

Part I

Christmas Impressions for String Orchestra

Part II

An Analysis of George Gershwin's piano solo version of *Rhapsody In Blue*

by
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Abstract

Part One, *Christmas Impressions For String Orchestra* is a piece based on Christmas songs that the composer heard as a child. The songs, including *Jingle Bells*, *Adeste Fideles*, *Angels We Have Heard on High*, *Deck The Halls*, *The First Noel*, *Silent Night*, *What Child Is This*, *Il est né le Divin Enfant*, *Joy To The World*, and *God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen*, are either combined or are freely varied for the purposes of creating musical interest. Compositional techniques include dissonant harmony, harmonic substitution, complex chords, rearranged accompaniment, melodic transformation, modal treatment, and jazz-like voicings.

Part Two examines George Gershwin's piano solo version of *Rhapsody In Blue*. The aim is to discover how the American music spirit is reflected in this great work. The study presents a brief account of Gershwin's background, followed by a parametric analysis including form, harmony, tonal centers outline, rhythmic structure, textural structure, and climaxes. The thesis shows that, despite putative shortcomings, Gershwin created a revolutionary fusion of American popular and Western classical music elements. The detailed examination of the *Rhapsody* proves that genius and artistry existed and flourished in Gershwin's music.

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Part I

Christmas Impressions for String Orchestra

By Yanda Zhu

Introduction

Some of the first musical recollections that I have include listening to Western Christmas songs. They enabled me to realize the beauty of Western music, and increased my curiosity about Western countries and culture. I chose the songs based on my early exposure to, and love for this music. It felt appropriate to close my time in America with an American project.

Christmas Impressions

For String Orchestra

Yanda Zhu

♩ = 112 *Cheerful and light* (Jingle Bells)

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Double Bass

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

f

mf
div.

mf

sfz < *mf*

sfz < *mf*

4

6

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

8

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

rall.

8va

a tempo ♩ = 112

10

Vln. I *f*
a tempo

Vln. II *mf*
a tempo
(8)

Vla. *mf*
a tempo

Vc. *mf*
a tempo

Db. *mf*

div.

12

Vln. I *div.*

Vln. II *unis.*

Vla. *loco.*
unis.

Vc. *unis.*

Db. *unis.*

14

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

unis.

16

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

dim.

div.

p

div.

p

p

18

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

p

div.

f

dim.

mp

unis.

mp

mp

mp

21

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

mp

unis.

mp

mp

mp

mp

24

Vln. I *mp unis.*

Vln. II *mf div.*

Vla. *f*

Vc. *f*

Db. *f*

rall. $\text{♩} = 115$
a tempo

27

Vln. I *f div. a tempo*

Vln. II *mf div. a tempo*

Vla. *mf*

Vc. *mf a tempo*

Db. *mf a tempo*

30

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

6

unis. 6

32

A

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

6

6

unis. 8va

loco.

div.

36

rall.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

div.
8va

f

mf

sub. p
div. loco.

mf

mf

Gently (Angles We Have Heard On High)

40

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

div.

f

mf

43

B

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

mf

unis.

mp

mp

mp

46

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

49

Musical score for measures 49-51. The score is for five instruments: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (Db.). The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#).
- Vln. I: Treble clef, starts at measure 49 with a forte (*f*) dynamic, playing a melodic line with slurs.
- Vln. II: Treble clef, starts at measure 49 with a forte (*f*) dynamic. Measure 50 is marked *div.* (divisi), and measure 51 is marked *unis.* (unisono).
- Vla.: Alto clef, starts at measure 49 with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. Measure 50 is marked *unis.*
- Vc.: Bass clef, starts at measure 49 with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic.
- Db.: Bass clef, starts at measure 49 with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic.

52

Musical score for measures 52-54. The score is for five instruments: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (Db.). The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#).
- Vln. I: Treble clef, measure 52 has a half note, measure 53 has a whole note with a fermata, and measure 54 has a whole note with a fermata.
- Vln. II: Treble clef, measure 52 has a half note, measure 53 has a whole note with a fermata, and measure 54 has a whole note with a fermata.
- Vla.: Treble clef, starts at measure 52 with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. Measure 53 is marked *div.* (divisi), and measure 54 is marked *f* (forte).
- Vc.: Bass clef, starts at measure 52 with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. Measure 53 is marked *div.*
- Db.: Bass clef, starts at measure 52 with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic.

55 **C**

Vln. I *f*

Vln. II *mf*

Vla. *unis. 6* *p* *6* *div.* *mp*

Vc. *mf* *6* *6* *mf*

Db. *mf*

57

Vln. I *dim*

Vln. II *dim*

Vla. *div.*

Vc. *div.*

Db.

60 **D** rit. $\text{♩} = 85$

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

mf

f *div.*

mp

dim.

$\text{♩} = 83$
Very lightly (Deck the Halls)

63 *8va*

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

f *unis.*

f

mf

mf

64 *loco.*

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

This system contains measures 64 through 68. It features five staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The key signature is B-flat major. Measure 64 is marked with a first ending bracket and the instruction 'loco.'. The Violin I part has a first ending bracket over measures 64-68. The Viola part has a first ending bracket over measures 64-68. The Violoncello and Double Bass parts have first ending brackets over measures 64-68. The system ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

65

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

This system contains measures 65 through 69. It features five staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The key signature is B-flat major. Measure 65 is marked with a first ending bracket. The Violin I part has a first ending bracket over measures 65-69. The Violin II part has a first ending bracket over measures 65-69. The Viola part has a first ending bracket over measures 65-69. The Violoncello and Double Bass parts have first ending brackets over measures 65-69. The system ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

66

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc. *unis.*

Db.

67 **E**

Vln. I

Vln. II *f*

Vla. *unis.* *f*

Vc. *mf*

Db. *mf*

poco rit.

68

15

Musical score for measures 68-72. The score is for five instruments: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (Db.). The key signature is two flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor). The tempo is marked *poco rit.* (poco ritardando). The dynamics are marked *f* (forte) for all instruments. The Vln. I and Vln. II parts feature sixteenth-note runs with slurs and accents. The Vla. part is marked *div.* (divisi) and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Vc. and Db. parts feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The measure numbers 68, 69, 70, 71, and 72 are indicated below the staves.

$\text{♩} = 82$
a tempo

69

Musical score for measures 69-72. The score is for five instruments: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (Db.). The key signature is two flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor). The tempo is marked *a tempo* with a metronome marking of $\text{♩} = 82$. The dynamics are marked *mf* (mezzo-forte) for Vln. I and Vln. II, and *mp* (mezzo-piano) for Vla., Vc., and Db. The Vln. I and Vln. II parts feature sixteenth-note runs with slurs and accents. The Vla. part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Vc. and Db. parts feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The measure numbers 69, 70, 71, and 72 are indicated below the staves.

70

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

mp

mp

mp

div.

unis.

f

p

p

71

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

mf

div.

mf

div.

mp

div.

f

mf

mp

f

mp

Slightly subdued- O Christmas Tree (Oh Tannenbaum)

74

Musical score for measures 74-76. The score is for five instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature changes from 4/4 to 3/4 at the end of measure 76. Dynamics include *p*, *mf*, and *mp*. A crescendo hairpin is present in the Violin I part across measures 74-76.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

p *mf* *p* *mp* *mp*

77

Musical score for measures 77-78. The score is for five instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature changes from 3/4 to 3/4 (maintained). Dynamics include *mp*, *f*, and *mp*. A box containing the letter 'F' is placed above measure 77. The Violin I part features a melodic line with slurs and accents. The Violin II part has a dynamic marking of *f*. The Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass parts are marked *mp* and play a rhythmic accompaniment.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

mp *f* *mp* *mp* *mp*

F

unis. *unis.*

79

79

Vln. I *mp*

Vln. II

Vla. *div.*

Vc. *mp*

Db. *mf*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 79, 80, and 81. Measure 79 features a first violin part with a melodic line of eighth notes, marked *mp*. The second violin part has a few notes. The viola part consists of chords, with a *div.* (divisi) instruction in measure 81. The violin II, viola, and double bass parts have a similar rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Measure 80 continues these patterns. Measure 81 shows the first violin part with a melodic line, marked *mp*. The second violin part has a few notes, marked *f*. The viola part has chords, marked *div.*. The violin II, viola, and double bass parts have a similar rhythmic pattern. The double bass part is marked *mf*.

82

82

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 82, 83, and 84. Measure 82 features a first violin part with a melodic line of eighth notes. The second violin part has a few notes. The viola part consists of chords. The violin II, viola, and double bass parts have a similar rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Measure 83 continues these patterns. Measure 84 shows the first violin part with a melodic line. The second violin part has a few notes. The viola part has chords. The violin II, viola, and double bass parts have a similar rhythmic pattern.

broadly *rit.* - - - - - 19
tr

84

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

mp

f

broadly

f

broadly

f

broadly

f

$\text{♩} = 85$
Very lightly (The First Noel)

88

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

dim.

p

mp

unis.

mf

div.

f

f

91

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

94

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

mf

unis.

mf

mp

97 **G**

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

9

mf

9

div.

f

mf

mf

mf

Detailed description: This system covers measures 97 and 98. Measure 97 is marked with a 'G' in a box. The first violin part (Vln. I) features a melodic line with a crescendo leading to a 9-measure slur in measure 98, marked *mf*. The second violin part (Vln. II) has a melodic line in measure 97 and rests in measure 98, followed by a *f* dynamic marking and a *div.* (divisi) instruction. The viola part (Vla.) plays chords in measure 97 and rests in measure 98, with a *mf* dynamic marking. The violin part (Vc.) has a melodic line in measure 97 and rests in measure 98, with a *mf* dynamic marking. The double bass part (Db.) has a melodic line in measure 97 and rests in measure 98, with a *mf* dynamic marking.

99

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

9

mf

9

f

mp

Detailed description: This system covers measures 99 and 100. The first violin part (Vln. I) has a rest in measure 99 and a 9-measure slur in measure 100, marked *mf*. The second violin part (Vln. II) plays chords in measure 99 and rests in measure 100, with a *f* dynamic marking. The viola part (Vla.) plays chords in measure 99 and rests in measure 100, with a *mp* dynamic marking. The violin part (Vc.) has a melodic line in measure 99 and rests in measure 100. The double bass part (Db.) has a melodic line in measure 99 and rests in measure 100.

101

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

uni.

mf

div.

9 *mf* 9

103

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

mp

cresc.

f

div.

f

unis.

mf

unis.

mp

mf

mf

H solo.

107

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

Majestic

rall.

f

dim. pp

Majestic

f

dim. pp

Majestic

mf div.

dim. pp

Majestic

mf div.

dim. pp

Majestic

mf

dim. pp

unis.

♩ = 95
solo. (Silent Night)

112

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

p

div.

mf unis.

f

p

mf

118 *rall.*

Vln. I *f* *cresc.*

Vln. II *mf* *cresc.*

Vla. *mp* *cresc.*

Vc. *mp*

Db. *mp*

♩ = 96
a tempo

122

Vln. I *ff* *a tempo* *p* *f*

Vln. II *mf* *a tempo* *p* *mf*

Vla. *mf* *a tempo* *p* *mf*

Vc. *mf* *a tempo* *mf*

Db. *mf* *mf*

128

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

1

132

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

6

133

Vln. I *rit.* *solo.*

Vln. II *unis.* *cresc.* *dim.* *div.*

Vla. *dim.* *div.*

Vc. *dim.* *unis.*

Db. *dim.*

Detailed description: This system covers measures 133 to 136. Measure 133 features a first violin melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The second violin and viola play a triplet eighth-note accompaniment, marked 'unis.' and 'cresc.'. The third violin and double bass play a similar triplet accompaniment. In measure 134, the first violin part is marked 'rit.' and 'solo.', while the other instruments continue with their accompaniment. Measures 135 and 136 show the first violin playing a sustained note with a decrescendo hairpin, while the accompaniment continues. Dynamics include 'dim.', 'div.', 'unis.', and 'cresc.'.

137

Vln. I *f*

Vln. II *mp*

Vla. *mp*

Vc. *mf*

Db. *mf*

Detailed description: This system covers measures 137 to 140. The first violin part begins in measure 137 with a dynamic marking of 'f'. The second violin and viola play a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes, marked 'mp'. The third violin and double bass play a similar accompaniment, marked 'mf'. The first violin part continues with a melodic line in measures 138, 139, and 140. Dynamics include 'f', 'mp', and 'mf'.

141

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

unis.

Detailed description: This system of musical notation covers measures 141 through 144. It features five staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The Violin I part consists of quarter and half notes. The Violin II part plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in chords. The Viola part has a similar eighth-note pattern, with a change in clef from bass to treble in measure 143. The Violoncello and Double Bass parts play a simple harmonic accompaniment of quarter notes. The word "unis." is written above the Viola staff in measure 143.

145

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

J

Detailed description: This system of musical notation covers measures 145 through 148. It features the same five staves as the previous system. A box containing the letter "J" is placed above the first measure of the Violin I staff. The Violin I part continues with quarter and half notes. The Violin II part features a more complex rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents. The Viola part continues with eighth-note chords. The Violoncello and Double Bass parts continue with their harmonic accompaniment. The key signature remains one sharp (F#).

149

K

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

p

f

mf

p

mf

154

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

f

159

L

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

f

mf

f

mf

163

poco rit.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

dim.

div.

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

p

♩ = 130

167 March, not heavy (il est ne le Diwin)

Vln. I *f*

Vln. II *unis.*
f

Vla. *mf* 3

Vc. *div.*
mp

Db. *mf*

173

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla. 3

Vc.

Db.

179

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

mp

mp div.

f unis.

f

soft ly

mf

186

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

f

soft ly

mf

poco rit.

a tempo = 128

193

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

p

mp

div.

div.

div.

div.

f

200

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

3

3

3

3

3

205

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

210

rit.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

unis.

f

unis.

216 ♩ = 108 *Slower* (O Come All Ye Faithful)

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

221 *Tenderly (slightly slower)*

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

div.

unis.

mf

f

mf

225

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

228 *a tempo*

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

mf
a tempo

mf
unis. a tempo

mp
a tempo

mp
a tempo

div.

mp

231 *rall.*

Vln. I *f* *dim.*

Vln. II *f* *dim.*

Vla. *mf* *dim.*

Vc. *mf* *dim.*

Db. *mf* *dim.*

♩ = 140 Keep it moving— God Rest You merry, Gent lemen)

235 *solo.*

Vln. I *f*

Vln. II *mp*

Vla. *mf*

Vc. *mf*

Db. *mf*

238

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

Detailed description: This musical score block covers measures 238 to 241. It features five staves: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (Db.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The Vln. I part begins with a *p* dynamic and plays a melodic line of quarter notes. The Vln. II part plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Vla. part plays a similar eighth-note pattern. The Vc. part provides harmonic support with chords, and the Db. part plays a steady bass line of quarter notes.

242

M

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

div.

Detailed description: This musical score block covers measures 242 to 245. It features the same five staves as the previous block. The key signature remains one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. A box containing the letter 'M' is positioned above the Vln. I staff at the start of measure 242. The Vln. I part continues its melodic line. The Vln. II part continues its eighth-note pattern. The Vla. part is marked with *div.* (divisi) starting in measure 242, indicating that the instrument should play multiple parts of the eighth-note pattern. The Vc. and Db. parts continue their respective harmonic and bass line parts.

245

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

Detailed description: This system of musical notation covers measures 245, 246, and 247. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The Vln. I part features a melodic line with quarter and eighth notes, and a fermata over the final note of measure 247. The Vln. II part plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Vla. part has a similar eighth-note pattern. The Vc. part provides harmonic support with chords in measures 246 and 247. The Db. part consists of a constant low-frequency accompaniment of two notes.

248

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

unis.

Detailed description: This system of musical notation covers measures 248, 249, and 250. The key signature remains one sharp (F#). The Vln. I part continues its melodic line. The Vln. II part plays eighth notes. The Vla. part has a similar eighth-note pattern, with the instruction *unis.* (unison) appearing above the staff in measure 250. The Vc. part provides harmonic support with chords in measures 249 and 250. The Db. part consists of a constant low-frequency accompaniment of two notes.

♩ = 65 Jingle Bells³⁹
poco accel. . .

251 *rit.*

Vln. I
dim.

Vln. II
dim.

Vla.
dim.

Vc.
dim.

Db.
dim.

4/4

255

Vln. I
mp *ff*
div.

Vln. II
mp

Vla.
mp *ff*

Vc.
mp *ff*

Db.
ff

♩ = 100 *With Spirit and Playful*

258 *solo.*

Vln. I *f*

Vln. II *mf*

Vla. *mf* *div.*

Vc. *mf*

Db. *mf*

261

♩ = 120 *A bit faster*

Vln. I *f*

Vln. II *f unis.*

Vla. *f unis.* *mf*

Vc. *mf*

Db. *mf*

264

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 264, 265, and 266. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The Vln. I part starts with a half note F#4, followed by a half note G4, and then a half note A4. The Vln. II part starts with a half note F#3, followed by a half note G3, and then a half note A3. The Vla. part has a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents. The Vc. and Db. parts play a simple harmonic accompaniment of quarter notes.

267

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

N

Detailed description: This system contains measures 267, 268, and 269. The key signature changes to one flat (Bb). The Vln. I part starts with a half note Bb4, followed by a half note C5, and then a half note D5. The Vln. II part starts with a half note Bb3, followed by a half note C4, and then a half note D4. The Vla. part has a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents. The Vc. and Db. parts play a simple harmonic accompaniment of quarter notes. A box containing the letter 'N' is placed above the Vln. I staff in measure 269.

42 270

Vln. I

Vln. II *div.*

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

273

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

276

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

0

mf

mf

mp

mp

mp

279

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

283

allargando

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

mf
allargando

cresc.

mf
allargando

cresc.

mp
allargando

cresc.

mp
allargando

cresc.

♩ = 100 rit.

287

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

293 $\text{♩} = 98$ Joy to the World

Vln. I *f*

Vln. II *f*

Vla. *f* *div.*

Vc. *mf*

Db. *f*

299

Vln. I $\frac{1}{2}f$ *P* *mf*

Vln. II *f* *mf*

Vla. *f* *mf* *div.*

Vc. *f* *f*

Db. *f* *f*

304

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

div.

mf

f

mf

unis

mf

mf

309 **Q**

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

ff

f

mf

mf dim.

f

mf

mf dim.

f

mp

mf dim.

f

mf

mf

dim.

R

315

Vln. I *mp*

Vln. II *mp*

Vla. *p*

Vc. *p*

Db. *mp*

316

Vln. I *p* *ff*

Vln. II *p* *ff*

Vla. *f* *p* *ff*

Vc. *f* *p* *ff*

Db. *f* *p* *ff*

Part II

An Analysis of George Gershwin's piano solo version of

Rhapsody In Blue

By Yanda Zhu

Thesis

Youngstown State University

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Family background

George Gershwin, born Jacob Gershowitz September 26, 1898 in Brooklyn, became a professional musician at the age of 16 when he started working as a song plugger. A song plugger was a piano player employed by music publishers in the early 20th century to promote, help publicize, and sell new sheet music. Later, he changed his family name to “Gershwin.” His parents came from St. Petersburg. His mother, Rose Bruskin, belonged to a prosperous family. Morris Gerovitz, his father, was well esteemed in the old country, because George’s grandfather had invented a model gun sold to the Russian army¹.

Around 1891, the Bruskins migrated to America and settled in New York’s East side. Soon after, his father, following in the Bruskins’ footsteps, migrated to America and later changed his family name to ‘Gershvin’. He earned his living as a designer of women’s shoes. George’s parents married on July 21, 1895 in a rathskeller on Houseton street in the East Side; Rose was 19, and Morris was 24.²

One year later, Ira Gershwin, born December 6, 1896, was the first of four children from the immigrant family. George Gershwin was the second. The other two children, Arthur and Frances, were born on March 14, 1900 and on December 6, 1906 respectively. Both of them expressed a strong interest in

¹ Jablonski, Edward, *Gershwin*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), p.1

² Peyser, Joan, *The memory of All that: The Life of George Gershwin*, (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corp., 2006), pp.21-25

music.³

Ira, who established himself as a lyricist, was closely associated with George's affairs.⁴ Starting with *The Man I Love*, they wrote a lot of songs together, including *Oh Kay* and *Funny Face*. Not only did he spend a considerable amount of time collaborating with George's on popular songs, Ira also helped George with conducting his numerous personal and business matters.⁵

Arthur, like George, was full of enthusiasm about composition. Although he was a prolific composer, few of his pieces caught the public's attention. Once he joked, "I am a leading composer of unpublished songs." One of his few successful pieces was the musical comedy, *The Lady Says Yes*.⁶

Frances, the only daughter of the Gershwins, had a lovely voice. This enabled her to be popular as a singer at different parties and on the Broadway musical-comedy stage. She took part in shows like *Merry-Go-Round* and the second edition of *Americana*. Sometimes, George invited his young sister to sing his songs and admired her performances of his music.⁷

Gershwin's early musical life

Gershwin became interested in music when he attended P.S. 25 on the East Side. He was deeply affected by Dvorak's *Humoresque* performed by an

³ Carnovale, Norbert, *George Gershwin: a bio-bibliography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), p.3

⁴ Greenberg, Rodney, *George Gershwin* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998), pp.17-18

⁵ Schwartz, Charles, *Gershwin: his life and music* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Press, 1973), p.9

⁶ Greenberg, Rodney, *George Gershwin* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998), p.15

⁷ *ibid*, p.15

eight year-old violinist—Maxie Rosenzweig, who later came to be well known as the violin soloist Maxie Rosen. Afterwards, Rosen and Gershwin became good friends and young Gershwin began to learn some elements of piano playing with Rosen’s help. Playing and listening to music together with Rosen brought young Gershwin a lot of happiness, even though his playing was at first mostly by ear.⁸

He began his formal study of piano with a Miss Green, a local piano teacher. Gershwin next tried various piano teachers for two years, before being introduced to Charles Hambitzer by Jack Miller, the pianist in the Beethoven Symphony Orchestra. Until his death in 1918, Hambitzer acted as Gershwin's mentor.⁹ Hambitzer not only taught Gershwin conventional piano technique, but also introduced him to European classical music, especially Chopin, Debussy and Liszt, and encouraged him to attend orchestra concerts. During the time he taught young Gershwin, Hambitzer was so excited about George’s musical talent that he told his sister in a letter: “I have a new pupil... the boy is a genius, without a doubt; he’s crazy about music and can not wait until it’s time to take his lesson...” Young Gershwin showed a significant interest in classic music, but, at the time, he also projected his own preference for Jazz and popular music, which shaped his later career.¹⁰

Except for piano lessons, Gershwin didn’t receive consistent formal

⁸ David, Schiff, *Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.46

⁹ Jablonski, Edward, *Gershwin*. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), pp.11-12

¹⁰ Rimler, Walter, *George Gershwin: An Intimate Portrait*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), pp.2-3

theoretical training. Instead, he studied harmony and theory briefly with many well-known musicians. It was while studying with Hambitzer that George first began to be harmony-conscious. Hambitzer, however, never taught him much harmony. Besides Hambitzer, Gershwin studied with Arthur Bodanzky, Edward Kilenyi, Ernest Hutcheson, and Ruben Goldmark, among others. Bodanzky taught young Gershwin for a very short time, because he thought that Gershwin didn't work very hard on his lessons. Between 1919 and 1921, Gershwin took lessons with Kilenyi and studied harmony and theory, but the content was rather elementary in nature. Ernest Hutcheson just taught him one harmony course.¹¹

Goldmark introduced Gershwin to instrumentation, orchestration and harmonic research in 1923. As in his studies with Goldmark, Gershwin would not devote much time to prepare lessons and exercises. After only three meetings, Goldmark stopped the lessons. However, Gershwin showed his first string quartet, *Lullaby* (completed in 1919), to Goldmark.¹² The piece, though it had some theoretical shortcomings, was praised by Goldmark. "It's good," Goldmark recalled. "Yes, very good... It's plainly to be seen that you have already learned a great deal of harmony from me!"¹³

Although Gershwin had studied music with different teachers, after his early study he still had many shortcomings as a musician. In spite of his

¹¹ Rimler, Walter, *George Gershwin: An Intimate Portrait*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), p.2

¹² Peyser, Joan, *The memory of All that: The Life of George Gershwin* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corp., 2006), p.56

¹³ Schwartz, Charles, *Gershwin: his life and music* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Press, 1973), p.53-55

teachers, he was largely self-taught as a composer.¹⁴ However, only 5 years later, Gershwin completed numerous masterpieces such as the *Rhapsody*. His basic musical talent played an indispensable role throughout his life.

In May of 1914, George left high school at the age of 15 and took a job as a pianist and song plugger at Remick's Music Publishers in Tin Pan Alley.¹⁵ Here, working as a full-time pianist, he learned formulas applied by other writers for various moods and emotions. It seemed as though he was a sponge, absorbing everything shown in the music that he played.¹⁶ His experience as a song plugger laid the foundation for his career as a composer.

During the early stages of his career, Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern had exerted a significant musical influence on Gershwin. Berlin and Kern, who were two of the greatest American theater composers, became role models for Gershwin. Their musical works provided young Gershwin a vast amount of ideas.¹⁷ Once Gershwin confessed, "Irving Berlin is the greatest American song composer... American's Franz Schubert" and "I studied Kern, I imitated him. I admired him... I followed Kern's work and studied each song he composed... [Everything] I wrote at this period sounded as though Kern had written it himself."¹⁸

At the same time he was working at Remick's, he began to seek different publishers for his songs. It turned out that many of them didn't think his songs

¹⁴ David, Schiff, *Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.47

¹⁵ Jablonski, Edward, *Gershwin* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), pp.13-14

¹⁶ Peyser, Joan, *The memory of All that: The Life of George Gershwin*, (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corp., 2006), pp.30-31

¹⁷ Carnovale, Norbert, *George Gershwin: a bio-bibliography*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), p.4

¹⁸ Schwartz, Charles, *Gershwin: his life and music* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Press, 1973), pp. 48-52

were worth publishing. However, George was not easily discouraged by these failures. He was fully convinced that, one day, his songs would be exposed to the public, as long as he never gave up on looking for publishers. In 1916, when Gershwin was 17 years old, one of his songs –*When You Want 'Em, You Can't Get 'Em, When You've Got 'Em, You Don't Want 'Em*—was published, not by Remick's, but by Harry von Tilzer. This only earned him \$5. After the first success, he became more ambitious about writing music.¹⁹

Also in 1916, under the support of Sigmund Romberg, the principal Winter Garden composer, George began to write music for Broadway. Then, he became one of members of the Winter Garden production, *The Passing Show of 1916*, and he wrote a song, *Making of a Girl*, as a part of the show. With two of his songs published, others being played on Broadway, and a desire to become a more advanced composer (or a Broadway composer), he left his song plugger job at Tin Pan Alley on March 17th, 1917. From then on, he was a professional composer.²⁰

He also kept his eyes open to the theater. In 1917, his novelty rag, *Rialto Ripples*, published by Remick, proved to be a commercial success. On May 26th 1919, Gershwin desires to be a full-fledged Broadway composer came true with his musical, *La La Lucille*.²¹ Soon after *La La Lucille* was performed, a famous composer of operettas, Victor Jacobi, told Gershwin how much he

¹⁹ Jablonski, Edward, *Gershwin* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), pp.18-19

²⁰ Peyser, Joan, *The memory of All that: The Life of George Gershwin*, (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corp., 2006), pp.43-45

²¹ Schwartz, Charles, *Gershwin: His life and music* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Press, 1973). p.31

liked his music, stating “You are miles ahead of all of us.”²²

Later, Gershwin scored his first major national hit with the song *Swanee*, with lyrics by Irving Caesar.²³ After its appearance in Al Jolson’s musical, *Sinbad*, *Swanee* sold a million sheet music copies and two million records (Jolson first recorded it for Columbia Records in January 1920).²⁴ Although this piece brought him fame, Gershwin knew, by his own standards, that he still had far to go.

George and Ira Gershwin became the dominant Broadway songwriters to emerge during the 1920s. Working together, they fashioned the lyrics to fit the melodies with a brilliant sense of coherence. Their extraordinary collaboration led to a succession of 22 musical comedies, among them *Lady, Be Good!*, *Oh, Kay!*, *Funny Face*, *Strike Up The Band*, *Girl Crazy*, and *Of Thee I Sing*—the first musical comedy to win a Pulitzer Prize.²⁵

In 1920, George White, a prominent musical producer, chose Gershwin to be the composer for his annual *Scandals*. In the first version, *Scandals of 1920*, Gershwin wrote *Idle Dreams*, *My Lady*, *The Song of Long Ago*, etc. Afterward, George composed the music for five successive editions of *Scandals*. It is widely accepted that the *Scandals of 1922* was the pinnacle of the whole series.²⁶

²² Ewen, David, *The story of George Gershwin* (New York, H. Holt and Company, 1943), pp.78-79

²³ Rosenberg, Deena, *Fascinating Rhythm: The collaboration of George and Ira Gershwin* (University of Michigan Press, 1991), pp.39-41

²⁴ Britannica Educational Publishing, *The 100 Most Influential Musicians of All Time* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2009), p.164

²⁵ Rosenberg, Deena, *Fascinating Rhythm: The collaboration of George and Ira Gershwin* (University of Michigan Press, 1991), pp.75-197

²⁶ Carnovale, Norbert, *George Gershwin: a bio-bibliography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000),

His musical sights were not limited to Tin Pan Alley and Broadway musical comedy. After the *Scandals of 1922*, and as a result of a discussion between Buddy De Sylva and Brown & Henderson, Gershwin wrote music for a one-act opera—*Blue Monday* (later renamed *135th Street*), which was originally designed for the *Scandals of 1922*.²⁷ After a tryout performance in New Haven, this short opera received different reactions. Charles Darnton, in the *World*, said that:

It was “the most dismal, stupid and incredible blackface sketch that has probably ever been perpetrated. In it a dusky soprano finally killed her gambling man... and then turned the pistol on herself.”²⁸

Another voice, however, that was positive came from the New York Post’s Charles Pike Swayer: “It was a little bit of La Boheme with the ‘Liebestod’ of Tristan to close...but it was remarkably well sung and acted.”²⁹ No matter what kind of opinions were expressed by journalists, there was no doubting the impressive theatrical experience Gershwin had already accumulated. By the end of 1922, with the success of *George White’s Scandals*, Gershwin not only increased his fortune, but also began to be a national-known composer.³⁰

One year later, on November 1, 1923, Gershwin made his first appearance in a major concert by Eva Gauthier, a Canadian mezzo-soprano singer. This concert was entitled “Recital of Ancient and Modern Music for Voice”. The ancients included Bellini, Perucchini and Purcell; the moderns, Bartok,

pp.39-45

²⁷ David, Schiff, *Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 44-45

²⁸ Jablonski, Edward, *Gershwin* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), pp.24-25

²⁹ Ewen, David, *A journey to greatness* (New York: Holt Press, 1956), pp. 90-93

³⁰ Rosenberg, Deena, *Fascinating Rhythm: The collaboration of George and Ira Gershwin*.(University of Michigan Press, 1991), pp.50-51

Hindemith, Schoenberg, Bliss, Milhaud, Delage, Hennessy—and Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, Walter Donaldson and George Gershwin. During the concert, three Gershwin songs were on the musical menu, and he accompanied Gauthier in the popular pieces. The audience who attended the concert was deeply impressed by Gershwin’s brilliant performance. Deems Taylor reported in the *World* that Gershwin’s songs, “stood up amazingly well, not only as entertainment but as music.”³¹

After this performance, Gershwin was accepted as a composer and pianist in the American song-writing tradition. The Eva Gauthier concert in New York, as well, brought him the most important success of the whole year—a year before the *Rhapsody in Blue*.³²

Rhapsody in Blue

Whenever this masterpiece is mentioned, we cannot omit the great name—Paul Whiteman, leader of one of the most popular bands in the United States during the 1920s. It is through George White that Gershwin came into close contact with Whiteman. Like Gershwin, Whiteman had entered the field of popular music determined to create new artistic horizons. Both Gershwin and Whiteman had mutual musical interests. In 1923, when collaborating and conducting with *George White Scandals*, Whiteman began to be impressed by Gershwin’s fresh musical language. For Whiteman, Gershwin was a composer who could bring American popular music to a higher level, an equal level to

³¹ Jablonski, Edward, *Gershwin* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), pp.57-60

³² Carnovale, Norbert, *George Gershwin: a bio-bibliography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp.52-53

symphony, opera or concerto. Whiteman soon had strong indications that his faith in the young composer had not been misplaced. Deeply inspired by *Blue Monday*, Whiteman came up with an idea to plan a special experimental concert in which he would present a panorama of America's best popular music. Gershwin, at Whiteman's request, would write a revolutionary piece for the concert.³³

Initially, however, Gershwin didn't show great interest in Whiteman's suggestion to write an original work for the concert. First, Gershwin was not confident enough in his ability with writing a larger work. Gershwin said that: "Why do you come to me, Paul? ... I wouldn't know how to write a big work if my life depended on it."³⁴ Second, he was busy with the musical *Sweet Little Devil*,

"There was not enough time left for him to consider a new piece and he almost forgot to compose this work. It was not until he read a report in the New York's *Herald Tribune* that he was working on a "symphony" for the Whiteman concert that he had to take the commission seriously."³⁵

Gershwin, as previously stated by his musical guide, Hambitzer, was so talented that he could write music anytime and anywhere. When improvising on the piano at a party, he suddenly heard the flowing melody that later became the core of the slow section of *Rhapsody in Blue*. Another important theme of *Rhapsody in Blue* jumped out to him when he was on the train to

³³ Jablonski, Edward, *Gershwin* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), pp. 62-64

³⁴ Ewen, David, *The story of George Gershwin* (New York, H. Holt and Company, 1943), p.87

³⁵ Rimler, Walter, *George Gershwin: An Intimate Portrait*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), p.4

Boston for the opening of *Sweet Little Devil*. He finished the work in his head with the steely rhythms of the train sounding in his ear.³⁶ Following Ira's advice, Gershwin changed the name of the piece from *American Rhapsody* to *Rhapsody in Blue*, and refined the middle section of the piece into a broader melody.³⁷

Finally, *Rhapsody in Blue*, finished as a two-piano version on January 7, 1924, and orchestrated by Ferde Grofé, received its world premier in the concert—*An Experiment in Modern Music*—at Aeolian Hall on February 12, 1924, by Whiteman and his orchestra with Gershwin playing the piano.³⁸

The piece calls for the following orchestra that contains 23 musicians:

“woodwinds (3 players): flute, oboe, clarinet in E-flat, Bb clarinet, Eb alto clarinet, Bb bass clarinet, heckelphone, Eb soprano saxophone, Bb soprano saxophone, Eb alto saxophone, Bb tenor saxophone, Eb baritone saxophone; 2 F horns, 2 Bb trumpets, 2 Bb flugelhorn, euphonium, 3 trombones, tuba; timpani, trap set; 2 pianos, celesta, accordion; banjo, violins and string basses.”³⁹

The concert attracted the elite of the music world. Those elite not only included the major music critics, but also world-famous artists in every field of music: Rachmaninoff, Godowsky, Mengelberg, Stravinsky, and many others.⁴⁰

³⁶ David, Schiff, *Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.12

³⁷ Rosenberg, Deena, *Fascinating Rhythm: The collaboration of George and Ira Gershwin*. (University of Michigan Press, 1991), p.57

³⁸ Rimler, Walter, *George Gershwin: An Intimate Portrait*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), pp.4-5

³⁹ David, Schiff, *Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 5-6

⁴⁰ Jablonski, Edward, *Gershwin* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), p65

Before the concert, the composer, Gershwin, and the conductor, Whiteman, had expressed different moods. Gershwin was cool and collected, but Whiteman was nervous. In his autobiography, *Jazz*, Whiteman recalled,

“Fifteen minutes before the concert was to begin, I yielded to a nervous longing to see for myself what was happening out front...I slipped around to the entrance of Aeolian Hall...I wonder if I had come to the right entrance...I even made excuses to keep the curtain from rising on schedule...”⁴¹

Then, the concert started. Before Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*, the audience’s reaction was mild. As the concert went on, the audience even began to express their impatience for a similarity in style of the different pieces. The environment changed dramatically, however, when clarinetist Ross Gorman introduced the *Rhapsody*. All of a sudden, the audience’s attention was again riveted. About 15 minutes later, Gershwin and Whiteman’s orchestra finished their performance, but not a sound came from the Aeolian Hall. The audience was shocked by the astonishing piece. However, seconds later, Gershwin and Whiteman’s orchestra was surrounded by enthusiastic applause. There was no question about the reaction of the audience. Whiteman recalled that, “...somewhere in the middle of the score, I began crying. When I came to myself I was eleven pages along, and until this day I can not tell you how I conducted that far...”⁴²

The next morning, it seemed as though the critics swept into the public’s eye like a flood. Some expressed their enthusiasm. Henry O. Osgood, an editor of the *Musical Courier*, said that: “*Rhapsody in Blue* is a more important

⁴¹ Ewen, David, *His Journey to greatness* (New Jersey: Greenwood Press 1977), p77-78

⁴² *ibid*, p 80

contribution to music than Stravinsky's Rites of Spring." And Henry T. Finck, found that: " Gershwin is far superior to Schonberg, Milhaud, and the rest of the futurist fellows."⁴³ Some others, however, showed different views on its shortcomings. As Olin Downes recalls in the *Times*, " the tuttis are too long, candenzas are too long. "⁴⁴ And Deems Taylor, in the *World*, said that:

Sunday, February 17: ... despite its shortcomings—chief of which were an occasional sacrifice of appropriate scoring to momentary effect, and a lack of continuity in the musical structure... Mr. Gershwin will bear watching; he may yet bring jazz out of the kitchen."⁴⁵

No matter what kind of reviews *Rhapsody* had received, there is no denying that *Rhapsody in Blue* not only established his reputation as one of the greatest and best-loved American composers, but also has since become one of the most significant American musical works. It added a totally new chapter into American music history and, more strikingly, helping to break down the traditions associated with the concert hall.

Rhapsody in Blue became known to the world through countless recordings and sheet music. Following in the footsteps of *Rhapsody in Blue*, many works combining American popular elements began to appear throughout the world and there were increasing numbers of composers who wrote music to fulfill this demand. Some examples are Aaron Copland's *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*, Ernst Krenek's opera *Jonny spielt auf* and Maurice Ravel's *Piano Concert in D for the Left Hand* and *Piano Concerto in*

⁴³ Goldberg, Isaac, *George Gershwin: a study in American music* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1931),pp. 149-152

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p.149

⁴⁵ Greenberg, Rodney, *George Gershwin* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998), p.74

G.⁴⁶

Besides its original version for piano and orchestra, *Rhapsody in Blue* has since been arranged in many transcriptions: for solo piano, for two pianos (including the 2nd edition of the two piano version edited by Henry Levine), for two pianos and orchestra, for eight harmonicas, for solo harmonica, for harmonica orchestra, for mandolin orchestra, for chorus, and more.⁴⁷

I am convinced that the piano solo version of *Rhapsody in Blue* can display the merits of this work very well—perhaps even better than the Whiteman orchestra or the large orchestral version, which could distract one's attention from Gershwin's own contributions. Therefore, I will concentrate my study on the piano solo version of *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Form

Since the birth of *Rhapsody in Blue*, the critics have never stopped mentioning its shortcomings, mainly its irregular and ambiguous form. It is somewhat difficult for me to decide what kind of form the piece uses, but finally, through multiple times reading, playing, and singing the piece, the form of *Rhapsody in Blue* is one-movement consisting of three main sections and a coda (Ex.1 below).

⁴⁶ David, Schiff, *Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997) pp. 71-72

⁴⁷ *ibid.* pp. 4-6

Section A	Section B	Section C	Coda (on Theme "a")
No.of Measures: 243	184	16	6

Ex.1: The Main Three Sections and Coda of *Rhapsody*.

The section A, or the first part of *Rhapsody in Blue*, consists of 243 measures. Contained in these measures are four themes, which are:

1. Theme "a"



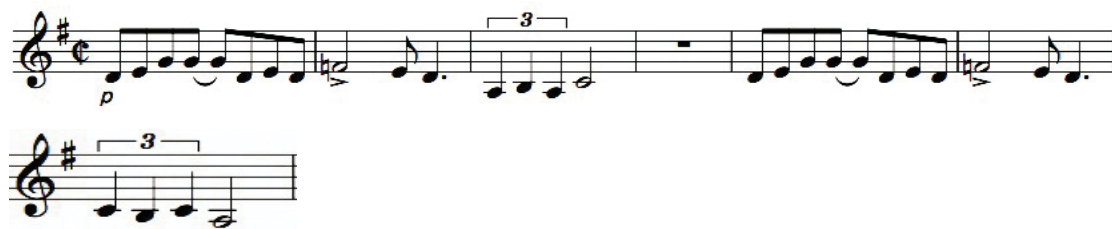
2. Theme "b"



3. Theme "c"



4. Theme "d"



Ex.2: Four Main Themes of Section A

The **section “A”** themes are constructed in the following manner:

Measure No.	1	11	16	19	21	24	30	38	52	55	61
Theme:	a1	b1	a2	D.U.1*	a3	D.U.2	Br.1*	a4	a5	D.U.3	Br.2
No.of mm.	(10)	(5)	(3)	(2)	(3)	(6)	(8)	(14)	(3)	(6)	(11)

Ex: 3: Form, Section A: mm.1- 71. ***Form symbols:** D.U= Design unit,⁴⁸ Br.= Bridge.

Measure No.	72	85	91	107	111	115
Theme:	a6	a7	c1	b2	b3	b4
No.of mm.	(13)	(6)	(16)	(4)	(4)	(27)

Ex: 4: Form, Section A: mm.72-151

Measure No.	142	161	184	201	217	221
Theme:	b5	b6	a8	d1	d2	d3
No.of mm.	(19)	(23)	(17)	(16)	(4)	(23)

Ex: 5: Form, Section A: mm.142-243

Section A, which is the largest part of the piece, consisting of four major themes and a design unit theme, is a rondo-like section. The “a” theme is the most frequently used theme, which is usually heard after the appearance of new materials. Another important theme—the “b” theme—enters at m.11, which has the most measures in this section (82 measures). Then, measure 19 emerges as a design unit theme. This theme mainly consists of a short recurring melodic passage. Compared to the other main themes, the design unit doesn’t possess a complete periodic structure and contains segmental treatment. The “c” theme appears at m.91, interestingly, only once. To conclude the first section, a fourth theme, “d”, is introduced at m. 201.

⁴⁸ It is a musical texture, where there is sequence or patterning repeating patterns, as opposed to periodic structure.

It is worth noting that section A is not constructed in a highly balanced manner. Out of a total of 243 measures, “a” theme passage comprises 66 measures, while “b” comprises 82 measures, “c” comprises 16 measures, “d”, 43 measures, and the “design unit” and the “bridge” combine to 32 measures. It is obvious that, unlike the case with the traditional first section (exposition), the “a” theme passage is a bit short while a higher value is put on the “b” passage and on the “d” passage. The “c” theme, which appears in the section only once, lasting merely 16 measures, is short as well. As a matter of fact, the “c” does not gain adequate development.

It is, however, interesting how balanced the phrasing of each main theme of section A is. For example, these major themes are mostly constructed in song-like manners such as AABA in the “b” theme, showing a double period-like structure (Ex. 6 below).

The image shows four staves of musical notation in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The first staff, labeled 'a', contains a melodic line starting with a quarter rest followed by eighth notes, marked *mf*. The second staff, labeled 'a'', is a variation of the first. The third staff, labeled 'b' and 'a', shows a different melodic pattern with a double bar line and a repeat sign, also marked *mf*. The fourth staff, labeled 'a', is another variation of the first staff's theme.

Ex. 6: A Double Period-like Structure. (mm.142-157)

As illustrated in Examples 7 and 8 below, the section B (the middle section)

contains 184 measures. This section is primarily constructed upon, and begins with the “e” theme passage, and employs no other new theme passage.



Ex.7: The Theme “e” of Section B

Measure No.	244	266	288	298	328	360	364	378
Theme:	e1	e2	Br.3	e3	Br.4.1	D.U.4	Br4.2	e4
No.of mm.	(24)	(24)	(10)	(24)	(32)	(4)	(12)	(24)

Ex: 8: Form, Section B: mm. 244 – 385

Measure No.	402	414	426
Theme:	Br.5	D.U.5	Br.4.3
No.of mm.	(12)	(12)	(12)

Ex: 9: Form, Section B: mm. 386 – 437

It is interesting that the “e” is designed with the similar period-like structure (AABA) as in the main themes of section A such as “b”. However, unlike the typical sixteen-bar (AABA) structure previously stated, the first phrase of “e” theme is prolonged into 7 measures, the second phrase is prolonged into 6 measures and the third and the fourth phrase still remain four measures in length each. Therefore, the total measures of “e” theme are 21 rather than 16 (see Ex.10).



Ex. 10: The Prolonged Double Period-like Structure, AABA Form, of the “e” Theme. (mm. 288-305)

Bridge 3, the first bridge of section B (m.288), constantly uses an accompaniment figure of the initial “e” theme, acting as a transitional passage between “e2” and “e3.” “Bridge 4.1” (m.328) is a long cadenza-like passage.

Bridge 4.2 then follows at m.364 (see Ex.7 above). Considering the similar rhythmic materials and textural organization, this passage resembles Bridge 4.1. The last bridge-like passage, Bridge.5 (m.402) is actually organized as an *idée fixe* variation of the initial “e” theme by constantly repeating its opening materials (see Ex.11 below).



Ex. 11: The Br.5 Freely Varied Using the Opening of the Initial “e” Theme. (mm. 402-405)

Section B shows great balance (see Ex.7 and 8 above). First, most of the “e” theme passages are 24 measures in length. Second, like the initial “e” theme, the design Unit 5 and Bridge 4.3, which combine to close section B,

also contain 24 measures. Finally, the design Unit 4 and Bridge 4.2 combine to return toward section B, giving this section an arch-like structure, further enhancing the balance.

In addition, except for the “e4” theme, most of the “e” theme passages are constructed not only of the same measures length (22 measures), but also in the varied AABA double period-like structure. Whenever these “e” theme passages are restated, they often follow a similar length or phrasing of the initial “e” theme. However, their expression, register, tonal center, and accompaniment figures are slightly different.

Measure No.	438	454
Theme:	b7	Coda
No.of mm.	(16)	(6)

Ex: 12: Form, Section C: mm. 438 – end

The section C (recapitulation), beginning at m.438, is a rather short section (see Ex.12 above). Theme “b” now reappears, giving a strong sense that the final section has begun and that the piece is nearing its final measures. Also, it is constructed in a period-like structure—4+4+4+4 (AABA form). The whole piece then ends with a brief and dramatic coda. Here, the “a” theme returns for the eighth and final time, briefly echoing the initial version.

In summary, the form of *Rhapsody in Blue* doesn’t show symmetrical balance. The measure lengths of the first, middle and final section (recapitulation) are 243, 195 and 22 respectively. Each section does not have

an even number of sub sections. It is obvious that the “head” is too long and the “tail” is too short, showing a free construction.

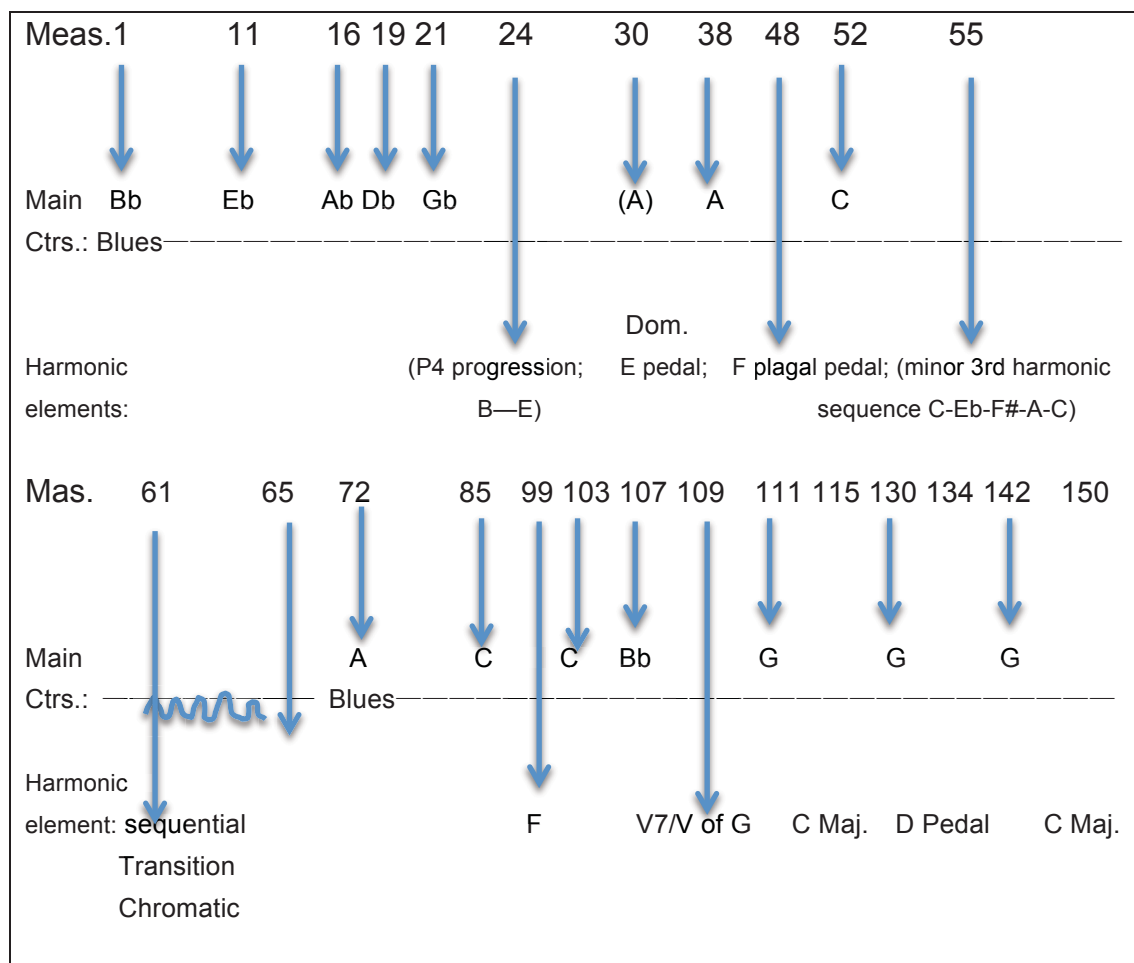
Moreover, the thematic subjects’ developments indeed rely on repetition, to create asymmetrical form. The restatement of familiar ideas can be seen everywhere in this piece. Those repetitious themes, to say the least, are not relatively interrelated—they are developed without greatly creative transformations, but with repetition. They are more similar to separate paragraphs, grouping together as a whole through a “building-block” approach. If you wanted to remove any of these stuck-together sections to make the piece shorter or to interchange these sections with one another, the piece might still work as well.

However, it is interesting that Gershwin’s thematic subjects are very tuneful and are nicely proportioned. Most of them possess a clear song-like or periodic structure (e.g, 4+4+4+4—AABA form), showing a great sense that this work is more like a big group of tunes and songs. It is as if he gives more attention to keep balance for each thematic subject, rather than for the formal integrity of the whole piece.

Harmony and Tonal Centers

The harmony and tonal centers of *Rhapsody* are complex. While the main tonal center is “B^b”, there are sixteen other tonal centers employed in this piece. In the 459 measure-long piece, 406 measures possess a discernable

tonal center, leaving 50 measures where the tonality has been blurred by one or more compositional techniques. Similarly, the harmonic structure in the section “A”, contains many shifts in tonal centers, as well as fast-moving bridges where tonality is ambiguous.



Ex.13: Tonal Centers, Section A: mm. 1—156

As the Ex.13 illustrated above, each change of tonal center of the section A is followed by the appearance of each main theme passage. The tonal modulations between m.1 and m. 38 are mainly organized by circle progressions. After m.38, tonal centers travel largely by minor thirds except for a major second modulation from mm.103-107.

Ex.13 also shows that Gershwin frequently uses a recurring harmonic sequential progression ascending by minor thirds in bridge-like passages. For instance (See Ex.14a and 14b below), in the original pair, at m.55-56, the C dominant 7th moves down a minor 2nd to a B dominant 7th; one measure later, the first pair is shifted a minor third higher, showing that E^b dominant 7th goes down a minor 2nd to D dominant 7th. This creates the second pair. The third pair appears at measure 58 with F[#] dominant 7th moves down a minor 2nd to F dominant 7th. The fourth pair then does so likewise by moving up a minor third. This displays a clear pattern of harmonic sequential progression ascending by minor third (**See Ex.14a and b below**).

a. mm. 55-56

Poco agitato
p poco cresc.

Root Mvt.: C7 B7 E^b7 D7
down mn2 down mn2
up mn 3rd

b. mm.58-59

cresc.

Root Mvt.: F[#]7(G^b) F7 A7 A^b7(G[#])
down mn2 down mn2
up mn 3rd

Ex.14a and b: An Ascending Sequential Harmonic Progression.

Meas.	157	159	161	169	173	182	184	217	219	221	229	238	253
Main	G		A		A		G	G	Bb	Db			
Ctrs.: Blues													
Harmonic elements:		V/A		D Maj.		V/G						(B Pedal → to section "B")	
													(minor 3rd sequence Db-E-G)
													V/E major

Ex. 15: Tonal Centers, Section A: mm. 157—243

As Ex. 15 displayed above, from mm.157 to 184, tonal centers are mainly organized by a whole-step vacillation between G and A major. After m.216, tonal and harmonic structure travel mainly by minor third modulations (**see Ex.16**).

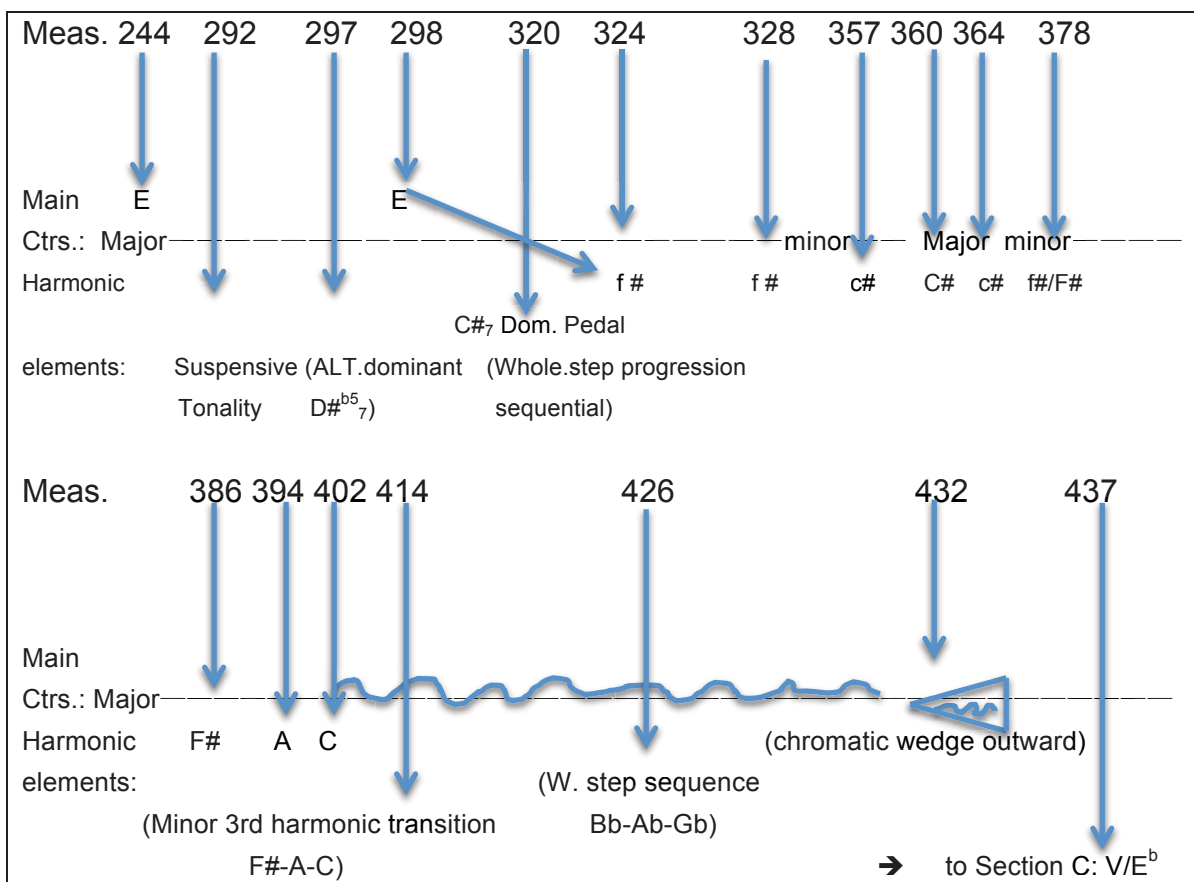
Tonal center "G"

Tonal center "Bb"

Tonal center "Db"

Ex.16: An Ascending Sequential Progression in mm. 216-222.

Then, by following the similar manner mentioned above, tonal centers continue to move up by minor thirds in mm.229-237. Therefore, through the examination of Ex.13, 14, 15, and 16 respectively, it is clear that Gershwin puts a high value on the use of minor-third modulations (e.g. C-Eb-F#-A-C, G-Bb-Db, and Db-E-G) in constructing the tonal and harmonic patterns of Section “A.”



Ex. 17: Tonal Centers, Section B: mm. 244—437

Ex.17 illustrates that tonal centers of section B largely move by whole step, perfect fourth up, and minor third progression. Considering numbers of measure, the tonal center “E” is most significant, while all other tonalities, implied tonalities, or suspended tonalities displayed in Ex. 17 are subsidiary to

it. These include “c[#]”⁴⁹—the relative minor to “E”; “A”—the subdominant of “E” and “f[#]”—the submediant of “A”. It seems as though Gershwin doesn’t desire to keep the subsidiary tonal centers too far away from the main tonal center “E”.

After m. 426, by introducing a whole-step descending harmonic sequence, the harmonic rhythm moves faster, making the tonal center more ambiguous. In the final 6 measures of section B, through largely using chromatic lines in each hand paying in opposing directions, the subsequent harmonies form a chromatic wedge outward. This acts as a transition to the final section (**Ex. 18 below**).



Ex. 18: A Chromatic Wedge Outward in mm. 434-437.

Meas.	438	454 (Coda)
	↓	↓
Main	E ^b	B ^b
Ctrs. Blues	-----	

Ex. 19: Tonal Center, Section C (recapitulation): mm. 438-end

The recapitulation, section “C”, is the shortest section of the *Rhapsody* and is more stable by employing only two main tonal centers (**Ex. 19 above**). At m. 438, where the “b” theme returns, the tonality moves back to E^b (the tonal center of the original “b” theme). Sixteen measures later, the opening tonic of the *Rhapsody*—“B^b”—finally returns at the Coda, m.454. This is surely

⁴⁹ Small letters imply tonal center with a lower third and capitals imply a major third.

foreshadowing of the work's final conclusion. By keeping the section "C" in its subdominant and opening tonality, it is clear that Gershwin has a simple careful plan for his harmonic and tonal construction.

The harmonic language of the *Rhapsody* presents blues inflections by employing the blues scale, which includes the lowered third, sharpened fourth, and lowered seventh degree (Ex. 20a below). A good example can be found in mm.16-18 (Ex.20b below), where an A^b major blues scale is created by alternating the normal third, seventh, and fourth degree.



Ex.20a: A Brief Example of the Blues Scale on C.



Ex.20b: Ab Major Blues Scale in mm.16-18

A variety of chords are employed in the work, including triads (e.g., major and diminished triads), seventh chords (e.g. major, minor, dominant, and diminished), whole tone chords, and complex chords (e.g. 9th and 13th). However, triads, especially major, minor triads, and diminished triads, are most commonly used (see Ex. 21-a, b, c, and d below).



Ex.21a: Major Triads in m.72 and m.244.



Ex.21b: Minor triads in m.52, m.84, and m.87.



Ex.21c: Planing Triads in mm.7-9.



Ex.21d: Minor Triads, An Augmented, and A Major Triad in m.237.

Among the various seventh chords in the *Rhapsody*, the dominant, half-diminished, and whole tone sevenths are more significant. Largely due to the employment of blues notes, dominant sevenths are not only displayed in conventional cadence-like passages, but also within passages without functional solution. The half-diminished sevenths and whole tone chords are used very freely (Ex. 22a and b below), while the complex chords in the work are abundant (**Ex.23 below**).



Ex.22a: Dominant Sevenths in mm.55-56.

The image shows a musical score for Ex.22b. It consists of two staves: a piano part on the left and a violin part on the right. The piano part features a series of triplets in the right hand and a more complex rhythmic pattern in the left hand. The violin part has a melodic line with accents and a dynamic marking of *ff* (fortissimo). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#).

F₂⁴ - - - G^(b9)E⁰₂⁴ F^(b9)G^{#o}₆⁵ D₂⁴WT C₂⁴ D^{#o}₇ Bb₂⁴C₃^o⁴

Ex.22b: Dominant, Half-diminished seventh, Fully-diminished seventh, and Whole Tone Sevenths (mm.35-36).

The image shows a musical score for Ex.23. It consists of two staves: a piano part on the left and a violin part on the right. The piano part features a series of complex chords and whole tone chords. The violin part has a melodic line with accents and a dynamic marking of *ff* (fortissimo). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#).

C7 B9 Bb7 WT - G9 F#7 F₇^(#11) E₇^(b13) Eb^(#11) WT B9 C7 WT Bb7

Ex.23: Dominant Sevenths, Complex chords (dominant 9th, 11th, and 13th) and WT Chords in a Transitional Passage (m.437).

Through the use of planing triads, half-diminished, whole tone, and complex chords mentioned above, it is worth noting that the *Rhapsody's* harmonic language is similar to Debussy and Ravel's.⁵⁰ However, the work still shows conventional harmonic features by largely maintaining its harmonic ideas in a functional setting. Of course, the influence of contemporary American popular music can be discovered by the use of blues notes in the work. This is closely related to Gershwin's early plugger experience in *Tiny Pan Alley*.

Rhythmic structure

It is common to discover dance-like rhythms in the *Rhapsody*, among

⁵⁰ The *Rhapsody's* harmonic language also resembles other composers' such as Bartok's, considering the similar features mentioned above.

which the ragtime and additive rhythms are most significant. Gershwin uses only 4/4 meter except for the 2/4 time from measure 324 to the end, maintaining the duple-pulse throughout irrespective of changing tempos. Ragtime rhythm, which includes much syncopation, is widespread. In the total 459 measures, 246 measures contain discernable ragtime rhythms. This creates not only a sense of rhythmic unrest, but sometimes hemiola and cross rhythm as well. Many examples are found in the “a” theme passages. In mm. 3-4, Gershwin establishes ragtime rhythm by using the melodic syncopation with an agogic accent on the second eighth note of beat 2 and 4. This is a ragtime rhythm (**Ex.24a below**). Another similar case is found in mm 73-74 (**see Ex.24b below**).

a. Anticipated stresses



Ex. 24a: The Ragtime Rhythm in theme “a1.” (mm.3-4)

b.



Ex. 24b: The Ragtime Rhythm in theme “a6.” (mm.73-74)

The rhythmic structures shown in “d3” are complex. In Ex.25 (below), there are repeated rhythmic patterns, which occur against the main metric beat.

At the beginning of the polymeric idea in measure 221, the bar lines indicate a meter of 4/4 to which the right-hand adheres. The left-hand part, acting as a rhythmic ostinato, mainly consists of a syncopated rhythm establishing a 3/4 hemiola within the 4/4 meter. After 6 measures, at measure 227, the three-four-pattern moves back to its initial location in the measure. Gershwin's employment of polymeter creates a feeling of interestingly rhythmic unrest.

The image shows three systems of musical notation for piano. The first system (measures 221-222) features a right-hand melody in 4/4 time and a left-hand accompaniment with a syncopated 3/4 hemiola pattern. The second system (measures 223-224) continues this pattern. The third system (measures 225-226) shows the hemiola pattern shifting. A blue arrow points from the downbeat of measure 227 to the text below.

Polymeter here finally lands on the downbeat.

Ex. 25: The 3/4 Hemiola in 4/4 meter (mm. 221-228).

At mm. 138-141, through mainly stressing the “weak” beats, there are repeated three-eighth-patterns against the notated 4/4 meter (**Ex. 26a below**). At measure 71, both the right-hand and left-hand parts employ a three-sixteenth-pattern marked with brackets (**Ex. 26b below**).

a. Three-eighth-pattern

The image shows a musical score for two systems. The first system has a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble clef part has a dynamic marking *p* and a tempo marking *poco a poco cresc.*. The bass clef part has a dynamic marking *p* and a tempo marking *L.H. rall. e dim.*. Blue arrows point to three groups of three eighth notes in the treble clef part. The second system also has a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble clef part has a dynamic marking *p* and a tempo marking *L.H. rall. e dim.*. The bass clef part has a dynamic marking *p* and a tempo marking *L.H. rall. e dim.*. Blue arrows point to three groups of three eighth notes in the treble clef part.

Ex.26a: Three-Eighth-Patterns in mm. 138-141.

b. Three-sixteenth-pattern

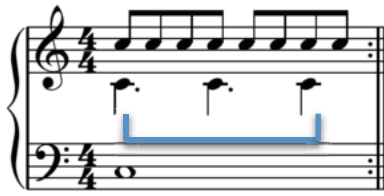
The image shows a musical score for two systems. The first system has a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble clef part has a dynamic marking *p* and a tempo marking *poco a poco cresc.*. The bass clef part has a dynamic marking *p* and a tempo marking *L.H. rall. e dim.*. Blue arrows point to three groups of three sixteenth notes in the treble clef part. The second system also has a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble clef part has a dynamic marking *p* and a tempo marking *L.H. rall. e dim.*. The bass clef part has a dynamic marking *p* and a tempo marking *L.H. rall. e dim.*. Blue arrows point to three groups of three sixteenth notes in the treble clef part.

Ex.26b: The 3/16 Hemiola in m. 71.

Gershwin also employs additive rhythm in this piece. Generally speaking, additive rhythm uses regular recurring patterns of asymmetrical grouping (e.g., 3+3+2). It is closely associated with Bulgarian Rhythm or Turkish *askak*, (limping) rhythm.⁵¹ In addition, according to Schiff, Bartók, in his “Studies on Bulgarian Rhythm,” demonstrated that the additive rhythm has Eastern European parallels.⁵² Below is a brief example of additive rhythm (Ex.27).

⁵¹ Suchoff, Benjamin. *Bartók's Mikrokosmos: Genesis, Pedagogy, and Style*. (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, inc. 2004), p.138

⁵² David, Schiff, *Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p. 20



Ex. 27: Addictive Rhythm (1 Whole Note = 8 Eighth Notes = 3+3+2)

Gershwin uses additive rhythm in the lower part of the “e” theme passage in mm. 91-92, acting as rhythmic ostinato. It is worth noting that the similarity between the two examples (Ex.27 and 28) is the use of (3+3+2) structure. The upper melody plays in original 4/4 meter. Its melodic and rhythmic contour form an arch shape suspended above the unsettled lower patterns, generating a sense of swing. **(Ex.28 below)**



(3+3+2) additive rhythm

Ex.28: Additive Rhythm in mm. 91-92.

Another example of additive rhythm is found in the Bridge 4.1 passage of Section “B” (mm.340–347 in Ex.29 below). Here, the (3+3+2) additive rhythm is played in diminution (in 2/4 meter). The five low melodic register notes form an interesting accent structure, and establishes a (3+2+3+3+5) rhythmic pattern.

(3+3+2) additive rhythm

(3+2+3+3+5) rhythmic pattern

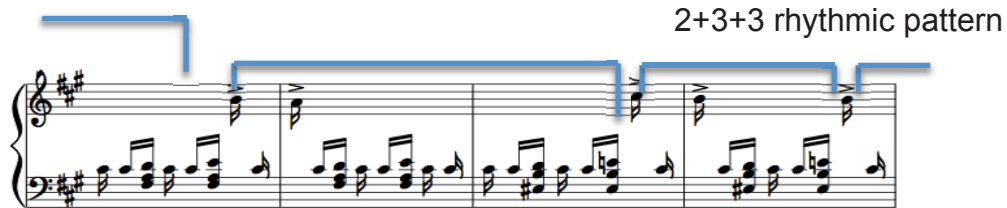
Ex.29: Additive Rhythm and (3+2+3+3+5) Patterns (mm.340-347).

More importantly, Gershwin takes his own rhythmic ideas further by bringing two more rhythmic patterns in mm.348-357 (see **Ex. 30 next page**). Here he uses an anacrustic accent structure on two high register notes, while the lower accompanimental patterns remain the same. This pattern doesn't change until the last beat of m.344, where Gershwin varies its pattern by shortening it to (2+3+3) rhythmic pattern. The same anacrustic accent structure is still used. Meanwhile, a basic left hand three-note grouping appears. Although this pattern has no accents, it still keeps the same grouping. With the use of various rhythmic patterns and grouping, Gershwin brings the listener a strong sense of rhythmic tension, as well as displaying his rhythmic mastery.

(2+3+3)+(2+3+3) rhythmic pattern



Three-note grouping



Ex.30: The (2+3+3)+(2+3+3), (2+3+3) Rhythmic Pattern, and Three-Note Grouping in mm.348-357.

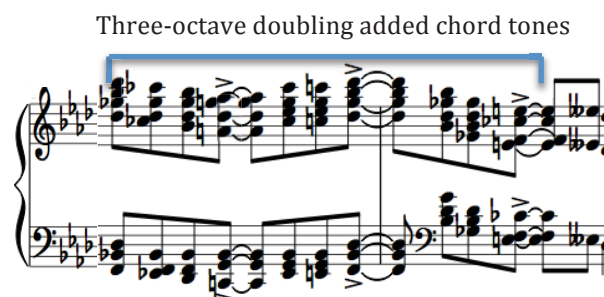
In summary, American popular music and other contemporary styles exerted a profound influence on the *Rhapsody*. Gershwin's tasteful use of the dance-like rhythms (ragtime, syncopations and additive) entertains the listener. This displays rhythmic mastery and moves the listener into Gershwin's fascinating musical universe.

Textures

The *Rhapsody* contains a variety of textural structures, mainly including homophonic and polyphonic textures. However, the employments of homophonic texture are the most common. In the total 459 measures piece, 375 measures contain clear homophonic textures, most of which are

organized with a basic melody-accompaniment figure using multiple voices that are played with the same rhythm, and are primarily constructed by various inner voice motions (e.g., oblique and free parallel motion).

The employment of many voices with the same rhythm and octave doubling, a characteristic feature of homophonic texture, is common in the “a” theme passages. In mm. 22-23, all the voices are not only played with the same rhythm, but also with compactly multi-layered voicing, featuring a three-octave doubling of the melody with freely added chord tones. The primary melodic line, located at the top of the texture, is unmistakably emphasized (**Ex.31 below**).



Ex. 31: A Thick Homophonic Texture (mm.22-23).

In the “e” theme passages, Gershwin continues to incorporate melodic importance with thick homophonic texture. For example, in mm. 244-245 (**Ex.32a below**), the octave doubling on the melody with added chord tones appears in the right-hand part, while the left-hand provides bass support for the melody. This is a homophonic texture. However, in m.283-290, as the main melodic line continuously develops, the texture becomes much thicker by not only adding more chord tones within the octave doubling, but also employing the same rhythm in both hands simultaneously (**Ex.32b below**).

- a. Octave doubling and added chord tones in right-hand part



Ex. 32a: Homophonic Texture (mm. 244-245).



Ex.32b: A Thickened Homophonic Texture (mm. 280-281).

Although the homophonic textural structures in *Rhapsody* are usually thick, Gershwin also creates a special thin homophonic texture found in measure 340-347 (**Ex.33a below**). When constructing this homophonic texture, Gershwin employs a two-strand homophonic textural structure by repeating the fast-moving pedal tone (e.g. C#) against both chordal structure and fragmented melodic lines, which contain five low register melodic pitches. Here, the pedal tone serves as accompaniment, while the disjunct melodic line creates the second strand, simply acting as melody. Later, In mm. 348-358 (**Ex.33b below**), Gershwin further develops the two-strand homophonic texture through using fragmented melodic lines consisting of two higher pitches that are organized with an anacrusic accent structure, while the

accompanimental patterns do not change until in m.357, where they shift a fifth up to a higher register.⁵³

a. The first strand (accompanimental patterns)

Pedal tone Chordal structure

Two-Strands; The second strand (fragmented melody)

Ex.33a: Two-Strand Homophonic Texture in mm. 340-347.

b. The second strand (fragmented melody)

L.H.

The first strand (accompanimental patterns)

Ex.33b: Similar Two-Strand Homophonic Texture in mm.348-358.

⁵³ In addition, the less important strand occasionally has three-note chords on weak beats added as foils for the pattern.

Gershwin employs Schillinger's compositional technique in the inner voice of the "e" theme passages. For instance, in example 34a (below), after its first appearance in m.249, the pitch content, D#-D-C#-D#-D, are then arranged in a varied pitch order on different beats of the following measures. This is a recirculating permutation of a five-pitch-pattern, and resembles one of the Schillinger's compositional techniques that creates continuity by growing the original elements (e.g., patterns, pitches, rests, accents, durations, etc.) with a continuous recirculating permutation.⁵⁴ Through using this technique, the five-pitch-patterns keep moving against the sustained double whole notes, which act as background support.

a.

The recirculating pitch order (permutation):

Ex. 34a: Homophonic Texture Using the Schillinger's Compositional Technique in mm 249-251.

Then, in measure 268 (**Ex. 34b below**), Gershwin further develops the Ex.33a by employing the recirculating permutation of five-pitch-patterns (the Schillinger's compositional technique) in each hand simultaneously and

⁵⁴ Schillinger, Joseph. *The Schillinger system of musical composition, v1*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1978. pp.46-62

thickens them by adding more voices such as octave doubling, chord tone doubling, and chord tones. With these expansions, the overall texture becomes much thicker.

b.



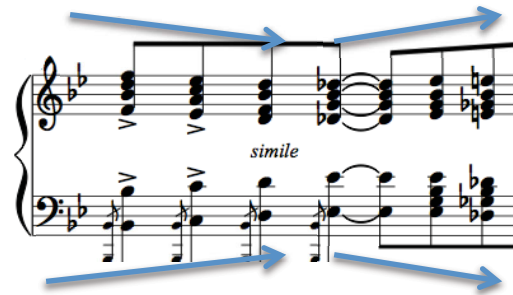
Ex.34b: A More Complex Homophonic Texture in mm.268-270.

Besides the largely displayed homophonic texture, Gershwin employs simple techniques to create polyphonic textures in the *Rhapsody*. The most commonly used ones are contrary motion and imitative canon technique. A detailed example comes, in mm.436-439, with a short transitional passage (**Ex.35a below**).

Here, the highest and the lowest chromatic lines of the texture move in contrary motion. However, the inner voices don't always move by the same intervals. Besides contrary motion, Gershwin also uses oblique, diatonic, parallel, and chromatic motion for inner lines. Another similar case can also be found in Ex.34b below.

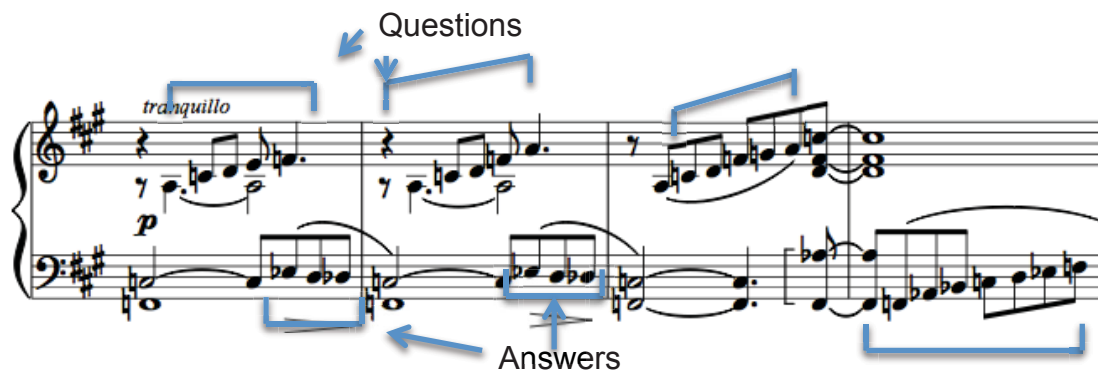


Ex.35a: Free Contrary Motion in mm.436-439.



Ex.35b: Free Contrary Motion with Changing Directions in m.455.

Gershwin also employs a free canonic technique to establish polyphonic textural structure (**Ex.36 below**). In mm. 48-51, the “question” (the fragmented melody) moves in the upper part, while the “answer,” which contains repetitive patterns consisting of a pedal tone and a short four-note melodic pattern, moves against them in the lower part. Both the “question” and the bracketed part of the “answer” are rhythmically related to each other. In mm.48-49, the “answer” is played as a free inversion of the “question”. In mm.50-51 on the other hands, the two lines materials are mainly organized in an imitative manner. Although all the “questions and answers” are either fragmented or repetitive, they still present a short interplay in each hand, creating a simple polyphonic texture supported by certain sustained melodic tones.

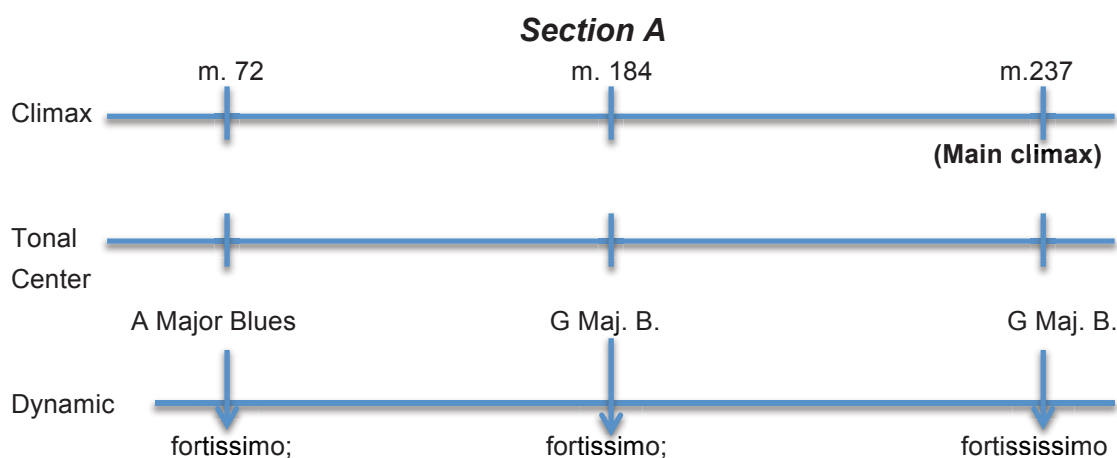


Ex.36: A Polyphonic Textural Structure Using Free Canonic Technique in mm.48-51.

Through the close examination of *Rhapsody's* textural structure, the homophonic texture shows itself to have a crucial position throughout the piece. The employment of octave doubling and added chord tones is significant. In addition, Gershwin's frequent use of the large multi-layered voicing (e.g., 6—9 voices) simulates an orchestral gesture. When compared to the large amount of complex homophonic textural structures, the use of polyphonic textural structure is rare and rather simple.

Climaxes

Climaxes are the most emphatic moments within the work, which are points of affirmation of the main theme passages.⁵⁵ There are five climaxes that clearly punctuate the piece (see Ex. 37a, b, and c below).



Ex.37a: Climaxes, Tonal Centers, and Dynamics in Section A.

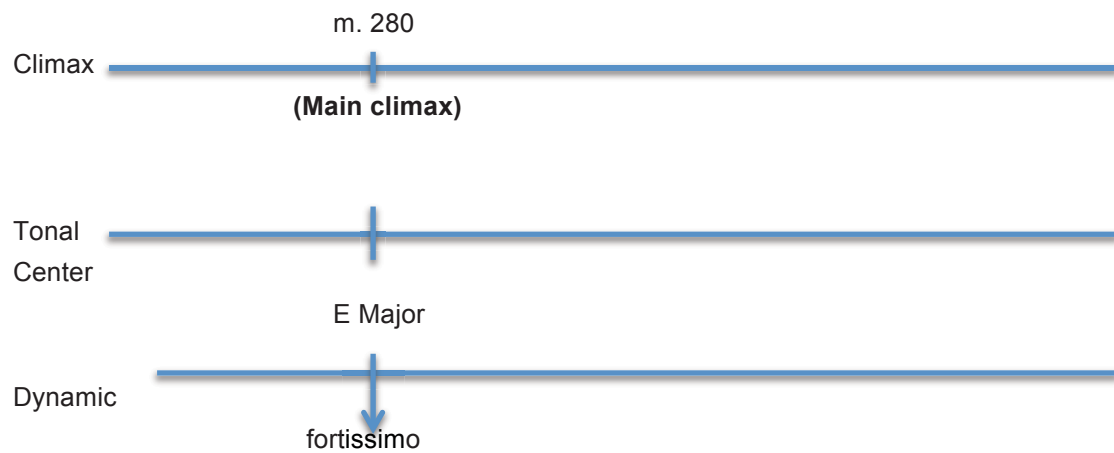
⁵⁵ Besides climaxes, the structure of the *Rhapsody* is also related to places involving sudden changes of dynamics. These places provide the listener surprises as well as create textural changes by sudden dynamic drop or, more rarely, dynamic increase. Emerging with either design unit or thematic passages, they mainly together act as a kind of secondary device to balance the dynamic structure of the work. Examples can be found in m.37, m.55, m.105, m.122, m.138, m.142, m.188, m.197, m.201, m.229, m.240, m. m.284, mm.324-327, m.378, m.414, and m.457.

The first climax of section “A” appears at measure 72 employing the “a” theme passage (see Ex.37a above). Prior to reaching the musical tension, the first climax is approached by a long transitional passage with crescendos and accelerated tempo. Also, this climax plays at the dynamic level of fortissimo, while the left-hand part strongly supports the melody in a lower register. Musical tension here is greatly increased.

The second climax occurs in measure 184, where the “a” theme passage is heard again (**see Ex.37a above**). Here, compared to the first climax, Gershwin creates the new climax by suddenly using a fortissimo G major triad and a much thicker texture adding more chord tones, octave doublings, and similar rhythm in each hand. This climax further emphasizes the “a” theme.

In a relatively short amount of time, the third climax, shown with the “d” theme passage, comes in m.237 (see Ex.37a above). This climax is first preceded by a repetitive and gradually accelerated restatement of “d” theme passages from m.229. Then, at m.233, the dynamic arrives at fortissimo and musical tension is greatly increased. However, the tension doesn’t abate as usual. Instead, it still keeps increasing after m.233. Finally at m.237, the music slows down with a fortississimo. Each hand plays the same triplet figures and are all accented at the same time, creating a powerful homophonic sound. The emotional tension here not only sets the mood for the strong reinstatement of theme “d,” but also provides a perfect conclusion to the end of section “A”, showing the arrival of the climax of section “A.”

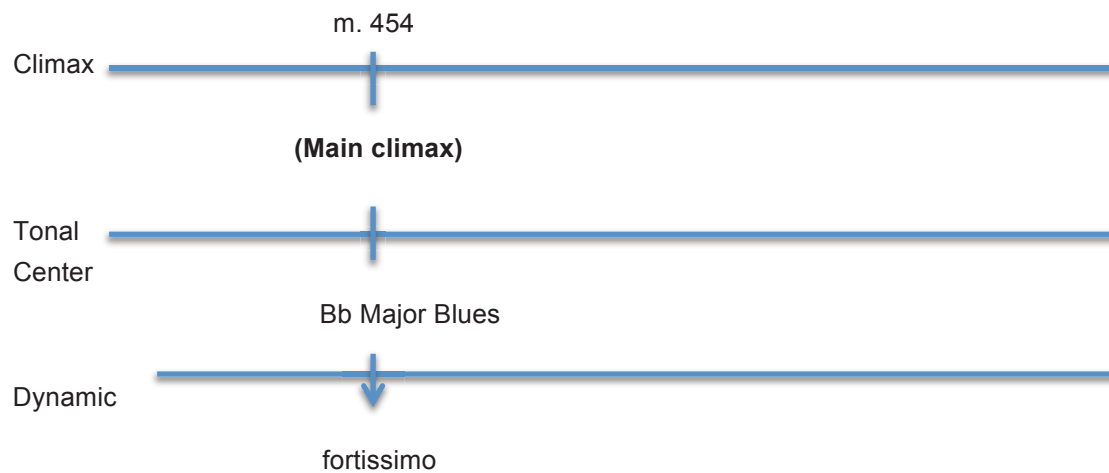
Section B



Ex.37b: Climax, Tonal Center, and Dynamic in Section B.

In section B (see Ex.37b above), the fourth climax appears in the “e” theme passage (m.280). Prior to reaching its emotional peak, a bridge-like passage using “Schillinger’s techniques” starts in m.268, along with a four-measure crescendo to the dynamic level of fortissimo and a four-measure acceleration (from m.276). When arriving at the climax, the same rhythm and accents are used in each hand simultaneously, unmistakably emphasizing the importance of the “e” theme. The pedal points are used in a rather low register while the melody is shown in a high register, producing a rather wide pitch range. The texture here becomes much thicker by employing more chord tone doublings. This creates a clear and loud sound, marking section B’s climax.

Section C



Ex.37c: Climax, Tonal Center, and Dynamic in Section C.

The final climax comes in the section C (Ex.37c above). Prior to this climax, the music gradually slowed and became broader from m.402 where it is marked with *Molto stentando* and then *Grandioso* in m.438. When arriving at this climax (m. 454) the main “a” theme reappears in the opening tonic Bb, and at fortissimo. Each hand here plays in the same rhythm simultaneously and is accented, further reinforcing the impression and importance of the main theme passages. This brings a strong feeling of conclusion in the work’s final section.

Overall, Gershwin, by his use of climaxes, creates an atmosphere of intensity in the *Rhapsody*. The climaxes, which are distributed throughout the piece in an articulate manner, emphasize the importance of the main theme passages. Most of them usually come as a result of bridge-like passages that mainly consist of melody, and have clear tonal centers. It seems that Gershwin liked to stay in the tonic or dominant when implementing climaxes.

Conclusion

Gershwin was a brilliant and talented musician and composer, who enjoyed a successful musical career until his sudden death in 1937. Even though Gershwin initially had no set plan, and almost forgot to compose it, he finally realized that the *Rhapsody in Blue* would be a challenging and important piece featuring aspects of contemporary American music.

It turned out that *Rhapsody* was a huge success, bringing the world a fresh and an eye-opening piece. Although, Gershwin still needed to learn orchestration, *Rhapsody* was evidently a positive turning point, earning him not only social fame, but also fortune.

It is clear that the influence of contemporary American popular music plays an indispensable role in *Rhapsody*. First, with the use of the blues scale, blue notes, and the half-step embellishing notes, the first four of five main themes of the work decidedly display the features of contemporary American popular music. The fifth theme, the middle section, brings the work the most beautiful moment using a more conventional major scale. All of the main themes resound with a feeling of not only humor, but also courage and strength.

Second, the main theme passages are interestingly organized with a “song-like” structure such as AABA or ABCA, a common periodic form of popular melodies, giving a strong sense that the work is more like a big group of tunes and songs rather a large formal concert work.

Third, sequential harmonic progressions of minor thirds in the work are

abundant. The main theme passages often modulate by thirds with very few changes in either melody or harmonic progression. Also, the tonal centers change very often throughout the piece, closely corresponding with the frequent restatement of main theme passages.

Fourth, influenced by contemporary American popular music, the rhythm in the work is expressive and brilliant. Ragtime rhythms are plentiful, as well as additive rhythms, syncopations, hemiolas, cross-rhythms, and polymeters, displaying Gershwin's mastery of complex rhythmic patterns. All the features stated above represent Gershwin and his early life, and are closely associated with the time when he worked in Tin Pan Alley, and, subsequently the Broadway Theater.

Of course, to some extent, *Rhapsody* is not only influenced by American popular music, but also by Western classical music. Elements such as the changes of tonal centers, bridge-like passages, various dynamics, tempos, the recapitulation-like section "C," and the title—*Rhapsody*—reflect the classical influences within the work. The thick textural structures, largely containing thick chords and doublings, clearly illustrate that it is not a simple American-popular work. Rather, it is a large composition that combines a variety of contemporary American popular and Western classical music elements together, showing a revolutionary fusion of these styles.

Since the world premiere of *Rhapsody* in 1924, critics have never stopped criticizing the "shortcomings" of the piece such as the unclear/unbalanced

formal structure, inadequate development, or excessive restatement of main theme passages. It is true that, by the standard of Western classical music, those “shortcomings” are indeed present. However, the critics might ignore Gershwin’s brilliance in using a variety of textural structures, rhythmic patterns and harmonic ideas to embellish each restatement of main theme passages. They might also overlook such unique compositional devices in *Rhapsody* as impressive “Bluesy” passages, energetic rhythm, romantic harmony, and emotionally tense climaxes. All of these constantly provide the listener with restless excitement and surprise.

The American public loved the work, perhaps not knowing its true reflections. The public actually felt the strength and resonance of the music and how it symbolized characteristics of American musical culture. More importantly, however, Gershwin, his music, spirit, creativity and *Rhapsody*, should be regarded as an inspiration to musicians and non-musicians alike. Gershwin was able to meet the new challenge of combining the popular and classical styles. The *Rhapsody* itself also proved that genius and artistry existed and flourished in Gershwin’s music. Certainly, more work and additional research are needed to further enhance our comprehension of the American music spirit reflected in this great work.

APPENDIX I. George Gershwin Rhapsody in Blues

Form

Section A	Section B	Section C	Coda (on Theme "a")
No.of Measures: 243	184	16	6

Section A

Measure No. 1	11	16	19	21	24	30	38	52	55	61	
Theme:	a1	b1	a2	D.U.1. ⁵⁶	a3	D.U.2	Br.1	a4	a5	D.U.3	Br.2
No.of mm.	(10)	(5)	(3)	(2)	(3)	(6)	(8)	(14)	(3)	(6)	(11)

Measure No. 72	85	91	107	111	115	
Theme:	a6	a7	c1	b2	b3	b4
No.of mm.	(13)	(6)	(16)	(4)	(4)	(27)

Measure No.	142	161	184	201	217	221
Theme:	b5	b6	a8	d1	d2	d3
No.of mm.	(19)	(23)	(17)	(16)	(4)	(23)

Section B

Measure No.	244	266	288	298	328	360	364	378
Theme:	e1	e2	Br.3	e3	Br.4.1	D.U.4	Br4.2	e4
No.of mm.	(24)	(24)	(10)	(24)	(32)	(4)	(12)	(24)

Measure No.	402	414	426
Theme:	Br.5	D.U.5	Br.4.3
No.of mm.	(12)	(12)	(12)

Section C

Measure No.	438	454
Theme:	b7	Coda
No.of mm.	(16)	(6)

***Form symbols:** D.U= Design unit; Br.= Bridge.

⁵⁶ It is a musical texture, where there is sequence or patterning repeating patterns, as opposed to periodic structure.

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