Lonely Cello: A Performer's Analysis of Leon Kirchner's "For Cello Solo"

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LONELY CELLO: A PERFORMER’S ANALYSIS OF LEON KIRCHNER’S
FOR CELLO SOLO

By

Aaron Ludwig

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

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

LONELY CELLO: A PERFORMER’S ANALYSIS OF LEON KIRCHNER’S
FOR CELLO SOLO

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The purpose of this essay is to examine Leon Kirchner’s *For Cello Solo* for the preparation of a performance. The score, manuscripts, and recordings were analyzed to better inform the author’s interpretation of the work. Backgrounds for both the piece and the composer are included to illuminate the origins of the work. Additional information was accumulated through interviews with Carter Brey and Maria Kitsopoulos, performers of the work who collaborated with the composer. This essay aims to aid a performer’s preparation and interpretation of the composition by describing the piece’s historical and biographical context, analyzing its compositional design, and addressing specific sound and musicality issues related to the work.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Music for unaccompanied cello has been an essential part of the core cello repertoire for most of the twentieth century. Leon Kirchner joined Bach, Cassado, Hindemith, Crumb, Kodály, Britten and Reger, by making his own contribution to the repertoire with his *For Cello Solo*. Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Six Suites for Unaccompanied Cello* are regarded as some of the best music ever written for the instrument. These baroque masterpieces contain great technical challenges for the cellist as well as dramatic character contrasts within each suite. An important and enduring legacy of the Bach suites is that Bach was able to create music with melody and accompaniment all performed by an unaccompanied cello, just as Leon Kirchner did with his unaccompanied cello piece *For Cello Solo*.

The Bach suites, composed in the eighteenth century, are of superior quality and are very popular in the twentieth century. However, between the time of their composition and the twentieth century, there was little interest in unaccompanied cello music. There are no pieces in the standard repertoire for solo cello from the classic or romantic eras. It was not until the twentieth century that the suites gained tremendous popularity and became a major part of the cello repertoire due to Pablo Casals’ rediscovery and recording of the suites.

With the popularity of the Bach suites in the twentieth century, composers were inspired to compose new works for unaccompanied cello. During the twentieth century,
music for the unaccompanied cello covered a wide range of styles including Zoltán Kodály’s Hungarian sounding sonata, Gaspar Cassado’s Spanish sounding suites, Paul Hindemith’s sonata and Leon Kirchner’s *For Cello Solo*. Though the forms had changed and Bach’s dance movements like the minuet and sarabande were gone, twentieth-century composers were responsible for the rebirth of unaccompanied cello music, continuing Bach’s musical legacy.

**Need for Study**

Research on cello repertoire has centered on works for cello and orchestra and cello and piano. There is an abundance of research on Dvořák’s cello concerto in B minor including *Cellists and the Dvorak Cello Concerto, An Interpretive Approach to the Dvorak Cello Concerto, Cello Compositions by Antonin Dvorak: with emphasis on the Cello Concerto in B Minor op. 104, and A Historical Overview and Analysis of the Cello Concerto in B Minor, op. 104*.¹ Research has also focused on works for cello and piano by nineteenth-century composers including sonatas by Beethoven, Brahms, and Debussy.² There is research on unaccompanied cello music, including dissertations like Ching-Tzy Ko’s *Dynamic Markings in Bach Cello Suites* and Martin William Bernard

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Jarvis’s *Did Johann Sebastian Bach Write the Six Cello Suites?* 3 Unaccompanied music by Kodály and Hindemith are also the focus of research.

Although there has been no research on Kirchner’s *For Cello Solo*, other Kirchner compositions have been researched. Most of the research on Kirchner has been on his piano music, including Inette Swart’s *An Analysis of “For the Left Hand” by Leon Kirchner* and *Formal Determinants in Four Selected Compositions of Leon Kirchner*. 4 In addition to the dissertations that use Kirchner’s music as the primary source material, Kirchner is also included in two dissertations as part of a group of twentieth-century composers. 5

Instead of defining Kirchner by the lack of research on him, he deserves to be defined by his accolades. Early in Kirchner’s composing career, Aaron Copland said that Kirchner’s music is “charged with an emotional impact and explosive power that is almost frightening in its intensity.” 6 Copland was an early proponent of Leon Kirchner and wrote the previous quote in a review of one of Kirchner’s first published works.

While Kirchner was in California, Arnold Schoenberg was impressed by Kirchner and

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invited the teenage composer to be one of his students. Also, during Kirchner’s tenure at Harvard, he found a future collaborator in one of his students, Yo-Yo Ma. It was because of a request from Ma that *For Cello Solo* came into being. Ma later included Kirchner’s piece *For Cello Solo* (as the first movement of a three-movement work called *Triptych*) on his *Made in America* recording.\(^7\) In addition to Leon Kirchner’s very successful teaching career at Harvard, where he taught Yo-Yo Ma and John Adams, Kirchner received a Guggenheim Fellowship and won a Pulitzer Prize for his third string quartet in 1967.

Despite Kirchner’s acclaim and having the distinction of having Yo-Yo Ma record and perform the work, no research has been conducted on *For Cello Solo*. Even though unaccompanied music is at the heart of the cello repertoire and Kirchner is a highly regarded composer, Kirchner’s *For Cello Solo* has been overlooked. There is research on unaccompanied cello and Leon Kirchner’s music, but there is no research on Leon Kirchner’s unaccompanied cello music.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to research Leon Kirchner’s background and style in order to prepare *For Cello Solo* for performance. I have analyzed the recordings of *For Cello Solo* by Yo-Yo Ma and *Continuum* and compared them to the manuscripts and published version of the work. I have also interviewed colleagues and students of the

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composer to fill in gaps in the current research. *For Cello Solo* has also been analyzed for solutions to its technical and musical challenges.

**Review of Related Literature**

The dissertation examines Leon Kirchner’s background and style to give an interpreter of his work a better understanding of the performance practice of *For Cello Solo*. To illustrate what research has been done and where there are gaps in the research, this section includes a summary of the books and articles on Leon Kirchner’s background and also covers the reviews written about Kirchner’s performances and published compositions.

**Leon Kirchner Background**

Alexander L. Ringer’s article for *The Musical Quarterly* provides a good foundation for understanding Kirchner’s background.\(^8\) Ringer’s article was published in 1957, very early in Kirchner’s career. Because Kirchner’s career continued for more than fifty years after Ringer’s article, the article is not a comprehensive biography. It discusses Kirchner’s upbringing in Los Angeles, Kirchner’s interests as a child and how he became a student of Arnold Schoenberg at UCLA. Furthermore, Ringer explores what makes up Leon Kirchner’s style:

Kirchner’s music goes all out to move the human soul rather than the performer’s fingers or the listener’s eardrums alone. On the other hand, he is imbued with a healthy amount of pure musicianship, which rules out the obvious danger of an overwrought emotionalism. Judging from the three

first major works of a list of nine completed to date, Copland classified Kirchner as belonging to the “Bartok-Berg axis” in contemporary music. In view of the well-known stylistic differences implied in any coupling of these two illustrious names, Copland must have been referring to their basic musical attitudes. In these terms he could not have been more accurate.  

Ringer also states that Aaron Copland was an early proponent of Leon Kirchner. Copland was a champion of Kirchner’s work during much of Kirchner’s career. Until recently, Ringer’s article on Kirchner was the best biographic material written about Kirchner. On November 1, 2010, the first comprehensive biography was published on Leon Kirchner, written by Dr. Robert Riggs, professor of musicology at the University of Mississippi. A former student and assistant of Kirchner, Riggs developed a close relationship with the composer.  

The book is a vital addition to current research on Kirchner. As a young composer, Kirchner garnered a lot of attention with his Guggenheim Fellowship, work with Schoenberg, early commissions, and support from Aaron Copland, but once he made his move to Boston to teach at Harvard, there are few publications about him. Kirchner certainly continued to compose later in his career, but not at the rate at which he composed while in California. In addition to his composing, his time was split among his responsibilities at Harvard, performing, conducting, and serving on various boards and committees. He became less prolific and was not the focus of the composition world as he once was. But Riggs’s book shines a light on the entirety of his career, including the parts that, as of its publication, had not been written about.

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9 Ringer, 9.

In addition to the book’s comprehensive detail on Kirchner’s biography, there are also six musical interludes at the end of chapters. The interludes are concise analyses of six different works from corresponding periods in the composer’s life. Riggs shows his knowledge and understanding of Kirchner’s style in the interludes by giving quality analyses. They are not very long or comprehensive, but through musical examples and detailed discussion, the interludes are informative about Kirchner’s music.

Much of the book is based on a series of interviews Riggs conducted with Kirchner from around 2001 to his death in 2009. Anyone that has spent any time with Kirchner will likely recognize some of the stories in the book. For instance, when describing the first meeting between Hindemith and a young Kirchner, Riggs wrote:

As Kirchner was putting on his coat and taking leave, he asked Hindemith if he would mind being asked a personal question—did Hindemith remember a statement that he had made concerning musical inspiration: “A composer, in order to truly be a composer, would have to see the entire vista of a work in a single lightning stroke?” Hindemith confirmed the statement’s accuracy, but Kirchner queried further: “Would you accept a student who could see the entire vista of a work in two lightning strokes?” Hindemith was not pleased with the question, but he “supposed that he would accept such a student.” As Kirchner was about to go out the door, he turned around and posed a final question: “Would you accept a student who could see the entire vista of a work in three lightning strokes?” After a momentary scowl, Hindemith started laughing, came over, put his arm around Kirchner, and said: “You know, I think we could have gotten on very well together.” That was their last meeting.\(^1\)

I include this story because I think it represents the tone of much of the book. Kirchner relayed the events in his life to Riggs through stories that he told and retold countless times. Though this is a casual and charming story, Riggs is careful in his citations, including the date he interviewed Kirchner about this event. More importantly, he researched the origin of Hindemith’s “lightning strike” quote. Though the book has a

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 24.
casual tone at times, Riggs researches the events of Kirchner’s life independently as much as possible.

Riggs describes Kirchner’s life as having two main themes. One theme was that he had many interests outside of music, especially in the sciences. In fact, on the second page, Riggs writes about a story where Kirchner describes a trip he took to a science laboratory on Long Island. One of the scientists “…expressed doubt that concert pianists, who by necessity have to practice so many hours a day in order to master the technical demands of their instrument, could be broadly educated intellectuals.”\(^\text{12}\) Kirchner immediately offered two examples of concert pianists with “multifaceted academic credentials.”\(^\text{13}\) Riggs included this story because “it provides a rich and characteristic entry into several aspects of Kirchner’s persona: his love of story-telling, his interest in science, his wonderful sense of humor, and his outgoing sociability.”\(^\text{14}\) He comes back to the point that Kirchner was very interested in the sciences and was often trying to understand the connection between the sciences and the arts.

The other theme in the book is Kirchner’s concern with how he fit into the musical tradition that came before him. Even though, especially early in his career, Kirchner was at the forefront of music’s development, he always had a respect for tradition. Riggs says, “Throughout a span of more than sixty years, as a mature composer, Kirchner maintained a remarkably independent course, faithful to and guided by his romantic view of art and his conviction that tradition never loses its validity and

\(^\text{12}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^\text{13}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{14}\) Ibid.
power.¹⁵ Though a composer of modern music, Kirchner had an important relationship with the musical tradition that came before him as a pianist, conductor, teacher, and composer.

**Obituaries**

With Kirchner’s death in 2009, a number of remembrances and obituaries were written in honor of the composer. A Harvard website collects a few of these together on a permanent website. Included are the obituaries from the Boston Globe and New York Times as well as remembrances from students and colleagues. The most relevant item to this paper is a copy of the first and last page from Kirchner’s *Triptych*, a three-movement work where *For Cello Solo* eventually found its home.¹⁶ Also included on the website are remembrances from students and colleagues that help inform aspects of Kirchner’s teaching and composition styles.

**Reviews of Leon Kirchner’s Compositions**

Aaron Copland wrote a review of *Duo for Violin and Piano* in 1950.¹⁷ This piece was Kirchner’s first published work and with it he was already making waves in the music world. In the review, Copland (a composer with an important voice in the music world) states, “I doubt whether a more important young American composer has come

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¹⁵ Ibid., 250.


along since the advent of Harold Shapero several years back.”\textsuperscript{18} In the article, Copland gives some background on Kirchner: where he was born, where he moved as a child, and with whom he studied. Copland mentions that he finds it fascinating that Kirchner sought to work with twelve-tone leaders such as Schoenberg and Roger Sessions and yet for his own compositional style never fully embraced total serialism.

Overall, Copland’s article convinces the reader that Leon Kirchner has a special gift for communicating through his music. Though Copland thinks Kirchner’s harmony, rhythm, and melodies are not particularly innovative, Copland speaks highly of Kirchner’s prospects as a composer. One original characteristic Copland does grant Kirchner is his “out-of-control quality.”\textsuperscript{19} More specifically, Copland believed it was Kirchner’s creative approach to structural organization that gave Kirchner’s works originality.

In addition to Copland’s positive review of Kirchner’s work there have been many other reviews of Kirchner’s compositions published in journals and newspapers. Carl Anthony wrote one such review for \textit{Notes} in 1993.\textsuperscript{20} Anthony describes Kirchner as being “an integral part of America’s contemporary music scene as composer, conductor, pianist and pedagogue.”\textsuperscript{21} He also discusses how Kirchner was not a prolific composer, possibly due to his busy schedule with teaching and performing. Anthony goes into some detail about the specific challenges of the piece \textit{For Violin Solo}, citing the difficult bow

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 434.

\textsuperscript{20} Carl Anthony, review of \textit{For Violin Solo}, by Leon Kirchner, \textit{Notes} Second Series, Vol. 49, No. 3 (March., 1993), 1270-72.

\textsuperscript{21} Anthony, 1270.
techniques, wide color changes, many double stops, and difficult rhythmic changes. Anthony also discusses the work’s well-conceived, yet wildly free-style form. He concludes the article by saying, “Demanding first-rate musicianship and a total command of the instrument, *For Violin Solo* is an exciting new piece that will provide a rich musical experience for those willing to work out its numerous challenges.”

Another example of a review published in a journal is Wallace Berry’s review of Kirchner’s first piano trio. Berry had been aware of the quality of Kirchner’s music before he examined the piano trio. After studying the trio, he became further convinced of the composer’s skill. The article details the commission of the work and then goes into more detail of the trio. Berry describes the music as being “evocative and impressionistic, as at measure 45 in the second movement; and the same movement opens with a songful, lyric manner that recalls the quality of the first movement’s interrupting, adagio interlude.” Berry also discusses the tonality but has no conclusions other than to say that the “tonality is obscured, yet significant as a structural element.” It would have been more helpful had Berry gone into more detail about the trio’s harmony. Berry wrote a positive review of Kirchner’s first piano trio describing the piece’s broad palate of rhythms, tempos, meters and dynamics.

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22 Carl Anthony, review of *For Violin Solo*, by Leon Kirchner, *Notes* Second Series, Vol. 49, No. 3 (March., 1993), 1272.


24 Berry, 1106.

25 Ibid.
In addition to the works with piano that have been reviewed, David Stock reviewed Kirchner’s third string quartet. Stock assesses the quartet that eventually would win Kirchner his Pulitzer Prize. The third quartet was written for string quartet and electronic tape. In the review, Stock details some of the markings in the score that indicate how the players interact with the electronic tape. The way the composition is laid out allows the performers freedom in a performance. There are indications that direct the performer to imitate the recording in one section, or improvise on an idea in the other section. Kirchner came up with a unique way for musicians to perform with electronic tape but still play freely and creatively. In closing, Stock feels that Kirchner’s third quartet “represents a significant extension of his personal manner through the resources of electronic and semi-improvisatory procedures.”

In a New York Times article written in February of 2000, Anthony Tommasini reviews a concert featuring Kirchner’s work. In the article, Tommasini describes Kirchner’s tenure at Harvard and mentions some of his more famous students, including Yo-Yo Ma. The article details the program that started with a piece by Kirchner’s teacher, Schoenberg. Tommasini felt that beginning with Schoenberg was a great way to start the program because he believes that much of Kirchner’s style reflects the influence of Schoenberg. By starting with the Schoenberg, the stage was set for Kirchner’s pieces. Tommasini also describes the next piece on the program by saying “The Triptych begins

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26 David Stock, review of String Quartet No. 3, by Leon Kirchner, Perspectives in New Music, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn – Winter, 1968), 143-44.

27 Stock, 144.

with a ruminative, fitful, arresting movement for solo cello.” That first movement of *Triptych* is Kirchner’s *For Cello Solo*. Tommasini details Kirchner’s pre-concert talk during which Kirchner “addressed the question of why he has so often recycled material from existing works into new ones. He said the practice was a familiar one in music history but suggested self-effacingly that in his case he ‘needed to increase his folder’ somehow.” It could also be said that Kirchner took time away from composing to spend more time shaping musicians like Mr. Ma.

It is clear from the reviews written about Leon Kirchner’s music that he is a critical success. Though he may not be as popular as other twentieth-century composers, critics and academics alike have positively reviewed his compositions. In particular, many critics agree that Kirchner’s music has a unique harmonic language, an interesting and varied use of rhythm.

**Academic Research on Leon Kirchner**

An example of Leon Kirchner being included in a broader essay is Lilla Joyce Johnson’s dissertation on Elliot Carter and Kirchner’s rhythmic techniques. Unfortunately, Johnson’s dissertation does not detail much about Kirchner’s style. In fact, Kirchner’s name is not mentioned in the dissertation until the final chapter. Johnson does, however, include some interesting notions of twentieth-century composers’ use of

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29 Tommasini, review.

30 Ibid.

rhythm with many musical examples from various composers including Milton Babbitt, Pierre Boulez, Aaron Copland, and Olivier Messiaen. An example is her discussion of different composers’ attempts to “free rhythm from the tyranny of the bar line.” She then gives specific examples of pieces like Charles Ives’s *Concord Sonata*, in which the second movement is composed entirely without bar lines. Though there is some very useful and interesting information on different twentieth-century rhythmic techniques, there is very little of Kirchner’s music included. Johnson’s dissertation disappoints because the title suggests that Kirchner’s music and style will be front and center. Instead, it seems he is only treated as one in a series of twentieth-century composers with no more depth or insight than the other twenty-five composers Johnson mentions in the dissertation.

Kirchner’s sonata is, however, the focus of the section on form. Johnson describes Kirchner’s piano sonata (1948) as having a traditional form. The first movement of the sonata has a structure very similar to that of sonata-allegro form. Johnson also compares much of its structure and rhythm to the Elliot Carter Sonata for Piano.

**OUTLINE OF ESSAY**

The essay will proceed in the following manner. The second chapter consists of a brief biographical essay on Leon Kirchner and the origins of *For Cello Solo*. The third

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32 Ibid., 32.
33 Johnson, Rhythmic Techniques, 61.
34 Ibid., 66.
chapter is a discussion on how the piece relates to other works for the unaccompanied cello. The fourth chapter presents a large-scale analysis of the work. The fifth chapter details solutions to the numerous technical and musical challenges of the work, in addition to comparing the recordings of the work to the multiple published versions. The sixth and final chapter draws conclusions based on my research of the work.
Chapter 2

BIOGRAPHY OF LEON KIRCHNER

Leon Kirchner was born in Brooklyn on January 24, 1919, and he was exposed to music from an early age, first studying piano with his mother. Around age seven, Kirchner began serious musical training, but his training was then put on hold between ages 9 and 14 because his family moved to California without their piano. At age 16, Kirchner left high school early and enrolled in Los Angeles City College, majoring in zoology. At first, he balanced his dual interests in music and the sciences by taking piano lessons in addition to his pre-medical coursework. Eventually, Kirchner made an official commitment to music by designating it as his second major. From an early age, Kirchner was showing his dual interests in music and the sciences.³⁵

Kirchner’s piano teacher noticed his penchant for composing and recommended that he meet Ernst Toch. Impressed with Kirchner’s musicality, Toch then recommended the young musician to Arnold Schoenberg who took on Kirchner as a student. The Viennese master would remain one of Kirchner’s biggest influences throughout his career. Many critics and performers have described Kirchner’s music as bearing Schoenberg’s influence.³⁶

³⁶ Riggs, 13.
At different points in Kirchner’s life, he studied with Schoenberg. As an undergraduate student of Schoenberg, Kirchner developed his love of the traditional repertoire and profited especially from Schoenberg’s analytical insights. Frequently, entire classes were devoted to how a composer had approached specific compositional challenges in a number of different works…Schoenberg’s theoretical emphasis on structure, connections, and organic growth was balanced and tempered by an equally strong valuation of a work’s affective content.37

Schoenberg’s knowledge of traditional repertoire and his approach to analysis and musicality exerted a strong influence over Kirchner throughout his career.

In addition to Schoenberg’s influence on Kirchner’s compositional style, they also shared similarities in their teaching methods. Both men probed deeply into their students’ works and were viewed by some of their students as harsh. They were also both open to a variety of musical styles and tried to encourage their students to develop their own personal styles. Kirchner and Schoenberg also had a strong fascination with the sciences. Kirchner recalled a day in class when Schoenberg commented on the sound of a passing airplane and the rest of the lesson was spent discussing the Doppler effect.38

In the fall of 1938, at age 19, Kirchner left Los Angeles for the University of California, Berkeley, where he studied composition and theory with Albert Elkus and Edward Griffith Stricklen. By 1940 he had graduated with his Bachelor of Arts and

37 Ibid., 14.
38 Ibid., 15.
moved back to Los Angeles to begin graduate studies at UCLA under his influential mentor Schoenberg.\(^39\)

Although Kirchner had matured and learned to appreciate Schoenberg more than he had as an undergraduate, it was not long before he left UCLA to return to Berkeley. In the fall of 1941, he started graduate studies at Berkeley, possibly because he preferred the more supportive environment at Berkeley compared to the intensely critical one at UCLA with Schoenberg. Kirchner’s move was also due to financial considerations since he was hoping to win a lucrative new fellowship at Berkeley.\(^40\)

Ernst Bloch, a new hire at Berkeley, taught Kirchner in his formal analysis class. Bloch’s total command of the repertoire inspired Kirchner and his classmates. For instance, “His method of teaching involved writing one of Bach’s fugue subjects with its answer on the board, but with the intentional introduction of a subtle mistake in the answer.”\(^41\) Bloch would then prompt discussion in the class and try to weed out the mistake. Eventually the class would do the same thing for every section of the fugue. Later on, Kirchner applied similar methods to his own teaching, requiring his students to reach similar analytical depths.

After submitting a quartet to the Prix de Paris competition in 1942, Kirchner was awarded a fellowship. It funded two years of study in Paris, but Kirchner studied in New York City instead, due to the war. Assuming that he would be drafted, he joined the

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 16.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 20.
Army in 1942 with the agreement that he would spend his first year in the inactive reserves, allowing him to study in New York for one year before he served out the rest of his four-year tour of duty.

While in New York, Kirchner contacted a few composition teachers including Hanns Eisler and Paul Hindemith. Kirchner ended up meeting with Roger Sessions who, like Bloch, encouraged Kirchner to study Bach’s chorales. Around this time, Kirchner also met Samuel Barber and Mieczyslaw Horszowski, and befriended Leonard Bernstein and Lukas Foss. It was also during this period that Kirchner’s first surviving works, *Letter* (1944) and *The Times Are Nightfall* (1944), were written.

In the fall semester of 1946, after three years in the Army, Kirchner returned to Berkeley. Roger Sessions had recently been appointed to the composition faculty of the Department of Music at Berkeley and accepted Kirchner as a student. Sessions, like Kirchner himself later on, wanted to help his composition students find their own voice. It was while studying under Sessions that Kirchner composed the first work in his mature style, *Duo for Violin and Piano* (1947).

In 1948, Kirchner won a Guggenheim Fellowship in New York. On his trip out East, he stopped at Tanglewood’s Berkshire Music Center to meet Darius Milhaud, whom Kirchner had originally met at Mills College in Oakland, California. While Kirchner was playing his new *Duo for Violin and Piano* for Milhaud, Aaron Copland stopped in the office to listen. This meeting would later prove to be the beginning of an important relationship in Kirchner’s career. Copland would eventually write a very important review for Kirchner in 1950 in the journal *Notes*. In the review, Copland said:

> the impression carried away from a Kirchner performance is one of having made contact, not merely with a composer, but with a highly sentient
human being; of a man who creates his music out of an awareness of the special climate of today’s unsettled world. Kirchner’s best pages prove that he reacts strongly to that world; they are charged with an emotional impact and explosive power that is almost frightening in intensity. Whatever else may be said, this is music that most certainly is “felt.” No wonder his listeners have been convinced.\footnote{Aaron Copland, “Leon Kirchner: Duo for Violin and Piano,” \textit{Notes} Vol. 7 (June 1950 ): 434.}

Copland’s review, especially the line about “almost frightening intensity,”\footnote{Copland, 434.} would be referenced throughout Kirchner’s career. Copland would also remain a loyal supporter who would give Kirchner many compositional opportunities. More positive reviews came in as Kirchner continued his streak of productivity during his fellowship tenure. During his time as a Guggenheim Fellow, Kirchner completed two major works: \textit{Piano Sonata No. 1} (1948) and \textit{String Quartet No. 1} (1949).

After the Guggenheim Fellowship, Kirchner accepted a teaching position at the University of Southern California. While there, he quickly climbed the professorial ladder, moving from assistant to full professor in four years. He was also able to continue his impressive pace of composing a major work every year, including his \textit{Sinfonia} (1951), \textit{Sonata Concertante for Violin and Piano} (1952), \textit{Piano Concerto No. 1} (1953) and \textit{Piano Trio No. 1} (1954).\footnote{Riggs, 58.}

In January of 1951, Kirchner was in San Francisco to attend the West Coast premiere of his second string quartet performed by the California String Quartet. Dimitri Mitropoulos, then conductor of the New York Philharmonic, happened to be in the audience and was impressed enough to ask Kirchner after the performance if he had
written anything for orchestra. After Kirchner answered in the affirmative, Mitropoulos invited him to his hotel so that Kirchner could play the first movement of the not yet complete Piano Concerto No. 1. Immediately upon hearing it, Mitropoulos told Kirchner that he would conduct the work with the New York Philharmonic the following season. Mitropoulos would continue to play an important role in Kirchner’s career for several years.

Though composed in 1953, the work Mitropoulos heard in his hotel room, the Piano Concerto No. 1, was premiered with the New York Philharmonic in 1956. Kirchner, a very skilled pianist, performed the solo part and Mitropoulos conducted. The work had four performances and was recorded the morning after the premiere. As would happen during much of Kirchner’s career, critics mostly praised the work.

In 1954, Kirchner began teaching at Mills College. While at Mills, Kirchner composed his critically acclaimed second quartet and his first piano trio. The winner of the New York Music Critics’ Circle Award in 1960, Kirchner’s Quartet No. 2 received more votes than works by other composers such as Hindemith and Poulenc. The Piano Trio No. 1 would end up being one of Kirchner’s most frequently performed works. It was also at Mills that Kirchner began conducting, an activity that he pursued for the rest of his career.

**Harvard University**

Kirchner’s longest held faculty position and the one most identified with him was at Harvard University from 1961 until his retirement in 1989. Almost immediately after
he was hired, Kirchner began implementing changes in Harvard’s music department. For instance, he worked to give composition students more degree options by creating a master’s degree in composition separate from that of musicology and by persuading the university to offer a PhD in composition.

Kirchner was also responsible for establishing an electronic studio so that Harvard could keep pace with the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center and stay abreast of musical experiments coming out of Germany and France at the time. Electronic sounds would play an important role in Kirchner’s career. Though the vast majority of Kirchner’s oeuvre is for acoustic instruments, he also dabbled in electronic tape. In his *String Quartet No. 3*, Kirchner incorporated electronic tape with the four stringed instruments. The work eventually earned him a Pulitzer Prize for Music in 1967.

In addition to establishing electronic music at Harvard and altering the composition and theory degree programs, Kirchner worked hard to improve the state of music performance at the university. Though he failed to establish a Master of Fine Arts in Composition and Theory and Performance, its idea led to the establishment of “Music 180 Seminar in Performance and Analysis. Enrollment by audition only.”

Offered for the first time in 1969, Music 180 quickly attracted the most talented and advanced student musicians, many of whom were not music concentrators. Based on their audition, Kirchner accepted twenty to thirty students, who were then formed into chamber ensembles and assigned an appropriate work to study.

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45 Riggs, 116.
46 Ibid.
Music 180 remains one of Kirchner’s most important and enduring legacies at Harvard. Many performers, including Yo-Yo Ma, met Kirchner through his class.

**Kirchner and Performance**

Whether conducting or on the piano, performance was an integral part of Kirchner’s musical life. Kirchner became even more involved in conducting once he moved to Boston. He was the principal conductor of the Boston Philharmonia Chamber Orchestra for two years. He also initiated the Harvard Summer School Chamber Players. It was through the Harvard Chamber Players that Kirchner met Carter Brey, the performer of the premiere of *For Cello Solo*.

As the resident composer at the Marlboro Music Festival, Kirchner had the opportunity to conduct many performances of chamber orchestra music at the prestigious festival. In addition to conducting his own compositions, Kirchner especially enjoyed conducting other composers’ works. At Marlboro for instance, he was asked to focus on choosing wind repertoire to conduct, which inspired him to focus on the repertoire of two of his favorite composers, Stravinsky and Schoenberg.47

In addition to Kirchner’s own performing, he also had many special relationships with performers. Many of his works were written with specific players in mind. For instance, Yo-Yo Ma and Kirchner had a special relationship originating during Ma’s time at Harvard as an undergraduate. Initially, though Kirchner was impressed with Ma’s

47 Ibid., 132.
technique, he encouraged Ma to delve more into the composer’s intentions of a work. Kirchner told Ma that he had not found his sound “and he would not find it unless he understood that music is powered by ideas.”

**Retirement**

Kirchner continued to compose after his retirement from Harvard in 1989. Of particular interest to this essay is *Music for Cello and Orchestra* (1992). When the wealthy Long Island developer Maurice Barbash asked his wife what she would like for their fortieth wedding anniversary she said she wanted a cello concerto commissioned for Yo-Yo Ma. When Ma was asked which composer he would like to commission, he recommended Kirchner. Kirchner and Ma’s relationship was a productive one and inspired multiple works for the cello repertoire including a concerto, a solo piece, and a violin and cello duet.

Kirchner was busy after his retirement from Harvard in 1989. The Boston Symphony Orchestra premiered his most recent composition, *The Forbidden*, in 2008, less than a year before his death. Kirchner also spent time traveling the country to coach and conduct his own music. In 2007 for instance he was invited to conduct his *Concerto for Violin, Celli, Ten Winds, and Percussion* (1960) with the New World Symphony. That same year, the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival invited Kirchner to the festival as the resident composer. Seven concerts featured the composer’s work, including one that programmed the complete cycle of all four of Kirchner’s string quartets.

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48 Ibid., 213.
It was at the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival in 2007 that I met and worked with Leon Kirchner. My piano trio, *Trio Lunaire*, was asked to prepare Kirchner’s *Piano Trio No. 1* (1954), one of his most performed works. At almost 90 years old in 2007, he worked with my trio for hours helping us build our interpretation of his trio. Like many performers that have worked with Kirchner, I was inspired by the composer and learned a great deal as a performer and became an advocate of his work.

During the summer of 2009, Kirchner accepted a commission for a third piano trio. The new work, however, was never completed as he became weaker during the summer and succumbed to congestive heart failure on September 17, 2009. A memorial concert was performed in Miller Theatre at Columbia University in New York City. The program included performances of Kirchner compositions by the Claremont Trio, the Orion String Quartet, Jeremy Denk, and Corey Cerovsek. There was a performance of Schubert’s Piano Trio in E Flat by Yo-Yo Ma, Lynn Chang, and Richard Kogan, who had studied the piano trio under Kirchner when they were students at Harvard.

**Background of For Cello Solo**

*For Cello Solo* began its life as a violin work called *For Violin Solo*. In 1982, Josef Gingold approached Kirchner to compose a piece for violin and piano for the Violin Competition of Indianapolis. The competition, which is held every four years, regularly commissions a new work as a part of its repertoire for the competition. Kirchner accepted the commission and completed the composition in October 1985. The finished work was written for solo violin without piano. Gingold had requested a piece to test the competitor’s musicality and technique and was very pleased with the results. However,
Gingold urged Kirchner to take out one page of extremely difficult passages. The composer, though, would not take out the page.\textsuperscript{49}

The semi-finalists of the Indianapolis Violin Competition premiered \textit{For Violin Solo} in 1986 with Kirchner in the audience. In February 1987, Maria Bachmann (one of the Indianapolis finalists) gave the New York premiere of the work. Kirchner was so impressed with her performance that he invited her to perform Bartók’s \textit{Violin Concerto No. 2} with the Harvard Chamber Orchestra. As a prelude to the Bartók, Bachmann performed the Boston premiere of \textit{For Violin Solo}.\textsuperscript{50}

The impetus for the cello version was an exchange on New Year’s Eve between Kirchner and Yo-Yo Ma. Kirchner and his wife were Gertrude were throwing their traditional New Year’s Eve party. The house was so full that people were occupying every room in the house, including Kirchner’s studio. Yo-Yo Ma was observing the manuscript of \textit{For Violin Solo} and remarked to Kirchner that he had never written a piece for cello.\textsuperscript{51} Kirchner remembers the exchange:

\begin{quote}
I assured him that a piece would eventually come along. “Yes,” he countered, “but I can see a cello piece right here.” Our conversation was interrupted at that point. For the moment, the question of a cello piece was abandoned, but the following day, when I tried to create some order in my studio following the party, I noticed my violin piece. Before the day was gone I had, with modifications here and there, a cello piece before me.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

A friend of Carter Brey’s had heard Kirchner’s violin solo work and shared his

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 186.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 186.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 186.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 186-187.
enthusiasm for the work with the recent prizewinner of the Rostropovich International Cello Competition. Brey then contacted Kirchner about obtaining a copy of the cello version. In a recent interview, Carter discussed why he was interested in the work. Brey said, “I was interested in the work because of my immense respect for Leon Kirchner as a musician. I was fascinated by his music as well as by his insightful performances as a pianist in standard chamber music repertoire. It's fair to say that he was illuminating as a musical thinker.”

After a couple of weeks with the score, Brey went to Cambridge to go over the work with Kirchner.

To make the piece more playable, Brey made some suggestions to Kirchner. When asked later about the changes to the score, Brey said, “It’s piano music. It was written at the piano. It fits two hands at the keyboard just great. I suggested a few simplifications designed to make it more cello-friendly without compromising its harmonic integrity, and those were incorporated into the published edition.” The modifications included register changes, chord revoicing, and changing some triple stops to double stops. Even with Brey’s changes, the piece is still very difficult and not very idiomatic, but Brey increased its playability on the cello from Kirchner’s initial version. Even though the work was initially conceived for Yo-Yo Ma, Brey asked to give the premiere of the piece. With Ma’s blessing, Brey performed the world premiere of For Cello Solo on May 28, 1988 at the Spoleto USA Music Festival in Charleston, South Carolina.

During his career, Kirchner would sometimes rework pieces for different

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53 Carter Brey, interview by author, Miami, FL, March 5, 2011.
54 Brey email.
For Cello Solo is a particularly interesting example. As already noted, the piece started as a violin solo before being written for cello. Around the same time Kirchner was working on a violin and cello duet. For Cello Solo would eventually join with two movements of the string duet to become the three-movement Triptych. Ma and his friend and trio partner Lynn Chang would premiere Triptych on August 17, 1988. For Cello Solo is dedicated to “Carter and Yo-Yo.” Kirchner would later rework the two string duet movements written for Triptych as a piano solo called Interlude I.

Although For Cello Solo started out as a violin piece, it has a full life as a cello piece. Despite Maria Bachmann’s many performances of the piece, a commercial recording was never released of the violin version. In contrast to the violin work, two recordings of For Cello Solo exist. Yo-Yo Ma recorded the cello work as a part of the three-movement Triptych on his Made in America CD and Maria Kitsopoulos recorded the movement as part of Triptych on Continuum’s album of Kirchner pieces.55

55 Leon Kirchner, Cheryl Seltzer, Maria Kitsopoulos and Joel Sachs, Chamber works, [United States]: Naxos, 2005. Yo-Yo Ma, Jeffrey Kahane, Lynn Chang, Ronan Lefkowitz, Gilbert Kalish, Leonard Bernstein, Leon Kirchner, George Gershwin, and Charles Ives, Made In America, New York, N.Y.: Sony classical, 1993.
Chapter 3

COMPARISON OF FOR CELLO SOLO TO OTHER WORKS

In this chapter I will compare *For Cello Solo* to other more idiomatic compositions for cello solo. The cello is an attractive choice for unaccompanied music because of its array of sound colors, its ability to play multiple notes simultaneously, and a range that extends from low bass to high treble. Throughout the instrument’s history, the cello primarily played supportive, single-line roles such as the basso continuo, the bottom voice of a quartet, and the lower section of a string ensemble. Rarely was the cello a featured instrument or a solo instrument. Bach was one of the earliest examples to write for cello alone. Bach’s six cello suites continue to be the most famous example of unaccompanied music for the cello, followed by some well-known twentieth-century composition. The most famous works for unaccompanied cello tend to be written in an idiomatic way. Composers including Bach, Hindemith, Kodaly, Britten, Cassado, Reger, and Crumb have written works that cellists like to play because they work well on the cello and that stand out in the repertoire because of their quality. A composition can be idiomatic because of key choice, use of open strings, and the way its passages fit into the cello’s left-hand positions. A piece that is written idiomatically is, by definition, easier to play on the instrument for which it was intended than a composition that is unidiomatic. A possible drawback of idiomatic writing is that the choices of keys are limited and idiomatic.
gestures become common among different composers’ works. Leon Kirchner’s *For Cello Solo* is not traditionally idiomatic because it does not have a primary key or significant central pitch and generally avoids common idiomatic gestures. Because of its lack of idiomatic writing, it has a unique sound and is a uniquely challenging unaccompanied cello work.

One way in which composers can write idiomatically for the cello is by choosing a key that is friendly to the instrument. For instance, the first three Bach suites are in the keys of G major, D minor, and C major, respectively. The three respective keys of the first three suites allow Bach to use one of the cello’s open strings as the root and bass of the tonic chord. In the third suite in C major, for instance, the *sarabande* movement begins and ends on a four note C major chord built with two open strings on the bottom (C and G), an E on the D string, and a C on the A string as seen in Examples 1 and 2. Bach utilizes the instrument well, resulting in a very resonant chord with open strings that vibrate freely as the foundation of the chord.

Example 1. Bach’s *Sarabande*, first two bars from the Suite for Cello in C Major.
Example 2. Bach’s *Sarabande*, last two bars from the Suite for Cello in C Major.

The latter half of Bach’s unaccompanied cello suites pushed the boundaries of cello technique at the time. With suites 4, 5, and 6, he continued to develop music for the cello in an idiomatic way by exploiting the cello’s resonant open strings. In his fifth and sixth suites for the cello, he alters the cello by changing the open strings to allow for different compositional options. The fifth suite in C minor calls for the pitch of the top string to be lowered a whole tone from A to G, and the sixth suite is written for an instrument with a fifth string on top (E string). Both of these alterations allow for a new palette of tone colors and opportunities for more resonance. Lowering the A string in the fifth suite darkens the timbre of the instrument, which suits the C minor tonality, and the added E string in the sixth suite helps brighten the cello in a way that suits the bright virtuosic D major suite.

Kodaly’s *Unaccompanied Cello Sonata Op. 8* is another famous example of a cello work that uses open strings ingeniously. As Bach did centuries before, Kodaly alters the cello to suit a tonality. By lowering the bottom two strings a half step, he is able to use the full range of the cello in B minor. This alteration makes particular harmonies more accessible on the cello and makes the instrument ring more freely because of the open strings. For instance, the first movement begins and ends on a B minor chord with an “open” B string, an F sharp string, a D string, and a B natural fingered on the A string as seen in Example 3. Because of the altered tuning of the instrument, the B minor chords are able to have 3 three open strings vibrating freely.
When a work is written in traditional tonality, like those by Bach, or in a tonality that focuses on one key area over another, like those by Kodaly, certain chords will show up more frequently than other chords. Therefore, when composers write the most common chords and tonalities in a way that suits the cello, the resulting composition will be idiomatic because it is comfortable to play and resonates well.


Another example of an idiomatic work is the *Canto Primo* from Benjamin Britten’s *Suite for Cello, Op. 72*. The piece is written in the cello-friendly key of G major, which allows for the frequently used open and sympathetic strings to ring. The opening measure, for instance, is over an open G-string pedal. Though it does not work to play the A in the first bar as an open string, the open A string will resonate sympathetically while the A is stopped on the D string. Additionally, this piece fits comfortably in the cello’s positions, and awkward position jumps are infrequent. Britten’s *Canto Primo* is representative of an idiomatic work because of its key, its consistent use of open strings, and its comfortable use of positions.
Example 5. Britten’s *Suite for Cello, Op. 72*, Measures 1-6 of the *Canto Primo*.

One way in which Kirchner’s *For Cello Solo* differs from the most famous unaccompanied cello compositions is that it is not written in a resonant cello-friendly key. The mercurial nature of Kirchner’s tonal language makes it impossible for resonant open strings to be used regularly, because his music is atonal and does not use traditional harmony. The tonal language alone makes it a challenge for Kirchner to write something idiomatic for the cello in the harmonic sense because no chord or harmony occurs in the piece frequently enough to exploit especially resonant parts of the cello. If every part of the cello is being used more or less equally, then the resonant and not so resonant parts will receive equal attention. Because Kirchner’s work does not rely on open strings, the piece does not feature one of the common idiomatic traits of unaccompanied cello pieces. Since the work is not limited to the open strings, he has a virtually unlimited range of notes from which to choose.

The three- or four-note vertical chord is another common cellistic device that Kirchner generally avoids. This harmonic gesture, frequently used by Bach, Cassado, Kodaly, and Hindemith, is a tool that concisely sets the tonality of a section by opening
or closing it. It is common in unaccompanied cello music to have vertical chords at major structural points during a movement, including the beginnings and ends of movements and at modulations. The chord can be used to set the harmony for a section before a melody flows within the tonality that the chord has set up. Most of Bach’s sarabandes will start with a three- or four-note chord that sets the tonality of the movement. In the G major sarabande, the movement begins with a three-note vertical G major chord, followed by a subdominant chord that moves to an ascending set of four sixteenths in the dominant before returning again to tonic G major. The use of the chords richly and efficiently sets the tonality of the movement. Also, Kodaly does something similar in his unaccompanied sonata by starting the first movement with a four-note B minor vertical chord. The B minor chord at the beginning signals the tonality that the subsequent higher notes fit into. This is effective because the audience’s musical memory still hears the B minor chord ringing as a framework for the following melody.


In contrast to the vertical chord examples mentioned above, Kirchner does not rely on three- and four-note vertical chords as a framework for more melodic writing. Bar 110 is one of the few places Kirchner uses the vertical three-note chord, but unlike Bach or Kodaly, who used the chords as signposts, Kirchner puts nothing between each chord. It seems instead that he has three separate voices interacting. The bass line and middle voice in Bar 110 steadily rise while the top line descends by a half step and then rises by a minor third. Harmonically speaking, there are two sets of augmented sixths (or minor sevenths) that resolve to minor sixths. Unlike Bach and Kodaly’s idiomatic use of chords, these vertical chords are not used to set tonality. Rather, serving another role, the chords themselves are the focus of the passage.

Example 8. Leon Kirchner’s *For Cello Solo*. Measure 110.

*For Cello Solo* expresses harmony differently from most unaccompanied works. For instance, the beginning of the piece opens with a rising thirty-second note gesture followed by a double stop on top. The thirty-second notes are G-sharp, D, and F, and the double stop is F and C. The thirty-second notes clearly give the feeling of a fully diminished seventh chord. Because the tonality is so clear, the perfect fifth of F and C sound as though it needs some sort of resolution. The C then falls to B, resolving from a
fifth to a tritone. Instead of using a standard and cellistic rolled four-note chord to begin the piece, Kirchner makes a unique compositional decision by writing a more energetic set of thirty-second notes that becomes a thematic gesture throughout the work.


Although Kirchner does not use four-note chords in a traditional and cellistic way, he does rely on the audience’s musical memory and imagination to give the illusion of sounds that do not actually exist, as have most composers for unaccompanied cello music. For instance, in measures 16 and 17, there is clearly a melody and an accompaniment. What is interesting about this phrase is that he explicitly writes a connection between the two notes in the upper voice while the lower voice simultaneously sounds its accompaniment. Due to limitations of the cello, it is physically impossible for the E flat in the treble clef with a fermata to connect to the C natural by a slur while the accompaniment plays. Even though he has written the quarter note E-flat to sustain to the C, the accompanying figure needs the A string that the upper voice is currently using. Therefore, Kirchner relies on the performer to create the effect of the E-flat sustaining down to the C while the accompaniment sounds. The effect is very beautiful if executed effectively. However, if the performer falls short, then the
distinction between melody and accompaniment is lost and the phrase does not make sense.

Example 10. Kirchner’s *For Cello Solo*. Measures 16-17.

A performer can create the illusion that the E flat in measures 16 and 17 sustains to the C by manipulating tone color and timing. It is clear that the eighth notes occupy a different voice than the two quarter notes, so the cellist should create as much of a contrasting tone color as possible between the two voices to help the audience make the distinction. Kirchner helps the performer distinguish between the two voices by writing them in significantly different registers. The performer can magnify the difference by changing the tone color between the two voices, which helps the audience hear a distinct difference between the voices. Kirchner provides further information by putting a fermata over the first E flat to give the performer a hint for how to differentiate the voices with timing. Sitting on the E flat for a little longer than the printed quarter note suggests draws attention to it and helps separate the two voices. If the timing for the two melodic notes seems free and stretched, the performer can contrast that in the accompaniment bass part by playing the eighth notes strictly in time. Also, the performer should take care in the way that he or she releases the upper note. Too abrupt a release can ruin the illusion that the E flat rings all the way until the C. Therefore, the performer should release the E
flat in a way that allows it to continue to ring so that the illusion of sustainment occurs.

The performer needs to do more than what is literally written on the page to help illustrate the change in voices.

There are many examples in *For Cello Solo* when the performer is required to exaggerate a change in voice so that the audience’s musical memory and imagination can better understand the linear progress of the music. For instance, measure 83 is a representative example of clearly divided voices. The melody is on top in treble clef, and the bass line consists of double stop grace note chords. Even though the accompanying figure is only a short grace note, it needs to resonate in the audience’s musical memory in a way that allows the audience to relate the bass voice’s grace notes to the rest of the notes in a linear fashion. Examining the grace notes alone in measure 83 shows a harmonic progression of increasing tension from a major sixth to a minor seventh and finally to a very tense and tight tritone. The cellist needs to help the audience make the connection between the notes so that the changes in harmony make sense. Also, the grace-note double-stops make linear sense because the bass line rises by step. The performer needs to help the audience connect the grace notes because literally connecting them with a slur is not possible. The alternation between high and low register makes the change in voices clear, but also makes it a challenge to connect the disparate voices’ respective notes. The performer should separate the high voice from the low voice while drawing a connection between the individual notes in each voice.

Timing, in addition to tone color, is another variable the performer should manipulate to illustrate the change in voices in measure 83. It is important to keep the eighth notes in the treble steady, or at least give that illusion, so that the upper voice
sounds like a continuous idea supported by the grace notes, not totally interrupted by them. Then the performer can either take time on the grace note, which would add time to the measure, or play the second of each pair of eighth notes a little shorter so the next grace note can be sounded and the measure loses no overall time. Both solutions can be effective, but it is important for the treble eighth notes to continue steadily.

Despite the technical challenges, it is very important for the grace notes to be long enough for the interval to be clearly audible. If the grace notes are played so short that only a percussive attack is produced with very little tone, then the phrase loses its driving harmonic energy. Although the length of the accompanying figure is a grace-note, I believe the phrase to be more effective if the cellist takes time to play the grace-notes sufficiently long enough to make the interval clearly audible.

Example 11. Kirchner’s *For Cello Solo*. Measure 83.

A rare feature and challenge of *For Cello Solo* is that it is written on a grand staff. Though the use of two staves is not unprecedented in cello repertoire, it is extremely rare. The most famous example is an edition of the Bach Cello Suites arranged by Diran Alexanian. In the edition, Alexanian attempted to clarify his interpretation of the voicing of the Bach suites. To that end, he chose to arrange the fifth suite prelude on two staves. Alexanian uses two staves to show multiple voices sustaining and interacting with each other. Though some of the editor’s decisions come down to interpretation, seeing Bach’s
The cello suites on two staves gives the performer more interpretive information to work with. The use of two staves allows Alexanian to notate musical ideas that cannot be written on a traditional single staff.

Similar to the Alexanian edition, Kirchner uses the grand staff to show a bass note’s imagined length as opposed to its actual length, which is limited by the physical restrictions of a cello. There are times, for instance, when there is a note held at one end of the cello’s range while another note is sounding in the other extreme more than an octave away. There are a few of these extreme double stops in the piece. It is technically impossible for these notes to be played simultaneously, even though the notes appear to sound simultaneously on the score. Performers have to make technical compromises for passages like in bar 28 while still creating the musical effect that is written on score.

It is clear in bar 28 that the upper-voice notes are part of one continuous line that goes by step from the E sharp to the A natural. However, there is no way to connect the notes in the upper voice while still playing the notes in the lower voice. The lower-voice sixteenth notes A and F-sharp require a break in the sound of the upper-voice F-sharp and D before moving on to the G-sharp and D. Even though there is a technical break in sound, the musical line of the top voice must continue uninterrupted. As the phrase moves forward and up, the crescendo that Kirchner wrote helps the illusion that the line is continuing without interruption. If each note in the upper line gets louder at a consistent rate, it will give the illusion that the line is continuing even if there is an interruption for the bass notes. Additionally, contrasting the tone color of the two lines will help clarify the independence of the two lines.

Kirchner’s decision to use a grand staff has practical motives in addition to the interpretive ones. For Cello Solo is written over a huge range from the lowest note on the cello, the C two ledger lines below the bass clef, to the C two ledger lines above the treble clef. In addition to the wide range, the high notes and the low notes are often immediately juxtaposed next to each other. Therefore, the notation of this piece would be very impractical without the grand staff because there would be constant clef changes. The grand staff allows Kirchner to show the range of notes in a much more elegant way than as a single line with constant clef changes.

That For Cello Solo needs a grand staff illustrates how difficult the piece is on cello. Jumping from one range to another seems better suited to the piano than the cello. Because the composer was a pianist, wrote at the piano, and used a grand staff for the piece, I cannot help but think of the piece as being very pianistic. For instance, there is no comfortable way to play bar 74 on the cello. On piano, it would be no problem to sound the G, F sharp, and C sharp together, but on cello those three notes require awkward shifting between registers. Bars 78-79 present a similar problem. The bass notes he wrote require a position change from the upper-voice notes. The perfect fourths
are in an awkward position already, but jumping from that position down to the bass and then back again only complicates things further.

The downbeat of bar 79 requires the cellist to play the G-sharp on the G string and the F-sharp on the D string, and then shift to a high position to play the treble clef C and A. This is a special challenge because musically all four notes are happening at the same time. Bar 79 is different from standard four-note chords in the cello repertoire because of the position change. Rolling notes from bottom to top is common in unaccompanied cello music, but notes are always rolled while in one position. The challenge of the downbeat of 79 is that the shift is required. This passage is yet another illustration of why this work seems more suited to the piano than to the cello.

Example 13. Kirchner’s *For Cello Solo*. Measures 73-77.

Example 14. Kirchner’s *For Cello Solo*. Measures 78-79.
Leon Kirchner’s *For Cello Solo* is a demanding work both musically and technically. One trait that sets it apart from some of the famous unaccompanied works for cello is that it is not idiomatic for the instrument. Kirchner does not compromise or design his musical decisions to fit the cello. Because it lacks a traditional idiomatic quality, the piece is very challenging to play. However, because the work avoids idiomatic traits that have become very common among unaccompanied cello works, the piece has a unique sound in the repertoire.
Chapter 4

COMPOSITIONAL ANALYSIS

Mr. Kirchner has repeatedly refused invitations to provide verbal instructions to his music, since, like many composers, he finds it almost impossible to find “meaningful words” to interpret what has already been more cogently expressed in tones. Analytical outlines he considers both superficial and misleading. He prefers to have the listener concentrate on the “organic growth of the whole” rather than on “thematic recognition.”

As a performer preparing Kirchner’s *For Cello Solo*, I want to understand the work as thoroughly as possible. I find descriptive analysis to be a useful tool in developing my own understanding and interpretation of the work. In this chapter I will explore some of *For Cello Solo*’s compositional elements and include an analysis of the piece.

Rhythm

Kirchner manipulates tempo and the rhythmic feel to control the pacing of phrases. In general, most major sections have the feeling of moving forward until the highpoint of the phrase and then they tend to slow down towards the end of the phrase. Kirchner accomplishes this by using markings like *stringendo* and *accelerando* to push phrases and *ritenuto* and *allargando* to slow them down. Another way Kirchner affects

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56 Riggs, 107.

the pulse of a phrase is to progressively shift to shorter note values to increase the intensity of the phrase, doing the opposite towards the end of the phrase.

**Harmonic Language**

Much of the material in *For Cello Solo* is taken from diminished scales, and there are numerous instances of vertical diminished chords throughout the piece. In the sections that contrast with the diminished harmony, Kirchner relies on the whole-tone scale. Throughout the work, the diminished scale is used for more driving sections while the whole-tone material is used for more lyrical passages.

**The Perfect Fourth**

The perfect fourth is not usually considered a stable interval, but in the context of *For Cello Solo*, it takes on the role of a stable interval due to its surroundings. In contrast to the many diminished chords that often have a driving and tense character, the perfect fourths generally sound in a lyrical passage, acting as a stable interval. In measures 13 through 15, the stability of the perfect fourth is a clear contrast to the driving character of the first 12 bars. The stability of the interval works as a transition to the lyrical section that begins in measure 16.

**Developing Variation**

The large-scale structure of *For Cello Solo* is not like a traditional rondo or sonata form. The best way to describe the work is with a Schoenbergian term called Developing
Variation. The concept of Developing Variation applies to *For Cello Solo* because consecutive phrases often are closely related to each other, with continuous variation occurring as the piece progresses. Although many compositional aspects change from phrase to phrase including the meter, note duration, and pitch; consecutive phrases are closely and recognizably related to each other. For instance, the first measure of the piece has three thirty-second notes rising to a descending half-step, C to B. The second measure also contains three rising notes, but they contrast with the three notes in the first measure because each note has a duration of a dotted eight note instead of a thirty-second note and pitches and intervals are different from the first measure. The third measure has an ascending B to C half step which is the inverse of the opening measure’s descending half step of C to B. The fifth measure contains another set of three rising notes, but in this case it is a set of three quarter notes with the introduction of tremolo. With each passing measure there is a reference to the one before and an alteration.

As *For Cello Solo* progresses, consecutive phrases often clearly relate to each other despite the variations between each phrase. Using Developing Variation as a compositional form leads to a piece with a clear linear flow that is thematically unified.

**Measures 1-19**

The opening phrase of *For Cello Solo* contains motives that recur throughout the entire work. From this seed, the entire movement is derived. In measure 1, the thirty-second notes rise to a thematically important descending half step over a pedal tone in the bass, creating a fifth moving to a tri-tone. The second bar contains another set of rising notes followed by the inverse of the thematic half step, ascending while under a pedal
tone. The two half steps are symmetrical with each other, both involving B and C. The half step is an important motivic element throughout the work.

The first phrase contains some interesting harmonic functions. The perfect fifth is set up in such a way that it feels as though it needs to resolve. A fully diminished seventh chord (G-sharp, D, F) is outlined before the perfect fifth (F and C) is sounded. Because of the diminished-chord arpeggio leading up to it, the C feels as though it is being pulled down, so that the descending half step feels like a resolution to B natural. Another interesting aspect of the first phrase is that it ends on a C and A. The fully diminished seventh scored is spelled as a fully diminished seventh in A minor, and the end of the phrase in measures three and four resolves to what looks like A minor. Thus, though the piece is atonal, the opening phrase has functional motion reminiscent of traditional tonality.

Kirchner uses breaks in sound to signify new sections throughout the work. The rests that come after the opening phrase in bars four and five seem to highlight the importance of the opening phrase and the motives contained within it. The silence between bars four and five is also significant because it is the longest in the whole piece. Following the rest, a pianissimo diminished chord is outlined with a tremolo followed immediately by a dotted half-note double stop. The G and E-flat in the treble have a fresh sound because the E-flat does not belong to the diminished chord that was arpeggiated in the bass. The phrase in bar five relates to the first phrase because it consists of the three-rising-notes motive followed by a chord or double stop, similar to the first phrase.
Measure six is a forte interruption of the preceding pianissimo character with an emphatic statement the descending half-step motive. Measure five begins a sequence that alternates between rising sixteenths, reminiscent of the opening thirty-seconds, and more descending half steps. The double stop in measure seven is a repeat of the descending motive over a pedal, only this time the double stop is part of a diminished seventh chord. Measure eight recalls the three rising notes that were sounded in measures one, two, and five, though this time with a rhythmic variant.

As the previous bars slow into bar nine, there is yet another statement of the descending half step over a pedal. This time, however, the pedal descends in parallel motion with the upper voice. The subtle change of the parallel descent and the marking “move ahead a little” in bar nine suggest that the music is moving somewhere new.

The descending half-step motive continues to develop as the dotted quarter note A in bar 10 descends to the A-flat in measure 11. However, the motive continues to become more obscured and harder to recognize as it changes and develops. Though the A descends a half step over a pedal tone in measure 10 and 11, the supporting pedal tone does not sound until after the A is sounded. Up until measure 10, the pedal had sounded simultaneously with the note that would descend a half step.

The descending half-step motive and the is a signpost in comprehending the Developing Variation concept. As the piece progresses, alterations to the motives create musical contrast though the motives are still recognizable. Kirchner changes many aspects of the composition to arrive at new material, but the motives and their alterations can still be traced linearly.
Bar 12 contains complex voice interactions that recall the three-rising-notes motive, though measure 12 contains the inverse with three notes descending. The upper voice descends from the F-sharp to C-sharp to the C-natural at a quarter-note pulse while the bass descends at an eighth-note pace. Kirchner successfully uses contrasting rhythm and range to show separate voices on the cello.

There is a consistent use of diminished chords through the phrase in bars 10-12. There is a descending three-note diminished chord outlined in the bass with C (with an E-flat), A and F-sharp. There is a different diminished chord in the treble in bar 11 with A flat, B and F-natural. Bar 12 in the bass is a diminished seventh chord fully outlined while descending from B-flat to C-sharp. The fully diminished seventh chord is an important source of material in *For Cello Solo*.

The final line on the first page introduces some important material that comes back throughout the work. Measure 13 begins with another descending half step. This time the supporting lower voice rises as the upper voice descends the motivic half step. The introduction of the perfect fourth, which returns regularly throughout the work, has its first sounding in measure 13. The fourth has an intriguing sound in this context due to its stability when compared to all the tri-tones and diminished chords leading up to measure 13. The unique “slow-fast-slow” tremolo on a stable perfect fourth allows the ear to regroup and serves as a transition to the next section.

Measure 16 introduces new material that comes back multiple times throughout the work. The figure in the bass, G to a double stop D-flat and F-natural, returns several times throughout the work with the same intervals. The tonal material is taken from a whole-tone scale rather than the diminished scale for the first time in the composition.
With new material and a new scale to work with, measure 16 contrasts with the diminished-scale material that came before it.

Following the lyrical whole-tone phrase, the next two bars in 18 and 19 end the first large section of the piece. With poco rit. marked and two fermatas, the pace of the piece slows with the diminished tonality still sounding at the end of bar 19. A breath mark follows the final fermata in bar 19, allowing for the piece to begin again in bar 20.

**Measures 20-55**

After the fermata and the breath mark in measure 19 ending the previous section, a new one begins with arpeggiated pizzicato in measure 20. With the marking “poco a poco accel.” and “scherz.,” the forward energy is regained and a more playful character is explored for two bars. The first three sets of sextuplets all share a similar diminished harmony, range, and quickening feel. The fourth set of sextuplets expands the range and is marked with an allargando. The second half of 21 acts as a transition to the new material in measure 22 by intensifying the character and pulling back the tempo and stretching the range.

Kirchner shows his talent for controlling tension in measures 22 and 23. As the upper voice rises by half steps, each of the three supporting chords increases harmonic tension by progressing from a minor sixth towards a diminished chord and then raising the diminished chord by a half step. The effect is that tension builds and builds until the calando begins on the F-natural and the energy dissipates. This is the first statement of theme that has a melody rising by half step while chords below support it.
In the following ritardando bar, different materials are combined from previous sections. The F-sharp from bar 23 and the three harmonic notes are a transposed version of measure nine and the C-natural descending to B and G-sharp is a transposed version of the A to A-flat to F-natural in measures 10 and 11. In bars 23 and 24, though, the tempo is slowing instead of moving ahead. In bar 25 we hear the rising thirty-second notes going to a falling half step over a pedal tone as in the opening phrase of the piece. Following that we hear the “slow-fast-slow” tremolo reminiscent of measure 15, but this time with pizzicato and a much more dissonant harmony.

Measures 28 through 34 are generally slowing and decreasing the energy. The rising notes in the upper voice in measure 28 are reminiscent of the rising motive introduced in measure 22 and 23. Measure 29 has a cadential feel before the brief and fast interlude in measures 30 and 31.

After the faster section in measures 30 and 31 the tempo slows into the lyrical fourths. With so much of the piece having a forward feeling and sounding in a diminished key, the perfect fourths always have a restful sound. In measure 33, Kirchner writes “allargando” and the tension melts away before the “a tempo” marked in measure 35 with the B and E double-stop in the treble clef.

With “a tempo” marked, the music still has a relaxed feel before going into the fermata with a very dolce sounding B-natural marked “lunga” in measure 37. The fermata B is both the end of the previous section and the beginning of a new section going forward. A diminished chord is outlined in measure 37, still in the relaxed dolce character before a long accelerando and crescendo begins. For twenty bars, the primary rhythm is straight sixteenth notes with a few sections of eighth notes. In terms of tempo,
the pulse gradually quickens from the dolce character in 37 to “Presto!” in measure 45
before a *ritenuto* slows things down momentarily.

Kirchner skillfully builds momentum from bars 39 to measure 47, manipulating
note values and tempos. It initially takes two bars for the sixteenth notes to get to a high
point, from 39 to the downbeat of 41. Then the pace quickens as the notes are down then
back up to a high point in two bars, all while the pulse quickens. The change to eighth
notes in 43 allows the accelerando to continue without getting out of control. At the
presto in measure 45, instead of moving up and down from a high point to low point over
two or more bars, the sixteenth notes are rising during one beat and then jumping down
and rising again over one beat, quickening the pace of events and expressing a more
intense character. In the second sextuplet of 45, the range continues to expand with a
“Poco a poco ritenuto” marked. In bar 47, the character becomes more lyrical with
tenuto marks on the eighth notes. The energy from the rushing sixteenth notes has finally
dissipated with the dolce marking in measure 50.

The double stop built with the harmonic and a stopped note in measure 53 is a
low point in the energy of the work. The following bars of 54 and 55 seem to remain in
the distant calm character before the break in measure 56.

**Measures 55-73**

Following the false harmonics, there is a descending half step marked *subito forte*
in octaves from F-sharps to F-naturals, emphatically recalling the descending half step
motive. Measures 57 through 60 are marked *appassionato* and seem to be searching for something while remaining in the now familiar diminished scales common in the piece.

As happened earlier in the piece, the material in measures 61 and 62 is derived from a whole-tone scale in contrast to the surrounding diminished-scale material. The double-stop gestures in measure 61-62 are perfect transpositions of each another. Measure 62 is the same material as 61 but transposed down a whole step.

Measure 64 is marked “*start a little slower, then accelerate*” and begins the push to the end of this major section. Kirchner often uses tempo to build to climaxes or to end sections. The intensity builds with a quickening tempo and diminution of note values by moving from doubled triplets in bar 64, to sixteenth triplets in 65, to thirty-second notes in bar 66. With each measure from 64 to 66, the pace quickens until it is almost out of control before the *ritardando*. Due to the large leaps in measure 67, the intensity still builds despite the *ritardando* marked. As the end of this section nears, the tempo slows and the energy dissipates.

After the allargando in measure 68 the lyrical fourths return, this time with the rising-three-notes motive from the opening of the piece. The same closing material from measures 33-37 returns transposed in measures 69-72 to close a section. With the sounding of perfect fourths in measure 69, the character becomes more lyrical. Measure 72 is the same diminished chord and ends on the same double stop as in measure 5.
Measures 73-120

Measure 73 brings a change of timbre and texture due to the use of guitar-like pizzicato. In the following measure, a rhythmic motive consisting of a dotted eighth with a sixteenth is introduced. The rhythmic motive in measure 74 will return multiple times throughout the work with an agitated insistent feel. This time however, the rhythmic motive is sounded with the perfect fourths in a more lyrical section. In contrast to the stable strumming of the pizzicato, arco returns in bars 75 and 76 as the energy builds.

The minor sixthths that descend by minor thirds in measure 76 are a motivic element that is introduced in measure 76. It seems measure 75 through 77 are a side thought or interlude before returning to the fourths and pizzicato. The perfect fourths that return in measure 78 are a more extended version of the fourths in 74 and measure 78 is played with a bow. Before the pizzicato returns in bar 81, there is an elaborately ornamented descending half-step motive from the D to C-sharp in bar 80. Though still related to the descending half step motive, the descending measure 79 travels down and back up the cello before the D descends to the C-sharp.

The pizzicato returns in measure 81 only slightly varied from the pizzicato in 73. Arco returns halfway through bar 81. With the crescendo in measure 82 starting from a piano dynamic, a series of thirty-second notes runs up and down the cello outlining a diminished harmony. The energy builds to a climactic statement of the descending half step motive at the end of measure 83. The harmony of the grace note accompanying figure leading up to the climax in measure 83 increases the harmonic tension with each successive double stop. The harmony goes from a major sixth to a minor seventh and
finally to a tri-tone before the climactic descending half step motive makes another appearance at the end of measure 83.

Measure 84 contains the motive from measure 76, the minor sixths descending by minor third. Measure 85 transitions to the beginning of a section filled with forward moving passages. Though the sixth from F# to D in bar 87 seems as though it might be a consonant respite from the surrounding dissonance, the relentlessness of its repetition intensifies the character. The thirty-second notes in measure 90 explode from the monotony and an abbreviated version of the D and F-sharp motive sounds, this time with a major seventh from F to E-natural.

Kirchner uses repetition of musical ideas to build momentum in the section from measures 92 to 116. Measures 93 and 94 contain both contain sets of rising fast separate notes with a crescendo followed by a slurred answer. The two iterations are clearly related, though measure 93 is in simple meter with thirty-second notes and measure 94 is in compound meter with triplet sixteenth notes. The beginnings of 92, 93, and 94 all drop back to mf before a crescendo. A slightly altered version of the insistent rhythmic motive from 74 returns in measure 96, building to a high point in measure 97. Measure 101 states the insistent rhythmic motive in triplet form again.

The two related musical ideas in measures 105 and 106 recall the motive of three notes rising to a double stop from the opening phrase of the piece, though instead of three single notes rising it is made up of three sets of thirty-second notes rising to a double stop. Measure 107 contains a diminution of the rising thirty-second-note figure leading up to the descending minor-sixth motive. Due to the duple meter and accents, the
descending motive in measure 108 contrasts with the more playful character of the triplets in measures 76 and 84.

A high point is reached in measure 113 with the unrelenting dotted eight and sixteenth rhythmic motive in a whole tone tonality marked fortissimo. The high point relaxes into a combination of thematic ideas with the use of the perfect fourth F-sharp and C-sharp combined with the accompaniment figure from measure 16. The dissolution into measure 116 occurs through a change of harmony and a slowing of the rhythmic intensity. There is definitely a lost feeling in this section from measures 115-120 as the energy dissolves with the “dim. poco….to…..p.” The end of Measure 113 going into 114 is a transposed restatement of the forte interruption all the way back from measure five. The F-sharp descending to F-natural is another restatement of the descending half-step motive.

**Measures 121-160**

Measure 121 is the beginning of the final major push forward as energy is gathered after the long diminuendo in measures 116 to 119. The harmony of the beginning of 121 is in a whole-tone context but soon moves back to the diminished-scale environment that dominates the work. After two and a half measures of crescendo and poco accel. there is a Presto forte arrival in measure 123 before the triplets run down the cello.

After a decrescendo in measure 124 there is another building of momentum towards another arrival on an F natural in measure 127, more powerful than the arrival in measure 123. The fortissimo remains until the sudden drop in dynamic level at subito
piano in measure 129. From 129 there is a building of intensity to the high point at measure 135. An increase in both dynamic and tempo push until the ritardando in measure 132.

The high point of intensity in measure 135 takes six bars to dissolve into the “elegiac” moment in measure 141. As a listener, it is difficult to make sense of anything from 137 to 141 because of the disorienting continuous leaps, though all voices generally rise together to the elegiac high point in measure 141. The descending half-step motive is sounded a few times during this section, though more obscured than in its other iterations. From the confusion comes the elegiac downbeat of measure 141 with a G Major sounding arpeggiated chord.

From that downbeat of measure 141, the music makes much more audible sense. As the treble voice descends by half step, an arpeggiated accompanimental figure is repeated virtually unchanged for three bars. The thematic clarity of the repetition in bars 141-143 gives the listener something simple to understand. From the confusion before, this section is a chance for the piece to regain control.

The final drive that begins with the accelerando in measure 147 and leads to the high point in measure 154 is made up of relatively simple material that is easy to follow. The treble line from 147 comprises sets of three eighth notes with the bass accompanying with double stops on the big beats. Measure 150 quickens to sixteenth notes, and accents are added to build intensity as the accelerando reaches its peak going into 152.

After the intensity of measure 152, the D in the bass in measure 154 begins a series of broken double stops that rise to the final statement of the descending half step motive, again C to B as at the piece’s opening. The piece ends in an ambiguous tonality
with the marking “haltingly” in measure 159. The harmony of the final measure of the work avoids being diminished or whole-tone, the two main source scales of the work.
Chapter 5

TECHNICAL STUDY

In this chapter I will focus on the technical challenges of *For Cello Solo*. I will use my interviews with Carter Brey and Maria Kitsopoulos to inform my interpretation of the work. Brey gave the world premiere of *For Cello Solo* and worked with Kirchner on altering the composition to make it more idiomatic for the cello. Kitsopoulos also worked with Kirchner on the work in preparation for the recording of an all-Kirchner CD by her contemporary music group *Continuum*. The recordings of the work by Yo-Yo Ma and Maria Kitsopoulos have helped to inform my interpretive and cellistic decisions. I have also relied on my own experience with the composer and the work in finding solutions to the work’s technical and musical challenges.  

Measures 1-15

The opening phrase of the piece is rich with motivic material that is recalled throughout the work. It is important for the performer to make the motives clear while still shaping a beautiful phrase. Because the descending half-step motive is one of the

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most important in the piece, the performer should focus on highlighting the connection
between the descending half step in the treble clef in bar one, and the ascending half step
in the bass clef in bar three. The half step is an important thematic gesture and a vital
component of the opening phrase. Because of the way the phrase is written, focusing on
the motivic material in the opening phrase actually helps shape a beautiful phrase.

Highlighting the connection between the half steps in the first phrase can be
technically accomplished through matching articulation and shaping of the line. The half
steps in measures 1 and 3 have a feeling of resolution. To draw attention to the feeling of
resolution, the cellist should put more weight on the C and then release the tension to the
B in the first measure. In the third measure the cellist should put more weight on the B
and release to the C. Matching the articulation between the two motivic half steps of the
opening phrase helps the audience understand the musical rhyme.

A common technical challenge in For Cello Solo is leaping from the bass clef to
the treble clef and landing on a chord, as happens in bar 5. Leaps, especially to a double
stop, are very challenging on the cello. In measure 5, early in my learning process, I
initially played the bass clef notes on the G string, and then attempted a quick shift as
accurately as I could to the double stop high up on the D and A string in the same way I
believe Yo-Yo Ma does. I use my thumb on the octave harmonic on the D string as a
guide and place my second finger a fourth above the D harmonic. This fingering works,
but I find it difficult and uncomfortable. Listening to the Continuum recording, I noticed
that the cellist Maria Kitsopolous plays the double stop immediately after the E nearly
two octaves below the double stop. I concluded she must have played the three rising
bass notes on the C string because there was not enough time for her to make the shift.
Going up the C string puts me in position for the G and E-flat so that all I have to do is make the string crossing and I am already in position to play the double stop. I prefer Kitsopoulos’s fingering in measure 5.

There is a technical challenge in regards to harmony in bar 7. With a B and G-sharp half-note double stop over an F natural in bar 7, it is clear Kirchner intends the sound of a diminished chord. The technique of playing the downbeat of bar seven as a triple stop is very challenging. Both Ma and Kitsopoulos play the F on the D string and then shift to the B on the D string. The F, then, never sounds as part of the chord; instead, the double stop sounds separately from the F. Personally, I would like to be able to play the F and the B together before moving on to the B and G-sharp, but the musical payoff may not be worth the technical risks in this case. Hopefully the F will continue to ring in the mind of the listener and be associated with the chord. I think my analytical mind and my cello mind may have a conflict in deciding the best method to get from the F at the end of 6 to the B at the beginning of 7. My cellist self is not bothered that both Kitsopoulos and Ma have an audible slide from the F to the B, which sounds exciting and fits the character of the section. My analyst self, however, is bothered by the slide from the F to the B in measure 7 because it obscures the fact that the F is part of the B and G-sharp chord.

It is important for the cellist to make the two voices very distinct in measures 10-12. The performer is aided by the use of a grand staff that makes the visual distinction between the two voices very clear in the score. The cellist should take an active role in creating a different timbre for each voice by adjusting bow speed, bow placement, and bow pressure for each separate voice. In general, I think giving a little more bow weight
to the upper voice makes logical and aural sense. Anytime there is a double stop on the cello, the nature of the instrument helps separate the voices, because the timbre of each string will naturally differ. Finally, I think the cellist can show the purity of the descending line by trying to sustain the notes in the treble voice. Even as the bass notes accompany and make interruptions, the cellist should still give the impression that the upper line is descending without interruption.

The technical challenge in measure 12 is interesting because the two voices are moving independently of each other. Performed on piano, there would be no challenge playing the voices separately because a pianist has one hand for each voice. Cellists, however, do not have the option of having one hand for each voice. The solution to making the voices sound distinct is playing the two voices with a contrasting timbre and dynamic level.

Measure 15 asks for a type of tremolo rarely seen in cello repertoire. The “slow-fast-slow” describes the desired speeds of the tremolo. The cellist should start the tremolo slow, speed up and return to a slow speed. I prefer the way Kitsopoulos executes this technique when compared to Ma, who simply speeds up without slowing down. That said, Ma’s version creates a swelling effect with dynamics, though the tremolo speed never slows before moving on to the next bar. I believe Kitsopoulos’s version is closer to the intended marking in the score.

**Measures 16-27**

This passage starting in measure 16 introduces more technical challenges that reoccur throughout the piece. The lower accompaniment figure requires three strings to
be sounded even though Kirchner writes a melody to sound simultaneously. Kirchner wants the performer to connect the E-flat to the C musically, though it is technically impossible. The accompaniment must be played on the A-string while the E-flat and C in the upper voice also require the use of the A-string. The cellist therefore, needs to manipulate time and tone color to create the illusion of separate voices. By playing the E-flat note with a fermata, the upper voice sounds distinct. To accentuate the difference in voices, the performer needs to match timbres between the E-flat and C and play the accompaniment figure in a lower dynamic range.

The passage in bars 16 and 17 is a technical challenge. Like much of For Cello Solo, the passage is written in an awkward part of the cello. Because of the awkward position, it is important to choose a good fingering. One way to make the passage more comfortable and improve the sound is to use a harmonic for the low G. The ringing created by the harmonic helps the sound connect the G to the D-flat and F in the accompaniment figure and also takes strain off the hand, because the third finger playing the harmonic needs only to touch the string. With the third finger on the harmonic, the accompaniment figure can all be played in a single position. Shifting up to the E-flat and C and then back down to the accompanimental figure is an unavoidable challenge. Using the harmonic G makes the passage significantly easier to play.

The fermata in bar 16 is important both musically and technically. The fermata on the E-flat draws attention to the upper voice and helps the melody connect to the C-natural. The fermata also allows the cellist to reset his hand on the accompaniment double stop without ruining the flow of the music.
The technical execution of the downbeat of measure 19 is ambiguous in the score. It is unclear whether to attempt to play all four notes simultaneously or to separate them. Both Ma and Kitsopoulos play the bass-clef three-note D major chord and then shift to the F-natural. That makes sense technically because it is impossible for most people to stretch from first finger in first-position to the F-natural on the A-string with the fourth finger. Even though Kirchner wrote all four notes in vertical alignment, the bass notes share a stem while the F-natural does not. Following Ma and Kitsopoulos’s lead, I find it best to roll the bottom three notes and shift as my bow continues to roll to the A-string. The chord has to be rolled no matter what, due to the cello’s limitations. Another benefit of shifting after the three bass notes is that once I shift and my second finger is on the F natural, I am in position to play all the notes until the A-flat fermata in bar 19.

The technical challenge in measures 22 and 23 is simply being able to execute the leaps necessary to play all the notes. As the melody rises higher and higher, the cellist has to jump to a lower position to play a chord and then leap up again to play the melody. Ma and Kitsopoulos both shift between each note. The only other option would be to play the chords in a ridiculously high and awkward position that would require a very high position on the C-string, which would have poor resonance, poor sound quality, and tricky intonation. The best option is to take the time to shift between chords while attempting to play the rhythm as accurately as possible. The metronome marking is slow enough to allow a shift between each note. As with every other multiple-voice phrase in the work, contrasting the voices is vital for making sense of the phrase. Playing the accompanimental chords at a lower dynamic than the melody helps the phrase make sense.
Measures 28-60

Measure 28 is the first time there is a major difference between the recordings and the published work. The score clearly marks the F-natural in the bass to be sounded after the G-sharp chord and before the A chord. However, both recordings play the A and C-sharp chord immediately following G-sharp and D chord before moving onto the F-natural. In terms of voice leading, this makes more sense because the tri-tone D and G-sharp resolves to the C-sharp and A. The manuscript matches the recorded versions as well. It would make sense that the recordings would have more in common with the manuscripts than the published version, since I know that Kitsopoulos and Carter Brey performed the works using photocopied manuscripts.

A similar discrepancy between score and manuscript happens in measure 29. The score has the B-flat and F-sharp on the downbeat together and the C-sharp and D-natural on the second eighth note. The manuscript, however, has the D, F-sharp, and B-flat sounding simultaneously on the downbeat. Ma and Kitsopoulos both arpeggiate the D, F-sharp and B-flat as if the three notes are part of one chord.

A recurring challenge in *For Cello Solo* is the thematic and regular use of perfect fourths, which are technically challenging and awkward to play. Measures 33 through 35 are full of perfect fourths used in a melodic way. The fourths are often written in an awkward position above fourth position, which makes intonation especially difficult. It is important to think about all of the double stops, including the fourths, as a pianist would and voice the upper voice a little louder to make the melody distinct. For instance, in bar 35, it is important for the E, F-sharp and G to sound more prominent than the lower
voice, and then in 36 the lower voice can be more prominent when it has the more interesting moving line.

Measures 37 through 53 contain *accelerandos* and many sixteenth-note passages. The cellistic challenge is to keep the sense of momentum going forward without losing control. I try to play this section as rhythmically as possible so that the forward energy is not lost. The double stops, however, require some time to execute comfortably. Finding the balance between the musical and technical considerations is an ongoing struggle throughout the work.

Following the energetic passages before and after, bars 53-55 should remain very calm. Measures 53 to 55 fall between two fast intense sections, so the pianissimo character and false harmonic timbre of 54 and 55 should be a chance for the energy to dissipate.

The recorded performances of measure 54 differ from the published version of the work. The score has a pizzicato E-flat and F-sharp but the recordings have a double stop of consisting of E-flats separated by an octave. For major note changes, I think it is best to follow the recordings when there is a conflict with the printed score.

In measure 55, Ma and Kitsopoulos differ on execution of the double stop. As written, the double stop should be played with an F-natural on the A string and an A false harmonic to be played on the D-string. It is very rare in the repertoire for a double stop to be executed with a stopped note and a false harmonic. The way the double stop is written in 55 is especially difficult because it requires an awkward stretch between thumb and third finger for the false harmonic with the index finger reaching backwards towards the thumb for the F-natural. It sounds as though Ma plays the printed version as written and
he plays it beautifully. Kitsopoulos executes the double stop in bar 55 differently than Ma without altering the intended effect. Instead of sliding down from the high position of the downbeat of 55, Kitsopoulos stays high in position, stretches down to play the F on the D string, and stretches up to play the A as a natural harmonic on the A string. The double stop is made up of the F stopped and the A harmonic and therefore sounds similar to the published version of the double stop. I find that Kitsopoulos’s method produces a better tone, and the intonation is simpler because the A natural harmonic is stable and I need only adjust the stopped F for intonation. There is a stretch from the F with my first finger to the A with my fourth finger, but I have a higher success rate using Kitsopoulos’s fingering than the published version.

Although there is no dynamic marking in the published version, both recordings play *forte* in measure 56. The loud dynamic makes sense because of the *appassionato* marking, and it seems the descending half step motive is interrupting the silence that came from the calmer section before it. The next dynamic marking is in 69 and is a decrescendo, so the dynamic in 56 should be significantly higher than the *pianissimo* that ends bar 55. Therefore, I think playing the octaves *forte* in measure 56 is what the composer intended.

**Measures 61-160**

Because the music in measures 61 and 62 is made up of whole-tone material, I pull back here and try to make the section as lyrical as possible. Any time there is material from the whole-tone scale, the character is generally more lyrical and in contrast
to the driving diminished-scale material. The double stops made up of minor sixths and major thirds are a consonant respite from much of the dissonance in the rest of the piece.

The technical challenges in measure 61 are familiar in *For Cello Solo*. Again, the passage requires a quick shift to a double stop, this time from a double stop. Though there is a suggested fingering utilizing the thumb, I find a better fingering that consists of my second and third finger for the treble double stops and my first and fourth finger for the bass double stops. The intended lyrical character of the phrase actually eases the technical challenges a bit by giving the performer time to shift. The relaxed lyrical character allows for the performer to take the time to execute the shift between the positions.

It is important to choose efficient fingerings for a passage like the one found in measures 64-66 that runs up and down the cello at quick speed. One important principle in choosing a fingering is finding one that allows for as many notes as possible to be played in one position. Another important principle is taking advantage of open strings to shift. For instance, in measure 65, I play the first three notes in one position and then play the A as an open string. Even though the A is below the pitch of the D-sharp, my bow moves from the D-string to the higher A-string to allow me to move my first finger to the F-natural. Then while playing the open G-string in the second half of measure 65, I shift to have my first finger on the C-sharp. Using the open strings allows for a cleaner, more comfortable shift because no fingers are necessary to play an open string.

The sextuplet in measure 72 is representative of a common technical challenge in the work that involves going from a low range to a high range quickly and landing on a double stop. A fingering principle that I find helpful is shifting to a higher position on
lower strings to get in a better position for the double stop on higher strings. For instance, in measure 72, instead of playing the E natural on the A-string, I shift up the D-string and have my first finger on the E. Though it requires a leap from my fourth finger on the B natural to my first finger on the E, it puts me in position for the upcoming double stop. With my first finger on the E natural, I only have to stretch a minor third to the G for my second finger and then I am in position for the G and E-flat.

Measure 80 contains a descending half-step motive from the D at the beginning of the bar to the C-sharp at the end of the bar, obscured by all the notes in between the D and C-sharp. One way the cellist can help make the connection between the D and C-sharp is to play the D with a tenuto especially long to draw attention to it. Playing the D and C-sharp louder than the other notes in the bar will help the half step stand out.

A major challenge of the section from measure 87 until 116 is that the dynamic is marked almost entirely forte. Because of this section’s length and persistent loud dynamic, Kirchner uses the subito mezzo forte as a way to drop back the energy to allow a building of intensity. Each subito mezzo forte gives the performer room to grow in volume. The challenge to the performer is to avoid the monotony of playing the whole section loudly. I find it helpful to drop down to mezzo piano or even piano, which gives me more room to grow and gives the section more dynamic range.

Measure 135 is the beginning of a long diminishing of intensity and dynamic. Ma, however, makes a sudden drop in dynamic right on the downbeat of 135. Kitsopoulos makes the downbeat of 135 the high point and then gradually drops as the part is marked. I believe the high G in measure 135 is both the high point of the previous section and the beginning of a lyrical character change. Both ways of playing the
downbeat of 135 seem effective and informed. Ma’s sudden drop of dynamic makes the character change more clear, while Kitsopoulos’ dynamic makes the high point of the phrase more satisfying.

I find measures 137 through 141 to be a very technically and musically difficult passage. As I understand this passage, everything falls apart. It is hard to recognize any motives because the leaps are so large. I try to avoid as many slides as I can during this passage, though, due to the size of the leaps, some slides are unavoidable. When possible, I use extended fingerings instead of shifts for a cleaner sound. In measure 138 going into 139, for instance, instead of shifting from the G-sharp to the C-natural, I put my first finger on the G-sharp and stretch to the C-natural for a cleaner note change.

The final drive that begins with the accelerando in measure 147 leads up to the high point in measure 152. Kitsopoulos rolls the chord in the second half of the bar high in position. In contrast to Kitsopoulos, Ma plays the E-flat and C of 152 in first position on the A and D-string and then makes a dramatic slide to the C and G-sharp. Considering that this is the final loud moment of the work, I think Ma’s choice works better here. The piece may not be easy for audiences to follow, so including unmistakably dramatic gestures is a good way to inform the audience of moments in the piece.

The last line of the work contains multiple examples of challenging passages that Yo-Yo Ma alters for technical reasons. For instance, the A at the end of bar 157, the last C in 159, and the first C grace note in measure 160 are all omitted in Ma’s recording. Taking out the notes makes it easier to connect the phrase without taking the time to place an awkward double stop. Kitsopoulos however, manages to play all the notes Ma omits.
Comparison of Publications

_For Cello Solo_ joined two movements of a violin and cello duo to become a three-movement work entitled _Triptych_. Associated Music Publishers, Inc., has published two different versions of _For Cello Solo_, the publication by itself (1988) and the movement published as a part of _Triptych_. Most of the markings are identical between the two parts. The 1988 part lacks any bar numbers and also has dashed bar lines that match the dashed bar lines in the manuscript. The _Triptych_ version has normal bar lines and measure numbers throughout.

One major difference between the two publications is that the _For Cello Solo_ (1988) publication has a page out of order. Though the page numbers ascend correctly, the music actually skips to page 8 before going back to page 7. When compared to both recordings, it is clear that the order of the pages in the _Triptych_ version is correct. Because of the major mistake in the part and the addition of bar numbers, I prefer working from the _Triptych_ version of the score.

Conclusion

The purpose of this essay is to examine Leon Kirchner’s _For Cello Solo_ for a performance preparation. By providing historical and biographical context of the composition, this essay will aid a performer’s preparation of the work. Additionally, the musical and technical analyses will inform a performer’s interpretive decisions.
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