Leo Ornstein: 1893?–2002
his piano sonatas Nos. 4 and 8

Special Thanks

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- Severo Ornstein, Janice Weber, and Marc-Andre Hamelin
- Dr. Dennis Kam, Dr. Paul Wilson
a brief biographical sketch

AT 19

AT 107!

Early childhood of a prodigy

- Born in Kremenchug (Ukrainian province of Poltava)
- St. Petersburg Conservatory
- Imperial School of Music in Kiev
- Moscow Conservatory
- St. Petersburg School
Kremenchug (In Ukraine)

Escape to America 1906
- Volatile political situation
- URP (Union of Russian People)
New York

- Musical Institute (Bertha Tapper promoted and toured with Ornstein)
- 1911 New York Debut (conventional program)

- Programs began to incorporate radical compositions of contemporaries (Schoenberg, Albeniz, Debussy) as well as his own

Evolution of programming
**Turning away from the public eye**

Last public performance: 1933

Concertizing pressure, compulsive perfectionist, “small hand”

Dedicated his time to teaching and composing

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**Overall Compositional Features**

- Layering
- Embedded melodies (inside textural weaving)
- Use of bitonality
- Continuous process of Variational development
  - Fragments
  - Themes
  - Bridges
The 4th Piano Sonata

- 1924
- 1st NOTATED piano sonata
- Nos. 1-3 performed only by Ornstein, never notated and were eventually lost.

1st Theme:

Moderato con moto \( \frac{4}{4} \) 76
2nd Theme (embeds melody)

- Clusters over tonal bass sonorities
- Vertical piling of different contrapuntal voicing and sonorities
- Symphonic approach
- Simultaneous – difficult to digest
**Special Quoations (Debussy)**

- Jazz Chords
- Hebraic melodies
- Russian folk influences
- Stark contrast between sections (ABA)

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**4th Sonata 2nd Movement**

- Elements:
  - Jazz Chords
  - Hebraic melodies
  - Russian folk influences
  - Stark contrast between sections (ABA)
**4th Sonata 3rd Movement**

- Nature-Inspired bird calls
- Improvisational quality
- Delicate fluttering figurations within tonal centers

**4th Sonata 4th Movement**

- Rondo
- Form: A B A’ C A” B’ D A”’ B” A”’’
- Fluctuating textural variation of the A material
Returning ‘A’s
The 8th Piano Sonata

- 1990
- The last piano sonata composed by Ornstein

1st Movement Elements:
- Dialogue between sections
- Fragmentation
- Six themes (recurring rhythmic gesture - starts with eighth rest, rising and falling shapes)
- Unifying rhythmic gesture: beginning short phrases with an eighth rest - “breathless”

Map of 1st Movement

- INTRO 1-15
- SECTION ONE (quasi-Exposition)
- Theme I 16-33
- Theme II 34-52
- Bridge 53-55 (+ Barbaro 56-73)
- Theme III 74-100
- Theme IV 101-137
- Theme V 138-168
- Theme VI 169-190
SECTION TWO ('development')

- 191-216 Return of Theme I
- 217 Return of Theme II
- 233-242 Bridge + Barbaro (prime version of 56-73 Barbaro in previous bridge)
- 243-261 Development of bridge + barbaro
- 262-288 Return: Theme III

Section 3 ('Recap')

- 289-328 Return: Theme I
- 329-350 Theme IV prime (variation, fragmentation)
- 351-481 Burlesca
- 482-512 Return: Theme V
- 513-534 Return: Theme VI
Coda

- Return of Theme I
- *Barbaro* fragments
- 561- Close

Theme I & Returns
Final Theme I return (Coda)

Theme IV and (partial) Return
"A rhythmic pattern occurred to me and triggered the image of young dancers facing each other and improvising...some choreography of seemingly primitive origins. The faces, glazed and showing almost no response to what they were doing, made me want to make some musical comment on the scene..."
1st Mvmt. : “Life’s Turmoil and a Few Bits of Satire”

- Intro

Theme I
Theme II

Bridge
Theme I (Return)

Theme II Return
“BARBARO”
(part of bridge)
Development of bridge

Theme III Prime
Theme I (Recap)

BRIDGE
Theme IV (fragmented)

“Burlesca”
Theme V - Return

Theme VI (prime)
CODA (Theme I)

- Vignettes
- Programmatic
- Tonal, written with key signatures
- Simplicity - “break” from 1st movement

8th Sonata 2nd Movement
### 2nd Movement Titles

- Entire movement titled: “A Trip to the Attic - a Tear or Two for a Childhood Forever Gone”
- A. The Bugler
- B. Lament For a Lost Toy
- C. A Half Mutilated Cradle - Berceuse
- D. First Carousel Ride and Sounds of a Hurdy Gurdy

### 8th Sonata 3rd Movement

- Collage of compositional techniques
- Unrelenting, insistent drive of motoric movement
- Monothematic
- Passagework with discontinuous patterns
Returning Theme: 3rd Mvmt.

More varied returns..
Performance Issues

- Technical Challenges
  - Passagework
  - Making cohesive multisectional movements
  - Pedal issues: ¼ and ½

- Mental challenges/distractions
  - Multiple accidental indications without key signatures

First Carousel Ride and Sounds of a Hurdy Gurdy
Thank you for coming!