvisations are all phrased in order to blend with this implied rhythmic foundation. The *clave* rhythm takes a number of different forms depending on the context, all ultimately descended from various African styles.⁶³

---

⁶² Ibid.

Desenne used a similar pattern to the son clave which is commonly used in the Cuban genre son, from which salsa developed. The composer underlines the clave in the melody through the accentuation of offbeats and the use of natural accents of the downbeats (Example 17).

The movement can be divided into two main sections plus a coda. The first part, section A (mm. 1-91), is characterized by a fast-paced dialogue between the worm and the salsa orchestra. Each successive passage played by the salsa orchestra becomes longer and more euphoric. For instance, the first passage of the orchestra occurs from mm. 10-13, the second passage from 22-29, and the final passage from mm. 55-82. These excerpts interact with the worm’s polyphonic lines, which also become progressively longer, finally reaching a signal of harmonic rest on a perfect fifth (G-D) in mm. 90-91 (Example 18).
Section B begins in m. 91 with the worm, moving in rhythmically disjunct intervals of a second. These intervals become progressively wider, finally opening to a diminished seventh in m. 95. In the next appearance of the salsa orchestra in m. 112, the worm’s upper line (B♭ A A♭ G♭) develops by the addition of double stops and contrasting dynamics from mm. 99-111, reaching a euphoric climax that gives way to the entrance to the l’orchestre du Caire (“Orchestra of Cairo”) as Desenne calls it (Example 18). In this passage, from mm. 112-293, Desenne uses the violin to depict an Egyptian folk orchestra. He employs different melodic and rhythmic elements to illustrate the different instruments. He seems to suggest the ūd (a short-necked pear-shaped plucked lute of Arabic origin which is the ancestor of the European lute)⁶⁴, the nāy (an end-blown flute and solo Arabian wind instrument, which is the ancestor of the flute)⁶⁵, and the kamāncheh (a four-stringed instrument prominent in Arabian and Persian art music and the ancestor of the fiddle)⁶⁶. In mm. 113-114, Desenne writes a rapid trill-glissando (which translates on the violin as a wide and fast vibrato), a very typical ornamentation in

---


the style of any of these instruments in Arabian art music (Example 19). During his time in Paris, Desenne had the opportunity to perform different genres of music and creatively adapted the cello to these diverse musical settings. It is possible that his experiences with imitations of Middle Eastern instruments influenced his writing in this section.

Example 19: Entrance to the *l’orchestre du Caire*, and *trille gliss* (mm. 112-113)

The appearance of the Orchestra of Cairo represents the climax of the movement. It is essentially a series of quasi-improvisational passages, full of sixteenth notes and a number of double stops in the high register. The rhythmic displacement in this passage is also an important characteristic, providing the feeling that the bar line is both shifting and contracting—a characteristic also heard in the first movement. At the same time, the third-movement passages feature a series of repeated motives, with the range reaching higher and the highest note of the movement occurring in m. 152. In fact, this is the highest note that the violin will reach in the entire piece. Desenne even wrote the name of the note in the music to facilitate reading for the performer (Example 20).
Example 20: The highest note of the movement, reached in m. 152.

After the climax, the tempo decreases to the basic rhythm of the Afro-Cuban band (eighth notes with accents). Also, the line switches briefly from sixteenth notes to eighth notes and the register shifts downward, arriving in m.176 on the lowest note of the violin. The rhythmic pattern subsequently begins an exchange of passages alternating between sixteenth notes and eighth notes. The sixteenth-note passages becoming progressively shorter, and the eighth note passages becoming progressively longer until they take over completely. The eighth-note passages (Example 20, mm. 150-151) resemble mm. 81-82; with the off-beats accentuated twice (Example 21).

Example 21: Rhythm (mm. 81-82 and mm. 150-151)
In mm. 184-192, however, an *animando* marking leads the eighth-note passages upward to one final musical flourish before returning to the worm dance in m. 193. At this moment, a brief dialogue occurs between the band (m. 196) and the worm (m. 198). Beginning in m. 198, the worm is accompanied by pedal tones, providing a fleeting moment of polyphony (Example 22).

Example 22: Worm’s theme accompanied by pedal tones (mm. 198-201)

![Example 22](image)

The coda, beginning in m. 202, uses a variation of the worm theme in consecutive eighth notes, and it is followed by a single measure of eighth notes with accentuations on the off-beats (Example 23).

Example 23: Coda (mm. 202-205)

![Example 23](image)

Desenne instructs the performer to return to the *feureur*, a euphoric dance, at m. 213. This euphoric dance continues until m. 225. These sixteenth notes are similar to those used in the preceding sections (mm. 125). Finally, the last entrance of the worm occurs in m. 226, with the cyclical conclusions of return to the initial motive. Rather than utilizing a unison for this final recurrence, Desenne uses the pedal note D (Example 24).
The Fourth Movement: Andante con yopo/Alegrías

Desenne describes the diverse elements that are combined in the last movement:

After death, only shamans can communicate with the souls of the departed. For that purpose they must sing magic verses under the influence of yopo, a hallucinogenic bark extract. These chants are repetitive melodies that clear the path to the underworld and neutralize evil spirits with the help of certain magic associations with birds such as the Cônótô and the Nycotius grandis, whose songs are quoted in this piece. The second part of the movement is reached once the path to the underworld is clear. The music is based on the rhythmic patterns of Andalusian alegrías, a popular setting for gypsy guitar improvisations that combines units of two and three beats, grouped in pairs to form a twelve-beat bar. These particular alegrías lead us from song to dance, ending in a meditative, inconclusive spirit.67

In the fourth movement, comprised of two distinct sections played attaca, Desenne juxtaposes musical elements from the indigenous cultures of Venezuela and the European traditions of Spain. Desenne constructs the first part of the moment, Andante con yopo, using melodies based on chants of the shamans and quoting two South American birdcalls. In the second part of the movement, Desenne uses the musical genre alegrías that derives from flamenco.

67 Desenne, “Program Notes.”
Andante con yopo

During the Colonial period, indigenous tribes in Venezuela experienced considerable loss of life and resources. Many tribes fought against the arrival of the Spanish conquerors in 1498, until they were annihilated or forced to move into the interior. These struggles delayed Spanish colonization until 1567. Also, events such as epidemics, the arrival of Catholic missionaries, and enslavement influenced the living conditions of the indigenous communities. Today, native communities living in Venezuela inhabit areas south and east of the Orinoco River or the southern regions along the upper Orinoco, Casiquiare and Negro rivers. A thorough census of the indigenous population has not yet occurred, but the National Indigenous Council of Venezuela (CONIVE), founded in 1989, has registered thirty-two native groups in the country, including the Panare, Timotes, Warao, Wayuu, Yanomami, Yecuana, and Yucpa—approximately 800,000 indigenous people.

In his program notes, Desenne discusses the shamans’ power to communicate with souls after death through the use of hallucinogenic drugs and chants. Napoleon Chagnon, in his book Ygnomamö, explains the origin of the word shaman and its uses:

The word shaman comes from the Arctic tribe, the Siberian Chuckchee, and has been widely used to describe men and women in any tribal society who manipulate the spirit world; cure the sick with magic, sucking,

---


70 Hill, “Venezuela: Amerindian music.”

singing, or massaging; diagnose illness and prescribe a magical remedy; and generally intercede between humans and spirits.\textsuperscript{72}

Jonathan Hill, in his article about Amerindian music in Venezuela, explains:

Interpreting shamanic musical practices in this manner is difficult because of the deeply holistic character of ritual processes which have aesthetic, linguistic, medical, social, moral, spiritual, historical and even ecological dimensions. The shaman’s singing and chanting, often accompanied by percussive sounds made with gourd rattles, play a crucial role in integrating these diverse layers of situated meanings. The activity of singing connects two different levels of interpretation: the more specialized, verbally encoded meanings of the ritual process; and the more widely understood meanings embodied in the shaman’s bodily postures and actions.

The largest indigenous community in Venezuela is the $Ygnomamö$ which are situated on the border between Venezuela and Brazil. One of the most remarkable characteristics of this tribe is they have been able to maintain their living conditions unchanged by the outside world, due to their isolation in the Amazon.\textsuperscript{73} Among the $Ygnomamö$, only men become shamans. The shaman takes a hallucinogenic drug called yopo ($Anadenanthera peregrine$), after which Desenne named this movement. The drug is used during rituals in order to contact spirits of the deceased. Yopo is made from the beans of the $yakowana$ tree, which are toasted, facilitating the removal of the husk. The beans are therefore easier to grind into a powder, which is then mixed with lime, ashes, or some type of shell (a natural form of calcium hydroxide or calcium oxide), and then moistened with saliva and kneaded by hand into a gummy substance. This material is left

\textsuperscript{72} Napoleon Chagnon, $Ygnomamö$ (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 116

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 1.
out to dry for hours or days and then ground into a fine powder. Other people in the tribe usually blow the drug into the nostrils of the shaman through bamboo pipes. As the drug takes effect, the shaman begins to sing, varying his starting pitches, and then slowly ascending through microtonal intervals. These different pitches are accompanied by changes of timbre, rhythm, and tempo, representing the journey through the different worlds.

Desenne musically represents the chant by using a melody with two different pitches (F♯ and G), at an interval of a major seventh that is repeated through the movement. This cellular melodic structure is a feature of indigenous music. The composer illustrates the inflections of the song by marking each F♯ on a different string (D and G), creating a different timbre on every note. This variety of tone color emulates the intervallic singing of the shaman. Perhaps the leap suggests the shaman’s journey between the different worlds: the living and the dead (Example 25).

Example 25: Shamanic chant (mm. 1-2)

The chant is accompanied several times by a sudden ascending and descending intervallic line (the total interval is a minor 9th), and different gourd rattle sounds

---

74 Ibid., 54.
75 Hill, “Venezuela: Amerindian music.”
(Desenne used the bow stroke *jeté épaes*—a heavy ricochet). The repetitive melody and the addition of these sudden leaps might represent the bodily movement of the shaman through the cosmos to reach the different spirits. The percussive sounds likely represent the shaking of the sacred rattle (Example 26).  

Example 26: Intervallic line and gourd rattle (mm. 7-8)

```
[Music notation]
```

Dynamic contrast is an important element of the chant. The shaman illustrates his journey through different worlds by echoing the phrases of his song. Desenne’s dynamic spectrum for the chant ranges from *ppp* (*pianissimo possibile*) to *f* (*forte*) (Example 27). He also wrote a few tempo changes—*a tempo* and *animando poco a poco*—which suggest a representation of the shaman’s movement through the cosmos.  

Example 27: Dynamic contrast (mm. 37-40)

```
[Music notation]
```

---

76 Ibid.

77 Hill, “Venezuela: Amerindian music.”
The *Andante con yopo* is divided into three sections, which represent the repetitive verses of the shaman. The first verse is from mm. 1-35, the second from mm. 36-48, and the third from mm. 49-58. The melodic material that represents the shamanic chant is presented throughout the piece, albeit with intervallic differences. In the first verse the chant is composed of the descending pitches F♯ and G, which create a major seventh. In the second verse, the register goes higher in pitch: the lower note of the interval is transposed up a fifth and the interval between the notes is expanded to a descending minor ninth (E to D). In the last verse, the chant returns to its original form.

Interspersed throughout the movement are Desenne’s quotations of the calls of two Latin American birds: the côñötö or crested oropendola (*Psarocolius decumanus*) and the great potoo (*Nyctibius grandis*). The côñötö, or crested oropendola, is a tropical bird with a black body, yellow beak tail feathers, and large, bright blue eyes. Its Latin name means “with hanging nest,” and it builds round dwellings which hang conspicuously from isolated trees. The bird has a distinctive call that begins with a patter vibrato on the bass note, followed by a quick rise up an interval of a eleventh.\(^7\)\(^8\) Desenne represents the call using the notes (F B F) with a characteristic rhythm similar to a shaking rattle. In this excerpt, while the shaman is singing, the crested oropendola intervenes briefly. The composer also represents the echo of the call at m.16—the high F and E with the left-hand pizzicato (Example 28).

---

Example 28: The crested oropendola call and shaman song (mm. 37-40)

Desenne evokes the same call of the crested oropendola in m. 25 (Example 29), this time reaching a higher interval—passing the octave F and going to a perfect fourth on B♭.

Example 29: The crested oropendola call with expanded interval (m. 25-26)

The potoo is a small nocturnal bird. It has enormous eyes and mouth and possesses a plumage that allows it to be camouflaged during the day. When completely motionless, it is not visible among the branches of a tree. The potoo has three distinct calls. The first is a low, gruff “baaaao,” which descends tonally and occurs with long intervals of rest in between. The second is an owl-like sound when the bird is disturbed. The final is a characteristic repetitive clicking that sounds like dropping water.\(^\text{79}\)

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 369.
Desenne illustrates the low descending line of the potoo’s call using the interval of either a minor or diminished third; the composer uses the notes A or A♭ to F♯, overlapping the shamanic chant. The birdcalls appear throughout the movement at close intervals, briefly interrupting or overlapping the chant of the shaman (Examples 30 and 31).

Example 30: The potoo call (A F♯) (mm.15-16)

Example 31: The potoo call (A♭ F♯) (mm. 32-33)

Desenne also included a call of an unknown bird which he marks *horns temps, autre oiseau* (out of the action of the play, different bird) at mm. 30-31 (Example 32).

Example 32: The unknown birdcall
The bird’s magic attributes, which Desenne mentions in his program notes, aid the shaman in his magic journey. The melodic characteristic of each birdcall influences the sacred ceremony. Taking Desenne’s program notes (cited earlier) into consideration, the birdcalls have magic attributes: the call of the cönötö is an ascending line which helps to propel the shaman through the different worlds, and the potoo’s call is a descending line suggesting the shaman taking away the evil entities and clearing the path for the deceased. In 2007, at the release event for his self-published compact disc *Yopo Time*, Desenne explains the meaning of the title in this movement:

In order to travel to the world of the death and spirits, the shaman has his “yopo time”—a ceremony using natural chemicals that are inhaled for the cyclical incantations. In his path, the shaman encounters the spirit of the cönötö and other birds from the forest with which he has brief magic altercations.80

*Alegrias*

In his “Flamenco” article in the *Grove Music Online*, Israel J. Katz writes that:

According to the Spanish composer and musicologist Felipe Pedrell, the *cante flamenco* was brought to Spain by the Flemish (*flamencos*) immigrants during the reign of Charles V (also known as Charles I, who ruled Spain from 1516 to 1556). Another theory suggests that the *cante flamenco* were Arab songs that originated in North Africa and were later adopted by *flamencos* of the Low Countries.81

Regardless of the different theories about the origin of flamenco, all of them cite Andalusia, where the Gypsies began to settle during the latter half of the fifteenth century.

---


century, as the initial center of development. According to Peter Manuel, the gypsies developed an artistic culture, associated with their lower socioeconomic status, which expressed the difficulties of their existence and gave rise to a distinctive style of music.\(^{82}\) The gypsy’s impoverished socioeconomic situation, isolation from European culture, and the richness of their musical heritage influenced the development of Andalusian folk music to the present day.\(^{83}\)

The musical culture of the gypsies developed in three centers: Seville, Cádiz, and Jerez de la Frontera, where they performed *cante flamenco* at public feasts and taverns. By the 1840s the genre spread throughout Andalusia and became a popular form of entertainment in *cafés cantantes* (singing cabarets).\(^{84}\) In the twentieth century, flamenco continued to evolve and was influenced by other traditions, including Latin American (and Afro-Latin) music, regional genres from other parts of Spain, and Italian opera.\(^{85}\) UNESCO has recognized flamenco as a “Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity,” noting how this genre has successfully fused song, dance, and music.\(^{86}\)

Desenne was influenced by the *alegrías*, a song form of flamenco that originated in Cádiz. The translation of *alegrías* is happy or joyful. The dance is dynamic, lively, and defined by different sections. The form varies, depending on the performing dancer, solo guitarist, or singer. One of the most distinctive features of this song form is a

\(^{82}\) Ibid.


\(^{84}\) Katz, “Flamenco.”

\(^{85}\) Manuel, “Flamenco in Focus,” 94.

twelve-beat measure with accents on the third, sixth, eighth, tenth, and twelfth beats. This rhythmic structure combines patterns of twos and threes.

In “Alegrías” Desenne does not literally transcribe a flamenco dance, but he uses the dynamic metric flavor and characteristic sectional form of the genre. Desenne modifies the traditional 3+3+2+2+2 rhythmic pattern to 2+3+3+2+2, which he notates at the top of the score. Nevertheless, the resulting pattern is the same (Example 33).

**Example 33: Alegrías rhythm pattern (m. 2)**

Similar to the Alegrías, this part of the movement is a lively dance with different sections that emulate the flamenco dance style. Some of the sections are clearly marked, but others dovetail into one another providing a sense of a constant motion. The first section is from mm. 1-5, and the second is from mm. 6-12. The third section is the longest and consists of a dialogue between two different characters: one rhythmic and short and the, other melodic and long—similar to an interlude. Hence, this section can be broken down as follows: rhythmic (mm. 13-15), interlude (mm. 16-17), rhythmic (mm. 17-19), interlude (mm. 20-21), rhythmic (mm. 21-23), interlude (mm. 23-25), rhythmic (mm. 26-27), interlude (mm. 28), rhythmic (mm. 29), and transition (mm. 30), which leads to the fourth section (mm. 31-39).

The first section (mm. 1-5) is linked with a motive that is presented in the *Andante con yopo*. The last line of the first part has the same triplet pick-up which leads
into the dance *Alegrías* (Example 34). As the composer states in his notes: “the second part of the movement is reached once the path to the underworld is clear.” At this point, the soul has reached a different state and has grown free in joyful dancing—the *Alegrías*, as in any flamenco music, reflects the character’s improvisation and provides a certain freedom.

Example 34: *Andante con yopo* and *Alegrías* (mm. 57-58, and m. 1)

The melody of this section has a vocal character, moving through the middle register of the violin. The line reaches the lowest register in m. 4 and the melody begins different embellishments that lead into a new section (Example 35).

The second section (mm. 6-12) has different articulations than heard previously. In the first section the melody had slurs; the second section starts with the articulation *detache* but is played expressively as Desenne indicates. Also, the melody in the second section has ornaments—Desenne wrote *mordants nerveux* (nervous mordents)—which implies a faster speed (Example 36).
Example 35: Melody in lower register with embellishments (mm. 4-5)

This section in turn has two smaller sections, which have two contrasting melodies: the first one is *detaché* and the second one is made up of double stops and slurs. Each small section is three measures long, leaving m. 12 and the beginning of m. 13 as a transition into the third section.

Example 36: Melody with *mordants nerveux* (m. 6)

The third section (mm. 13-30) is the longest one and is structured by the dialogue of two episodic melodies with different characters. The first short melody, is *molto ritmico*, accentuated, and has some appoggiaturas—notated as sixteenth notes with rests. The other melodic material is in the character of an interlude: it is slower in tempo and has slurs, double stops (which provide some polyphony), and indications to play *amplement dessiné* (delineate the melody) (Examples 37 and 38).
Example 37: The rhythmic and short melody (m. 13)

Example 38: The interlude melody (m. 16)

These two melodies develop, reaching a high point in mm. 25-29. At m. 25, the rhythmic melody reaches a climax with a series of sixteenth notes that have an improvisatory character. At this point, Desenne writes *emporté* (with importance, carried away). The melodic line of the sixteenth notes is similar to a passage at the end of m. 12. At m. 28, the interlude achieves a melodic climax, reaching a high B that has not occurred previously. Here, Desenne writes *crémeux* (creamy), suggesting that the eighth notes should be interpreted with more time (Examples 39 and 40). At mm. 30 the transition to the fourth part occurs. This transition is based on previous melodic material with descending pitches and a few double stops.

Example 39: Improvisatory melody (m. 25)
Example 40: “Creamy” melody (m. 28)

The fourth section (mm. 31-39) is vocal and expressive in character. In his program notes, Desenne states that the movement ends “in a meditative, inconclusive spirit.” The fourth section thus has a meditative quality. The melodic material moves back and forth, and in each return the melody expands. A few chords in this section recall a gypsy guitar. The ending, as Desenne indicated, is inconclusive since it arrives at a long and calm note B in a contemplative mood to conclude the piece (Example 41).

Example 41: Ending (mm. 37-39)
Conclusions

The Sonata for Violin Solo is characteristic of Paul Desenne’s unique compositional style. His fusion of different cultures—those of Spain, Africa, Japan, and the Middle East—creates a hybrid composition, one of the trademarks of his style. Desenne does not simply quote actual melodies or rhythms from these diverse cultures; their musical structures provide the framework of his composition. He uses the melodic and rhythmic characteristics of each style, which he develops into his own personal language. Not only are these characteristics fascinating from a theoretical standpoint, but they are also a touching tribute to the life of an important musical patron of Venezuela, Alegría Beracasa.
CHAPTER III

The Practical Study of the Sonata

Desenne is meticulous in his notation, providing the performer with the appropriate articulations, dynamics, and tempo markings. His knowledge of the strings is enormous since he is primarily a cellist; consequently, he has written the Violin Sonata with the string instruments in mind. The expressive indications throughout the score are primarily in French since Desenne spent many years studying composition at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris.

The First Movement: Spiral Capriccio

At the beginning of the movement, Desenne provides a bow stroke suggestion, with the marking, détaché, jamais sautillé (separated, never off the string) (Example 42). This indication helps the performer understand the basic bowing of the piece. However, that does not mean that one needs to use the same bow stroke for the entire movement. It is true that the piece should be played détaché but it also should be interpreted with diverse détaché strokes in order to achieve different dynamics, characters, and accents. The different types of détaché are related to how much weight and speed the violinist applies to the bow stroke. These variations allow the performer to achieve a rich palette of tone colors.
Example 42: Fingerings and bow stroke of motive A (mm. 1-6)

It is also important to consider which part of the bow to use in order to get the most effective stroke. I advise playing in the middle of the bow; however, some violinists may be more comfortable playing closer to the tip, depending on the length of the arm. The most important thing is to have a bow stroke that is clear and on the string, and, at the same time, to remain comfortable with the different string crossings.

Since the bow stroke is détaché, it is crucial to keep a resonant sound. It is easy with this bow stroke and the different string crossings to get a tight, pressed sound. It is imperative to keep the balance of the bow stroke between the point of contact, weight and speed. These elements will achieve the best sound, producing better dynamics and a clean bow stroke.

The string crossings in this movement are challenging since they are so numerous and are combined with difficult position changes. In m. 5, Desenne wrote strictement a tempo (in strict time) since he was aware of the difficulty of the shift and string crossing. Many violinists will be tempted to take extra time in order play this passage cleanly; however, Desenne is specific that one should not do so. I recommend anticipating the shift so that the hand knows where to go and to practice the position change with
different rhythmic combinations in order to get familiar with it. Also, Desenne indicates that this section should be played *cristallin* (crystalline), making reference to the quality of the sound. By this, I believe he means that the passage should be played clearly, lightly, and beautifully. I suggest playing with light *détaché*—releasing weight on the arm but being careful not to use a *sautillé* stroke, since the dynamics are *piano* in the higher register. However, this crystalline stroke should be played more on the string in order to achieve the crescendo that is marked in m.6. For this reason, one must be able to produce different *détaché* strokes that can be used for changing dynamics and characters.

The accentuations are important in this movement since they delineate the different musical voices and rhythms. The performer should play these accentuations fully with a rich sound, always remaining aware of keeping the tempo. It is usual to give some length to the accentuated notes, but I advocate that, in this movement, it is imperative to keep the tempo and produce the accents by adding vibrato, speed and weight in the bow—keeping in mind that the weight should be released in the non-accented pitches. The dynamics must be observed since they can change drastically.

The bow stroke will be different during motive B (Example 43). Because of the nature of the music, I suggest playing closer to the frog in order to get a more rhythmic stroke. However, the performer should always try to bring out the melodic line. The music of this section is rich in string crossings, and, since it is played closer to the frog, the violinist should keep the finger relaxed and be aware of the position of the right elbow. The balance of the arm should be conceived on the D string; hence, it will help to have an effective bow stroke. Desenne marked some accentuations that have to be considered; also, I advise emphasizing the moving bass line. Even though it is not
explicitly accented, it is an important element to underscore. Furthermore, it is
imperative to keep the tempo. Since the music is written in groups of three, the tendency
is to rush.

Example 43: Fingerings and bow stroke of motive B (mm. 28-32)

During motive C, the bow stroke changes to perform the dance-like rhythm. Even
though it is not marked by the composer, I recommend playing with a light bow—almost
off the string—and a sweet sound. It is important to keep the tempo that Desenne
indicated—*strictement a tempo* (in strict time)—and to play with a sound that is light,
rapid, sweet, and not too percussive. As the motive develops, I suggest playing on the
string to make the dynamics more effective (Example 44).

Example 44: Fingerings and bow stroke of motive C (mm. 66-71)

In the coda of the movement, the bow stroke is still *détaché*; however, when the
music starts to develop from m.126 to the end, I suggest moving the bow toward the frog
to achieve a clear and rhythmic sound. At m.133 Desenne writes *faire des vagues* (rock the boat); this great verbal analogy refers to the euphoric character of the music and tells the performer to play on the edge (Example 45). It is imperative that, in m. 143, as the character changes, the bow stroke becomes cleaner and lighter.

Example 45: Fingerings and bow stroke of the coda (mm. 130-135)

The Second Movement: *Épaves*

This movement presents different challenges because of the slow tempo, which influences the phrasing and the tone. Another concern for the performer is the use of special effects, such as harmonics and left-hand pizzicato, which evoke an impressionistic character.

The *lentissimo* (very slow) marking in the first measure relates to the character of the motive: A B♭ D E C G (Example 46). I recommend playing this music calmly and phrasing according to the original slurs. I suggest slurring by measure but avoiding any accentuation between the up bow and the downbow. This challenge increases when the composer writes *senza vibrato* (without vibrato, m. 1); hence, the sound should be resonant and the bow should move smoothly within the piano dynamics. Also, since Desenne wrote a pedal note A in this motive, the bow should lean toward the moving
voice. Consequently, on the same bow stroke, the violinist will experience two different weights at the same time in both strings. I advocate raising the elbow somewhat in order to have a better emphasis on the D string.

Example 46: Fingerings and bows of Section A (mm.1-5)

At Section A’ (Example 47), Desenne wrote the motive in harmonics in the lower register of the violin. He also wrote *liberamente chaud, pas glacial* (free and warm, not cold), giving the motive a different characteristic. I suggest taking more time on each note in order to produce a warm tone in the harmonics; also, I recommend playing closer to the bridge in order to produce a better sound effect. It is important not to add any vibrato, but instead strive to achieve a warm sound through the speed of the bow and its placement between the bridge and the fingerboard. At m. 7, the left-hand pizzicato should be played softly, and I suggest placing the finger in advance in order to produce an optimal effect on the last note of the measure.
Example 47: Fingerings and bows of Section A’ (mm. 6-8)

In section B (Example 48) Desenne’s markings—_archets libres, suivre le phrasé_ (free bowing, following the phrase) and _poco vibrato_ (little vibrato)—allow the music to develop in sound and in phrasing. I recommend using a moderate vibrato to evoke the character of the music. Also, the bowing should be very delicate and avoid any accent when the stroke changes. At m. 13, the addition of the left-hand pizzicato and harmonic must be played carefully, especially the D harmonic. When the harmonic is played, I advise putting the second finger on the string in order to have the note ready before it is played, allowing for a better preparation.

Example 48: Fingerings and bows of Section B (mm. 9-15)
At section C, Desenne writes *encore plus lent* (even slower) and the music returns to the steady character of the beginning. The sound quality here should have less vibrato, even though Desenne does not notate the music *senza vibrato* as he did earlier. I recommend using a decreasing amount of vibrato until the last note of the movement, which should be played with a straight tone. In this last measure, Desenne indicates the use of two open strings—A and E—and the E goes to the harmonic D. I suggest playing this measure carefully since the weight applied in the bow should be different between the two notes. Trying to raise the elbow slightly will allow control of the weight and speed of the bow.

**The Third Movement: The Worm's Belly Dance**

This movement has the most technical challenges in the entire sonata. It is a mixture of different types of double stops, challenging leaps, and complex rhythms that derive from Arabic and Afro-Cuban musical traditions. At the beginning of the movement (Example 49), the worm theme is written in unison double stops, providing a unique acoustic characteristic and demanding great technical skill. Through this difficult double stop, enhanced by the expressive indications *languidamente* (languidly) and *cuasi glissando* (almost glissando), Desenne depicts the worm’s undulations.

Example 49: Worm’s initial theme (mm. 1-4)
To perform this passage, I suggest starting with the fourth finger in second position and moving the first finger backward to first position. Beginning this way capitalizes on the natural flexibility of the index finger. It extends more naturally than the fourth finger; hence, one is able to reach more extensions. Also, I recommend keeping the hand flexible and avoiding any abrupt movement. Desenne used the *cuasi glissando* annotation to portray the worm’s undulations but the marking also helps the performer technically by allowing for flexible position changes. For good intonation, it helps to understand when the interval is a half step and when the interval is a whole step and, more importantly, to be aware when the arm or the hand is shifting. At m. 2 the note A♭ can be considered a pivot point where the hand moves between the notes G, A♭ and B♭. The distance between the intervals is shorter than at the beginning of the passage and faster rhythmically, allowing the hand to move freely. The bow in this passage should lean toward the D string, allowing the violin to have a resonant sound.

Additional worm passages are based on the unison interval, but Desenne also writes some passages using intervals of seconds (Example 50). Desenne illustrates the undulations of the worm through the disjunct movement of this interval. These passages consist of two melodic lines that move independently, a great technical challenge for the performer. I suggest practicing slowly, keeping the hand flexible. The difficulty of the passage is not only the intonation, but also the flexibility of the fingers since they do not move together. At times the fingers are not only out of sync with each other but also move in different directions.
Example 50: Recurrence of the worm (mm. 5-9)

In mm. 51-54, Desenne writes the fingerings for the worm’s theme, emphasizing the slide in between the notes that portrays the character of the worm. Also, he provides clear articulations of the diverse themes of an Afro-Cuban orchestra. The performer should pay close attention to the correct note durations and dynamics and maintain a precise rhythm throughout to represent the Afro-Cuban orchestra. Some interludes of the “orchestra” are based mainly on the rhythmic features of salsa and the characteristic improvisational style associated with the genre. I suggest planning in advance when to play in strict rhythm and when to use rubato. The accents on the eighth notes will help bring out the salsa rhythm. I suggest that the performer strive for a more percussive (rather than melodic) sound. For instance, in the interlude of the “orchestra” from mm. 55 (Example 51), the violinist must play the rhythmically percussive section and the melodic improvisation of the orchestra. Desenne writes jeté de la pointe (thrown ricochet at the tip of the bow) and milieu, sauté, sec, energico (middle of the bow, off the string, dry, and energetic), indicating to the violinist how and where the bow should go. These
instructions produce a sound that imitates the rhythmic style of salsa percussion.

Desenne also adds the indication *detaché* to the fast sixteenth notes to bring a more the melodic character to the passage. At m. 75, the composer writes *battuto secco* (dryly beaten), related to the bow stroke that should be played with the upper part of the bow, hitting the string with the hair to accomplish a dry percussive sound (Example 52).

Example 51: Orchestra (mm. 55-64)

![Example 51: Orchestra (mm. 55-64)](image1)

Example 52: Battuto secco (mm. 73-76)

![Example 52: Battuto secco (mm. 73-76)](image2)

After this passage, at the entrance of the worm theme at m. 89, Desenne writes *bien déclamé* (well declaimed), which provides a flexible tempo, assures a point of rest and opens a new B section. This section *l’orchestre du Caire* (“Orchestra of Cairo”) as
Desenne calls it, must be played rhythmically and with accentuations. The difficulty of the passage is the addition of double stops with fast sixteenth notes. It is crucial to play on the string and use only a small amount of bow. At m.113 Desenne writes *trille gliss* (trill glissando), which is a unique effect accomplished by adding a fast vibrato in which the finger does not press the fingerboard, allowing it to move in a zigzag direction and become a glissandi between half steps (Example 53).

Example 53: Entrance of *l’orchestre du Caire*, and *trille gliss* (mm. 112-113)

At mm. 149-153, the climax is reached by the euphoric dance ascending to the highest pitches in the movement. I recommend preparing the hand before the shift—anticipation is crucial for the precision of the intonation. Also, Desenne adds the marking *amplemente* (broadly) that allows the performer to elongate the notes and have adequate time for the position change (Example 54). In the subsequent measures, the composer indicates a slower tempo, with the eighth notes growing longer in articulation and softer in dynamics. It is crucial to let the music relax after the euphoric dance in the preceding measures.
Example 54: The highest note of the movement is reached in m. 152

Before the coda at mm. 198, the worm’s theme is presented with an addition of two pedal notes, giving the passage a sense of harmony. I suggest taking the time to produce a rich tone and give some special attention to the notes $A^\flat$ and G. At the coda, Desenne summarizes the three different elements of the movement. When the rhythmic eighth notes return (mm. 202-213), I recommend playing them *detaché* with a rich vibrato. Even though Desenne did not indicate any articulation, this bowing technique will help bring out the melodic and rhythmic aspects of the section. When the fast sixteenth notes reappear (mm. 214-225) and Desenne indicates *retourner subitement à la fureur de la danse* (return suddenly to the fury of the dance), I advise following the melodic shape of the line and bringing out the accents. Additionally, the character of this passage should evoke the euphoric, virtuosic improvisation of the orchestra. Finally, when the tempo relaxes and the worm’s theme recurs in the coda with a pedal tone in the open string D, I suggest that the bow should lean toward the G string to highlight the melody; the pedal will resonate easily because it is an open string.
The fourth movement: *Andante con yopo/Alegrias*

In the fourth movement, Desenne uses musical elements from two isolated cultures: the indigenous culture of Venezuela and the Spanish culture. The movement is divided in two parts played *attaca*.

*Andante con yopo*

Desenne’s writing in this movement is extremely creative. He represents musically the different elements that constitute the *Andante con yopo*. The representation of the shamanic chant, the sacred gourd rattles, the magic birds, and the shaman’s journey take place in this part.

The chant is represented by a recurring melody that is formed by two descending pitches: F♯ and G, which form a major seventh. This chant is constant throughout the *Andante* (Example 55). In order to create a lyric quality, Desenne marks each F♯ on two different strings: G and D. Both have different timbres and, sounded together, resemble the inflection of the human voice. Desenne adds the expressive words *lisse, fluide* (smooth, fluid), indicating the nature of the chant. I suggest emphasizing the vocal quality throughout the movement by underlining the timbral difference and by using a legato stroke when one plays on the G string or the string crossing between the G and D strings. Also, one should consider using a vibrato that is not too fast, giving the sense of a vocal sound.
Example 55: Shamanic chant (mm. 1-2)

\[ \text{Example 55: Shamanic chant (mm. 1-2)} \]

In the chant melody, Desenne writes different dynamics for each F♯, creating the illusion of spatial movement between the two worlds of the shaman’s journey. I recommend bringing out that feature and carefully distributing the dynamic range throughout the entire Andante. This range extends from *ppp* (*pianissimo possibile*) to *ff* (*fortissimo*) and also includes the composer’s indication *rien* (nothing) (Example 56). I advise using different means to exaggerate the dynamic variety: playing closer to the bridge for loud dynamics and playing closer to the fingerboard for soft dynamics. Variations of the bowing speed as well pressure applied to the bow helps bring out the dynamics. Also, the amount of hair used—whether the side or flat part of the hair—highlights the richness of the sound.

During the chant, the shaman uses a sacred gourd rattle, which Desenne illustrates by using the repetition of the note F in a fast rhythmic figure, using the bow stroke *jeté épaes*—a heavy ricochet (Example 57). It is important to distribute the bow properly since the rattle sounds are preceded by the shamanic chant in the same bow. For the ricochet, I suggest raising the arm slightly and throwing the bow, letting it rebound naturally. The sound should be clean and bring out the rhythmic figure. Also, the chant has sudden descending intervallic leaps using the notes: A F♯ G (the interval is a minor
ninth). This contour mimics the body movement of the shaman and the vocal gesture of the chant. I recommend playing this passage cleanly, avoiding any double stops since it is a string crossing.

Example 56: Dynamic contrast (mm. 37-40)

Example 57: Intervallic line and gourd rattle (mm. 7-8)

Desenne’s quotations of the calls of the cônôtô or crested oropendola (Psarocolius decumanus) and the great potoo (Nyctibius grandis) are written throughout the movement. The composer represents the call of the crested oropendola by writing an ascending interval using the notes F B F. The beginning of the birdcalls overlap with sounds of shaking rattles (Example 58). Desenne emphasizes the bird sounds by indicating a pure tone, marked senza vibrato (without vibrato). The composer adds a note E to the left-hand pizzicato, imitating the echo after the call. I recommend drawing
attention to the melodic line of the ascending interval of the two tritones F B F, and emphasizing the crescendo and the sudden piano on the pitch E with the left-hand pizzicato to create the echo effect. It is important to consider that while the shaman is singing, the crested oropendola intervenes briefly; hence, it is crucial to bring out the two different characters in the music.

Example 58: The crested oropendola call and shaman song (mm. 37-40)

Desenne represents the crested oropendola’s calls in a longer ascending interval in m. 25 (Example 59)—the interval reaches a high B♭. Desenne imitates the ascending glissando and the sudden high pitch of the call by writing a glissando over the D string and emphasizing the top notes with accents in a fortissimo dynamic. The glissando is rhythmically underlined by the marking gliss. jeté serré (glissando with a fast-tight ricochet). All of Desenne’s indications must be carefully observed: dynamics, accentuated notes with vibrato (providing a singing quality), and fast ascending glissandos in ricochet (expressing the quick rise of the call). All these elements help bring the magic bird to life.
The other bird call is from the great potoo. Desenne represents the nocturnal potoo’s low call by using a descending interval of either a minor or a diminished third—A or A♭ to F♯. The birdcall appears periodically throughout the movement, briefly interrupting or overlapping the chant of the shaman (Examples 60 and 61). I recommend underscoring these intervals with vibrato and bow speed; also, when the call has the A♭, I advocate playing the note lower in pitch. This creates a dark color which relates to the nocturnal character of the call.
*Alegrias*

Desenne uses the intervallic descending motive at the end of the *Andante con yopo* to transition to the opening of the *Alegrias*. The persistence of this motive is evident in the last line of the Andante; the same notes of the triplet are played four times and transformed into pick-ups, leading the dance (Example 62). The use of the same thematic material and its transformation implies how the spirit of the deceased finally reaches a higher state—*Alegrias* is a joyful dance. I recommend considering the different interpretations of this motive, which is presented in two different settings. In the Andante, this motive is still part of the chant in combination with the birdcalls—it is repetitive, suggesting that the shaman is trying to free his soul to move forward, which results in dance. In the *Alegrias*, the motive is part of new musical material, which represents the spirit reaching another state and becoming part of a celebration.

Example 62: *Andante con yopo* and *Alegrias* (mm. 57-58 and m. 1)
In the *Alegrías*, Desenne was influenced by a flamenco song form that originated in Cádiz, Spain. The dance is dynamic, lively, and defined by multiple sections that can differ depending upon the performer.

Desenne uses elements of the flamenco dance to create the *Alegrías*. Specifically, he calls upon its dynamic rhythmic groupings of twos and threes and its sectional organization. In the *Alegrías*, Desenne uses metric patterns of $2+3+3+2+2$, which he annotates at the top of the score (Example 63). Desenne writes accents that sometimes emphasize this pattern or alternatively disrupt it, enlivening the rhythmic character of the piece. I suggest marking the accent with vibrato considering the vocal essence of the dance. It is imperative to make the groupings of two and three clear.

Example 63: *Alegrias* rhythm pattern (m. 1)

The *Alegrias* is divided into different sections, each having certain distinct characteristics. In the first section (mm. 1-5), the melody has a lyric character. Desenne uses the middle register of the violin and slurs to represent that vocal quality. At m. 4, the melody is written in the lower register with a series of embellishments providing a folk character. I advocate playing the thirty-second notes not too fast and following the melodic line and dynamics (Example 64).
Desenne changes the articulation in the second section (mm. 6-12). The thematic material begins with eighth notes with an articulated stroke. Desenne writes détaché expressif (detached and expressive). The addition of the “expressive” marking is essential to the melody. The articulation should be in the bow, but with vibrato on each note. Also, using different bow speeds emphasizes the dynamics and delineates the melody. Desenne indicates that the mordants in this section are mordants nerveux (nervous mordents), meaning that they are faster than the embellishments in the previous section (see Example 65). Accentuating each mordent will help the action of the left hand. Some double stops are written in this section, introducing a polyphonic element. The performer should always emphasize the moving notes rather the long notes. At the close of the section, a few sixteenth notes with an improvisatory character transition into the third section. I advise playing this passage with some rubato and using a subito fortissimo at the end of the measure (Example 66).
The third section (mm. 13-30) is formed by the interactions of two melodies with different characters. The first character is rhythmic and articulated, indicated as *molto ritmico*. This melody has different elements to consider: accents, appoggiaturas, and a *martelé* stroke. This melody should be played in the middle of the bow with a light stroke, making the accents with vibrato and a heavier stroke. Desenne marks “upbow,” helping the melody have a dance-like character. The other melodic material is slower in tempo, with slurs and occasional double stops, providing some polyphony. Desenne includes three expressive markings that help define the character of this melody: *poco meno mosso* (a little slower), *sempre ritmico* (always rhythmic), and *amplement dessiné* (delineate the melody). I advise combining these indications to bring this melody to life. One should take some time to enjoy the harmony and bring out the moving melody (Examples 67 and 68).
Example 67: The rhythmic and short melody (m. 13)

Example 68: The interlude melody (m. 16)

The climax of the section arrives between measures 25 and 29. Initially, in m. 25, sixteenth notes with an improvisatory character appear which Desenne marks *emporté* (with importance, carried away). One should play these notes with some *rubato*, leading to the next measure. In m. 28, the climax of the interlude arrives on the high note B that has not yet been heard in the melody. Here, Desenne offers two indications about the character of the melody: *un peu plus calme* (a little calmer) and *crémeux* (creamy). This measure should be played slower, with an emphasis on the melody and time on the high B. The “creamy” melody should have a legato bow stroke and a singing quality (Examples 69 and 70). For the transitional material in m. 30, the performer should bring out the melodic line and use vibrato for the accents, always maintaining the vocal character. Here, the composer writes *ample*, which suggests taking additional time.
Example 69: Improvisatory melody (m. 25)

Example 70: Creamy melody (m. 28)

In the fourth section (mm. 31-39), Desenne writes *espressivo* (expressive) at the beginning of the section since the music has double stops with moving eighth notes. I suggest emphasizing the moving line and adding vibrato. Also, the performing musician should be careful with the dynamics and make sure to observe the diminuendo. The melodic material is repeated but expands. A few chords reminiscent of a gypsy guitar are marked *dolce*. I advise playing them as broken chords since they are triple stops; also, in order to produce a dolce sound one should take some time, allowing a nice resonant chord, and adding vibrato. In the ending, Desenne wrote *très calme, expressif* (very calm and expressive), emulating a meditative character that he suggests in his program notes. This section should be played intimately by using almost no vibrato, with a soft and calm sound reaching a meditative state (Example 71).
Conclusions

Writing for a solo string instrument is always challenging, but Desenne accomplishes it with finesse. In his first movement, the composer uses only sixteenth notes, yet achieves a powerful polyphonic effect. This aural illusion takes a single voice and through the displacement of strong and weak beats creates different rhythmic modes. In the second movement, Desenne uses double stops, the open strings, harmonics, and left hand pizzicatos, providing an ample palette of colors with the combination of Japanese modes and Western harmony. In the third movement, he integrates different musical elements, by combining melodic and rhythmic features from the Middle East and Africa. He enables the violinist to speak the local language of each region by exploring different timbral and melodic possibilities and by demanding great technical skill from the performer. In the fourth movement, Desenne’s representation of the chant and the magic birds elevates the violin to a high poetic level by using a constant cellular melodic
structure, characteristic of indigenous music, and by incorporating quotations of bird songs. The opening chant section leads to the *Alegrías*, a joyful dance that is influenced by the flamenco musical tradition.
CHAPTER IV

Conclusions

Paul Desenne has revitalized the nationalist music of Venezuela, not only through the inclusion of traditional Venezuelan elements from indigenous peoples, Spanish conquerors, and African slaves, but also by bringing in elements from outside Venezuela, such as those from Japan and the Middle East. The hybridization of these cultural influences represents the multicultural atmosphere that has been developing in Latin America for centuries. The Spanish conquerors encountered the indigenous communities that were already present on the continent. Later, they brought over African slaves to the New World. Despite the clash between these different cultures, their traditions combined and integrated—not only in the arts but also in other cultural expressions such as food, clothing, religion and music.

This fusion is evident in Desenne’s Sonata for Violin Solo and also in the rest of his compositional output. Desenne possesses a creative mind that invents new and unique works, often with satiric undertones. His blending of different cultural elements in the Violin Sonata is not superficial; rather, these influences serve as the fundamental framework and musical foundation of the piece.

The Violin Solo Sonata, in memory of Alegría Beracasa, celebrates the life of a Venezuelan musical patron, who travelled from this world to the next. With the implication of this dedication and Desenne’s program notes, one can interpret each movement as a portion of her spiritual journey in the larger cycle of life, death, and resurrection. In the Sonata, Desenne presents a multi-layered composition that represents these aspects of the life cycle.
The first movement is the celebration of life; the second is the uncertainly after death; the third is the understanding of life and death as a constant cycle; and the fourth is the soul’s spiritual journey toward fulfillment and happiness. The first movement is influenced by the Venezuelan *valse* (which has its roots in the European waltz). The second movement combines Japanese and Iberian modes. The third movement utilizes Middle Eastern and Afro-Cuban elements. Finally, the fourth movement conjoins the indigenous culture of the shaman and the *alegrías* from Andalusian music. This new fusion of styles and idioms marks Desenne’s contribution as an exceptional moment in the evolution of Latin American music history. Not only has the composer conveyed the diverse nature of cultural influences inside and outside of Venezuela, but he has also has created a link between elements of both classical and popular music in a work that crosses between reality and imagination.
Bibliography


Desenne, Paul. Paul Desenne’s homepage. [accessed September 17, 2009].


“Virginie Robilliard.” International Violin Competition of Indianapolis Laureates. 


Zehetmair, Thomas. Program notes to Niccolò Paganini: 24 Capricci per violin solo, 
op. 1, performed by Thomas Zehetmair, violin. Edition of Contemporary 
Appendix 1: List of the Composer’s Works

1. *Quinteto del pájaro* for flute, oboe (English horn), violin, cello and cuatro (1981-83)

2. *Botella al Guaire* for flute, English horn, violin, cello and cuatro (1985-86)

3. *Quinteto de la culebra* for flute, oboe, violin, cello and cuatro (1988)

4. *El Monocordio de Lata* for flute, oboe, violin, cello and cuatro (1990-97)


6. *Pizziquitiplas* (1989) and *Pizziguasa Galeónica* for harp, flute and cello; *Pizziquitiplas* also available for viola and two celli, or for three celli (1988-89)


11. *Pizziquitiplas* for three celli (or viola and 2 celli); also available for harp, flute and cello (1988-89)


13. *Aeroglfisos* for three celli (or viola and two celli) (1994)


17. *Three Pieces for Flute and Guitar (Triptico)* (1994-95)

18. *Tocata Galeónica Cuarta* for two violins, cello and harpsichord (1991-94); version for sextet (2002), adding a viola and a double bass


22. Sonata for Clarinet and Piano (1997)

23. *Zarpa El Festival* for nine chromatic harps, two diatonic Venezuelan folk harps, celesta, marimba, percussion, bass and cuatro (Venezuelan guitar) (1997)


25. Trio for clarinet, cello or bassoon, and piano in four movements; also available for clarinet quartet (see #40) (1998-99)


28. Three Tropical Moves for large ensemble (19 chamber players) (1999)

29. *Haydn Tuyero, Chicharras, Galeones*, trio for flute, English horn or clarinet, and violin or cello, (with pre-recorded track) (2000)

30. *La Revoltosa*, Venezuelan rhapsody for violin or piccolo clarinet (Eb) and piano (2000)

31. *The Glass Bamboo Frog Consort* for four or more celli (1995-2001)

32. *Kaliguasa* for four or more celli (2001)

33. *Pájaro-Guaracha* for four or more celli (2001)

34. Three Orchestral Studies for symphonic orchestra (2001)

35. Sonata for Solo Flute (2001)


40. *Ornitolo Chipoleao* for clarinet quartet (piccolo, 2 Bb, bass); also available for clarinet, cello or bassoon, and piano (see #25) (2002)


42. *Haku Un Yuu Yuu* for flute, violin, cello, double bass, xaphoon and mixed media (2003)


44. *Nid d’Abeille, Nid d’Amour*, trio for violin, arpegina (five-string viola with a low E) or viola and cello (2003)

45. Tango Sabatier, three tangos for arpegina (five-string viola with low E) or viola and piano (2003)


52. *Mangosinsoni* for harp and organ (2005)

53. The Bass Concerto for double bass and orchestra (2006)


56. Emily’s Corner, three children’s pieces for solo piano (2007)

58. Symphony for Brass and Percussion (2007)
59. Surfay for flute and marimba (2007)
60. Gnossienne-Tonada (2007)
63. Dragoncello for six cellos and string orchestra (2008)
64. Number Nine, quintet for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano (2008)
65. Schtupak The Fish, piano quartet (2009)
66. Postcards from Kannibalia, trio for clarinet, violin and piano (2009)
67. Gran Cacerolazo, for piano, strings and percussion (2010)
68. Sinfonia op. 68 for symphony orchestra (2010)
69. La Tierra for solo piano (2010)