

**STYLE AND COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUES IN VINCENT PERSICETTI'S
TEN SONATAS FOR HARPSICHORD**

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BY

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I

INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century revival of the harpsichord has generated numerous compositions for the medium. American composer and harpsichordist Vincent Persichetti is one of the composers who dedicated much of his career to performing and writing music for the harpsichord during the twentieth century. The numerous honors and awards that Persichetti received from various universities and professional associations lead us to believe that his contribution as a composer to American music was nationally recognized. He was awarded honorary doctorate degrees from Combs Conservatory, Bucknell University, Baldwin-Wallace College, Millikin University, the State University of Arizona, Peabody Conservatory, Drake University, and The New School of Music in Philadelphia. Many professional associations and universities commissioned works and gave him numerous awards and prizes by the 1950's. These honors include: three Guggenheim Fellowships, two grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Brandeis University Creative Arts Award (the Medal in Music, "in recognition of a lifetime of distinguished achievement"), the first ever Kennedy Center Friedheim Award (for his Concerto for English Horn and String Orchestra Op. 137), and the Juilliard Publication award. In 1965, Persichetti became a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. With such an impressive recognition of the artistic value of his work, it

seems that the next natural step is to study Vincent Persichetti's work in its entirety and bring it to the attention of today's performer.

Persichetti chose to give opus numbers to 167 of the works he wrote. Besides his keyboard, band and vocal music, he also wrote eight symphonies and many instrumental pieces for standard instruments as well as tuba, carillon, piccolo, and harp.

He made a significant contribution to the band repertoire, even though he tried to compose for other mediums equally. Some of his most successful band works are *Divertimento* for Band Op. 42, *Psalm* for Band Op. 53, *Pageant* for Band Op. 59, *Symphony* for Band Op. 69, and *Parable IX* for Band Op. 121. However, Persichetti did not want his success as a band composer to represent his image as a composer in general.

His contribution to the twentieth century keyboard repertoire is substantial as well through his works for piano, organ, and harpsichord. He wrote ten pieces for organ (two of these are for pedals only), and his literature for piano comprises character pieces, technical studies, four-hand pieces, music for two-pianos, and concerted works with orchestra. There are twelve sonatas for piano, *Parades* Op. 57, *Serenade* No. 2, Op. 2, and *Winter Solstice* Op. 165, which was written during his final year of life. With regard to the importance of Persichetti's music for harpsichord, Donald and Janet Patterson wrote the following:

Perhaps the most valuable contribution Persichetti made to keyboard literature is the large output for harpsichord. At a time when this Baroque instrument was being rediscovered and popularized, he gave the harpsichordist a concentration of sonatas unequalled by any other composer in the twentieth century.¹

¹ Donald Patterson and Janet L. Patterson, *Vincent Persichetti: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1988), 14.

He wrote ten sonatas, the *Parable* Op. 153, *The Little Harpsichord Book* Op. 155, and *The Serenade* Op. 161 for harpsichord. Eight of the ten sonatas were commissioned by or for certain performers and were performed shortly after they were composed.

Besides his instrumental music, Persichetti composed significantly for voice and wanted to be recognized accordingly. He has numerous choral works, as well as solo music for voice. Writing choral music was his favorite, and he chose to set his music to works by Shakespeare, Millay, Dryden, Milton, Shelley, Cummings, Joyce, Sandburg, Teasdale, Belloc, Frost, and Dickinson. There were times when he wrote the text for some of his works, in which case he signed the texts as “anonymous.” Persichetti’s song cycle *Harmonium* was set to his good friend Wallace Stevens’s book of poems with the same title. He composed choral pieces for mixed, men’s and women’s voices, a Mass, a Stabat Mater, a Te Deum, cantatas, two volumes of hymns and responses, a Magnificat, works for chorus and instruments, one opera, and the work he considered his “magnum opus,” *The Creation* Op. 111. This latter piece was written for soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, chorus and orchestra and its text comes from a variety of religions and cultures. Vincent Persichetti’s single opera, *The Sibyl* Op. 135, was written in 1976 and was premiered in 1985. The composer’s vocal and choral works did not enjoy, however, the same acclaim and frequent performances as his instrumental, band and piano works.

Statement of the Problem

Already known for his piano sonatas, Vincent Persichetti also composed ten sonatas for the harpsichord. My own encounter with Persichetti’s harpsichord music in my graduate studies revealed to me the value of this repertoire. Surprisingly enough,

there was not enough supporting literature to help me in my study of the music scores. This dissertation presents Persichetti's ten sonatas for harpsichord. I analyze their content and provide information with regard to Persichetti's motivation to write extensively for this medium. The findings of this analysis underline his style and compositional techniques that he uses in order to express himself artistically.

While Persichetti referred to his compositional style as being an amalgam of techniques and considered himself a composer whose vast musical knowledge was meant to lead him to new and original approaches to music, there are many who reviewed his music and referred to his style as being very close to the compositional style of numerous other composers. Most of these composers wrote in a neoclassical idiom. This dissertation aims to provide a new body of observations on Persichetti's compositional style through the analysis of his harpsichord sonatas. I define Persichetti's stylistic traits through a thorough treatment of form, melody, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, articulation, registration and texture, supported by music examples. Although Persichetti refers only to Haydn and Schumann as his influences in composition, I have found it relevant to refer to examples from J.S. Bach's music when discussing compositional techniques that Persichetti used in his own music. In this context, I use music theory terminology, such as "Baroque dislocation," "reversed chromaticism," "complementary rhythms," "mutations for modulation purposes," and "latent polyphony." All these terms are defined in the body of this work and presented by comparison in Persichetti's harpsichord sonatas. There are other stylistic elements that one can find in these sonatas that are clearly reminiscent of Haydn's and Schumann's compositional styles. These include Persichetti's preference for quick running scales, simple but expressive melodic lines, his special

attention given to balancing the melodic and textural context, as well as for the preponderance of active and well-balanced contrapuntal writing.

This analysis reveals Persichetti's unique employment of the sonata form on a regular basis (e.g., in most of the first movements and in some last movements) and of other Classical forms (e.g., ternary and rondo-like movements). While he employs two distinct themes in the exposition of the sonata form, he adapts the second theme of the recapitulation to a new harmonic center, thus emulating the tonal architecture of Classical music in his own unique manner. Persichetti's expressive melodic lines are characterized by sequential writing. They are highly motivic and very pitch driven. This dissertation aims at Persichetti's use of several techniques in the process of developing his melodic lines.

Finally, there is one important aspect that preoccupied Persichetti in his work that one should consider, namely his attempt to express himself with his own compositional voice that combines a variety of existing compositional techniques in order to create his signature style. His *Twentieth-Century Harmony* treatise proves his impressive knowledge and awareness of compositional techniques and styles. His ideas presented in this treatise as well as his other writings denote his continuous preoccupation for creating a music that sounds specific and original. In his music, Persichetti goes much further than merely reinventing a classical sense of tonality. He breaks conventionalism through the combination of a multitude of twentieth-century compositional trends. His neoclassicism may be defined by his affinity for fine contrapuntal writing and classical forms. I also believe that Persichetti avoided labels for his music; thus, defining his style with overly-specific labels would not do justice to his work. My intention is to present Persichetti's

originality and make reference to styles that are well-known and help define his compositions through preexistent and conventional definitions.

Need for the Study

Persichetti's harpsichord sonatas have not been analyzed in detail in books, articles, and scholarly research until now with the exception of Margaret Ann Pringle's study of the first sonata, which I will review in the next chapter. One can also find brief reviews of most of the harpsichord sonatas in *The Musical Times* journal, but a complete analysis of all ten harpsichord sonatas that Vincent Persichetti so masterfully composed is yet to be accomplished. Consequently, the present topic intends to reveal these ten sonatas and to open up a wonderful harpsichord repertoire to performers.

Delimitation of the Study

This researcher chose to limit her analysis to the ten sonatas for the harpsichord (year of publication in parentheses):

- Sonata for Harpsichord, Op. 52 (1973)
- Second Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 146 (1983)
- Third Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 149 (1983)
- Fourth Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 151 (1983)
- Fifth Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 152 (1984)
- Sixth Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 154 (1977, 1984)
- Seventh Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 156 (1985)
- Eighth Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 158 (1987)

- Ninth Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 163 (1987)
- Tenth Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 167 (1994)

As mentioned, Persichetti wrote three more opuses for harpsichord, the *Parable* Op. 153 (1982), *The Little Harpsichord Book* Op. 155 (1984), and the *Serenade* Op. 161 (1985). The *Parable* for harpsichord is only one of his 25 *Parables*, described by Howard Schott as a series “which encompasses solos for every orchestral instrument as well as ensembles and even a one-act opera, *The Sibyl*.”² The *Serenade* for harpsichord is also a part of a unique series of fifteen works with the same title for diverse combination of instruments, such as piano duet, flute and harp, solo tuba, orchestra, band, two recorders, and a trio of trombone, viola and cello. Similarly, Persichetti wrote a series of Little Books, two for piano, one for recorder, and one for harpsichord. The *Little Harpsichord Book* is a collection of twelve short pedagogical pieces meant to transition the harpsichord student to a more complex repertoire. Given the nature of these three harpsichord works, I will limit the research to the ten harpsichord sonatas.

² Howard Schott, “Music Reviews: Harpsichord,” *The Musical Times*, 126, no. 1711 (September 1985).

II

SHORT BIOGRAPHY AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter is an overview of Vincent Persichetti's life and work as presented in existing literature and other resources (e.g., books, articles, recordings and their liner notes, internet, microfilms, etc.). It also outlines the role of Persichetti's harpsichord compositions in his musical output, as well as in the general literature for the harpsichord.

Biographical Data³

Vincent Persichetti was born in Philadelphia on June 6, 1915. He lived his entire life in Philadelphia, until his death on August 14, 1987. He was born of Italian and German immigrant parents who arrived in the United States at a young age. He showed interest for music very early. Even though Vincent was the only one in his family to express any interest in music, his parents were supportive of his musical efforts. Persichetti and his family lived on the same street where the Combs Conservatory of Music was located.

At age five, he started piano lessons with William Stanger and at fifteen he continued with Alberto Jonas. He began taking harmony lessons at eight years of age and

³ The biographical information about Vincent Persichetti presented in this chapter is based on Donald L. Patterson and Janet L. Patterson, *Vincent Persichetti: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1988), 3-23 (Biography).

counterpoint at nine. Persichetti also studied organ, tuba, and double bass. He worked very hard and his rapid progress brought him a first performance on the radio when he was only six years old. He considered Russell King Miller, organist and composer, as the most influential musician in his life; Persichetti came in contact with Professor Miller through composition lessons at Combs Conservatory of Music. His early studies included intense work with various orchestral scores and complete memorization of the scores he was about to hear in a performance. In 1936, Persichetti graduated with his Bachelor of Music degree from Combs Conservatory and immediately took the position of conductor of the Combs College Orchestra. At the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia he studied conducting with Fritz Reiner. He continued his piano studies and was awarded a piano scholarship with Olga Samaroff at the Philadelphia Conservatory of Music where he worked on his Master's degree. At fifteen, he had his first organist and music director position in a church, and a year later he took the organist position at the Arch Street Presbyterian Church where he stayed as both organist and Director of Music for more than fifteen years. He shared his piano scholarship in Olga Samaroff's studio with another student, Dorothea Flanagan, who later became his wife. Vincent and Dorothea Persichetti have two children—Lauren, a professional dancer, and Garth, an actor.

In 1947, Persichetti was hired to teach at the Juilliard School of Music in New York City while still teaching and living in Philadelphia. His workload was incredible, considering that he was also providing music for two church services, had a rehearsal and was teaching organ lessons on Sundays as well. During his sixty years of teaching, Persichetti the teacher had a great deal of influence on his students' development and created a Literature and Materials course that was very well attended by students. His

students include Pulitzer Prize winning Jacob Druckman, as well as Philip Glass and Peter Schickele, the creator of PDQ Bach. For several years, Persichetti wrote critiques for the *Journal of Modern Music*, *Music Quarterly*, and *Notes*. Beginning with 1940, Vincent Persichetti collaborated with the Philadelphia music publishing house of Elkan-Vogel through his works that they published as he wrote them. In 1952, Persichetti was hired as an editorial assistant, and later he became the Director of Publications at Elkan-Vogel.

Persichetti was very active as a teacher, conductor, performer, as well as clinician. Throughout his career, Persichetti had over two hundred appearances as clinician. He enjoyed performing and discussing his own compositions or other composers' works. His musical knowledge was vast and his enthusiastic, positive, and encouraging attitude determined his success as a clinician as well. He found driving long hours to various destinations for these clinics inspiring and a time that he could dedicate to writing music. He always had staff paper with him and he would write over the steering wheel or dictate to his wife, Dorothea, when she was accompanying him.

He is the author of the text *The Twentieth Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice* (1961) and together with Flora Rheta Schreiber co-authored the monograph, *William Schuman* (1954). Persichetti joins a select list of twentieth-century composers, such as Paul Hindemith, Arnold Schoenberg, Walter Piston, and others, who wrote harmony and composition treatises. In his book, Persichetti methodically presents harmonic procedures encountered in twentieth-century compositions. He investigates the nature of musical intervals, modes, and modern scales and explores the variety of chordal structures in tertial, quartal, and secundal harmonies. His presentation also includes

harmonic connotations with regard to tonal, polytonal, atonal, and serial works. His theoretical discussions are supported by excellent musical examples that Persichetti created solely for the purpose of this work. In each chapter, he provides comprehensive lists of musical suggestions for further study, comprising a wide range of composers and styles. Each chapter ends with a section of proposed practical exercises, revealing the pedagogical purposes of his book.

Review of Literature on Persichetti's Harpsichord Sonatas

The literature that has been written about Vincent Persichetti and his harpsichord repertoire in particular is relatively limited. There are only a few primary sources in book or dissertation format as well as several references about the topic present in journal articles, websites, liner notes of compact disc recordings, and transcriptions of interviews and master classes.

One of the most important resources that regard Vincent Persichetti's life and work is *Vincent Persichetti: A Bio-Bibliography* by Donald and Janet Patterson (cited in footnote 3). This book contains five main sections. The opening biographical chapter presents Persichetti's life and career in detail. Listed in alphabetical order by genre headings, Persichetti's works are enumerated in the second chapter. It contains information concerning titles of works, their premieres and notable performances, as well as details of instrumentation, duration, commission, dedication, and publication. Following, there is a chapter dedicated to all commercially produced recordings of Persichetti's music, which includes information on performers, date of issue, and recording company. Chapter four is a bibliography about Persichetti that mentions all

references about the composer in books, periodical and newspaper articles. These entries refer to over five hundred writings about the style and music of Vincent Persichetti with annotations that oftentimes take the form of quotations extracted from performance reviews. Finally, chapter five is an annotated bibliography of fifty-four writings by Vincent Persichetti⁴ and it is followed by appendixes that provide alphabetical, chronological, and opus number listings of his works. This book represents a valuable resource about Persichetti for the present research through its detailed biographical data as well as its comprehensive lists of his works, recordings, and writings about and by Persichetti. In the Preface of the book, the authors state that they had the opportunity to interview Dr. Persichetti on July 21, 1987 when the terminally-ill composer showed enthusiasm about their project after seeing the two hundred completed pages of the book. Unfortunately, Vincent Persichetti died three weeks after that interview and did not get the chance to see the final version published in 1988.

Among his over two hundred appearances as clinician, Persichetti's residency at the University of Minnesota-Duluth was recorded in Curt L. Tryggstad's master's thesis, *Vincent Persichetti: On His Music*⁵. The author begins with a brief description of Persichetti's complex musical personality, as well as an explanation of the composer's week-long clinic with the Music Department at the University of Minnesota-Duluth in May 1986. On this occasion, Persichetti presented twenty hours of master classes, open

⁴ "Entries in this chapter cover a wide range of materials. Included are the books, authored or co-authored, by Persichetti, articles written for journals concerning his compositions and thoughts about his compositions, and some correspondence. Most entries are references to the critiques of new music and new recordings that he wrote for *Modern Music*, *MLA Notes*, and the *Musical Quarterly* between 1944 and 1962." Patterson, Op. cit., 272.

⁵ Curt L. Tryggstad, *Vincent Persichetti: On His Music. The University of Minnesota-Duluth Residency May 5-9, 1986* (Master Thesis, St. Cloud, Minnesota: St. Cloud State University, 1989).

rehearsals, and concerts showcasing his works for vocal and instrumental soloists, chamber, orchestral and wind ensembles, offering a valuable insight to his creative process and performance practice. The composer also gave a lecture on twentieth-century American music titled “Music in Our Time.” Tryggestad’s thesis comprises three chapters, bibliography and four appendixes, which represent partial transcriptions of the residency’s tape recordings. After the biographical chapter, he describes Persichetti’s creative process. He begins with the stylistic influences that determined an “eclectic or amalgamated approach to composition.”⁶ A very important finding in this second chapter is the definition that Persichetti gave when referring to his own compositional style: “I go in and out of tonality or in and out of serialism, but there is always some kind of tonal grasp.”⁷ In order to characterize his tonality, Persichetti chose two original terms—“mijor and manor”⁸—that depict a polytonal combination of major and minor. This chapter ends with Persichetti’s thoughts on performing his works and on teaching composition. The format of the third chapter on American music is a combination of general historical facts and information from Persichetti’s lecture, presented in three sections, past, present, and future. Following an extended bibliography, Tryggestad presents four detailed transcriptions of student and faculty master classes, a seminar with advanced composition students, as well as the lecture, “Music in Our Time,” that Vincent Persichetti presented during his residency.

⁶ Op. cit., 12.

⁷ Idem, 23, citing Robert Scanlan, “Spotlight on Contemporary American Composers,” *The NATS Bulletin* 34:42 (1978).

⁸ Idem, 24, citing Vincent Persichetti, “Music in Our Time,” Lecture, University of Minnesota-Duluth Residency (May 9, 1986), Appendix A, 58.

Since Persichetti served as editorial advisor at Elkan-Vogel Co. between 1952-1987, it is not surprising that the company published the brochure *The Music of Vincent Persichetti*.⁹ This small brochure opens with a cartoon of Persichetti, and a very brief biography. There is a complete list of awards and commissions, followed by a list of his works presented chronologically and specifying the publisher for each of them. The brochure then lists his works by medium for which they were composed, a selected recording list, the books that Persichetti wrote, his published articles, as well as selected articles on and references to Persichetti. The brochure ends with three pages of press comments, which brings together a handful of musical reviews that appeared in various publications. The year of this publication is not available.

Another valuable resource that mentions one of the Persichetti sonatas for harpsichord is Larry Palmer's *Harpsichord in America: A Twentieth-Century Revival*.¹⁰ Larry Palmer briefly describes Persichetti's Harpsichord Sonata Op. 52 in the chapter dedicated to Fernando Valenti who premiered the work on January 10, 1952. The paragraph describing this sonata reads:

The three-movement work proved to be wonderfully idiomatic for the instrument, a splendid prelude to the flowering of harpsichord sonatas later composed by Persichetti. Several commentators suggested dubbing him "Domenico," since no other twentieth-century composer had written so many major works for the instrument.¹¹

⁹ *The Music of Vincent Persichetti: Biographical Material, Complete Works, Records, Articles, Books* (Philadelphia, PA: Elkan-Vogel Co.).

¹⁰ Larry Palmer, *Harpsichord in America: A Twentieth-Century Revival* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989).

¹¹ Larry Palmer, "Vincent Persichetti: A Love for the Harpsichord. Some Words to Mark His 70th Birthday," *The Diapason* (June 1985): 8.

There are a few master's theses and doctoral dissertations that represent works of interest for my research: *An Analysis of the Organ and Harpsichord Music of Vincent Persichetti* by Margaret Ann Pringle, *Contemporary Harpsichord Music: Issues for Composers and Performers* by Joyce Lindorff, and *The Twentieth Century Harpsichord: Approaches to Composition and Performance Practice as Evidenced by the Contemporary Repertoire* by Keith Andrew Thorp.

In her Master of Arts thesis,¹² Margaret Ann Pringle presents a complete and in-depth analysis of Vincent Persichetti's works for organ and harpsichord. The following organ works are analyzed: *Sonatine for Organ, Pedals Alone*; *Sonata for Organ*; *Chorale Prelude: Drop, Drop Slow Tears*; and *Shimah B' Koli (Psalm 130)*. The harpsichord composition that the author includes in her thesis is Persichetti's *Sonata for Harpsichord* Op. 52 (written in 1951), the first of ten. When Pringle wrote her thesis in 1968, this composition was the only existing harpsichord sonata by Persichetti. It was only in 1973 that the work was published by Elkan-Vogel and Pringle used manuscript excerpts to support her analysis. As the author herself states in the abstract of this work, "the analysis of each composition is presented in a separate chapter; sections within the chapters are given subheadings such as follows: Form and Thematic Materials; Motives; Characteristics of the Row; Tonality; Melody, Scale, and Counterpoint; and Harmony."¹³ With each of the works that are analyzed the author brings very detailed information about the elements of music and compositional techniques that Persichetti used for contouring expressively each piece. Besides the particular details found throughout the

¹² Margaret Ann Pringle, *An Analysis of the Organ and Harpsichord Music of Vincent Persichetti*, (Master Thesis, University of Rochester, 1968).

¹³ Pringle, Abstract, iii.

thesis, even more valuable for understanding Persichetti's compositional style are her conclusions found in the last chapter. Here, Pringle presents the information in the same format that she used in the entire thesis, tracing general stylistic characteristics for form and thematic material, motives, tonality, melody, scale, counterpoint, and harmony. These conclusions are meant to summarize Persichetti's approach to composition, regardless of a certain work.

Joyce Zankel Lindorff's dissertation¹⁴ offers a comprehensive image of contemporary music written for harpsichord. Her thesis comprises four chapters. The first one puts the twentieth-century harpsichord repertoire into perspective. Following, there is a chapter dedicated to the dual history of the modern harpsichord. The author describes the two types of harpsichords employed in the twentieth century, the classical type and the modernized version, that are "really two different instruments, encouraging entirely different playing techniques."¹⁵ Under these circumstances, Lindorff reveals the importance of a close collaboration among builders, performers, and composers of twentieth century harpsichord music.

The third chapter of Lindorff's dissertation presents details regarding the composition process when writing music for the harpsichord. Elements such as texture, articulation, arpeggiation, volume, amplification, registration, and others are analyzed in detail and are accompanied by numerous musical examples. In the final chapter, the author gathers in-person or phone interviews with composers and harpsichord builders, and focuses on these connoisseurs' views on composition and performance.

¹⁴ Joyce Lindorff, *Contemporary Harpsichord Music: Issues for Composers and Performers* (Doctoral Dissertation, The Juilliard School of Music, 1982).

¹⁵ Op. cit., 26.

The time when this dissertation was written (1982) is important when considering the meaning of “contemporary” music found in its title. Even though the author does not refer to any of Vincent Persichetti’s works in the third chapter, which would have required musical examples and a brief analysis, Persichetti’s remarks appear in the last chapter. Lindorff briefly comments on his first six harpsichord sonatas, as well as his *Parable* Op. 153, quoting Persichetti with each opportunity. Thus, one reads, “I get ideas, and when I do they come in a medium. In the early fifties, the ideas were for the harpsichord. Now I’m back to it.”¹⁶

Precise dynamic indications that are meant to guide a performer’s choice of registration are found in his first four sonatas. Persichetti said, “They can be done different ways I think. I didn’t want to be specific about it. It depends on how you feel and what kind of harpsichord you have.”¹⁷ However, in his *Parable* Op. 153 and the fifth and sixth sonatas, he changed his approach. The composer said, “For the last few pieces I had to be more specific. For instance, some harpsichords go up to G, but in the Fifth Sonata, mine goes to the F above that.”¹⁸ The solution to Persichetti’s choice of range lies in the use of the solo 4’ stop that extends the range and brings a change in color as well. Very convincing of his love for the instrument are his closing statements, “everything I need is right here on this keyboard” and “if you make that your world for twenty minutes, that’s it!”¹⁹

¹⁶ Op. cit., 79.

¹⁷ Idem.

¹⁸ Op. cit., 80.

¹⁹ Idem.

Liner notes of audio recordings of Persichetti's music represent another notable source of information on my topic. There is only a limited number of commercial recordings of several of the ten harpsichord sonatas by Vincent Persichetti. Nonetheless, they represent a wealth of information due to the fact that they were recorded by prestigious harpsichordists such as Elaine Comparone and Barbara Harbach.

A notable audio recording is represented by Elaine Comparone's recording of Vincent Persichetti's second, third, fourth, and fifth harpsichord sonatas. The first two of these sonatas were in fact commissioned for Elaine Comparone. Therefore, the liner notes of this compact disc recording contains vital information with regard to Persichetti's music in general, as well as Comparone's encounter with the composer. This is how she remembers her first encounter with the musician: "I liked him immediately. He was smaller than I had expected, but he radiated energy. Even though his remarks were full of humor and whimsy, his dark eyes never lost their serious gaze. Words tumbled so rapidly from his lips that I frequently had to ask him to repeat a sentence."²⁰

In her notes about the album, Elaine Comparone writes: "Like earlier composers for the harpsichord, Vincent gives sparse dynamic advice, but much more than Bach or Scarlatti whose occasional '*p*'s' and '*f*'s' are rare indeed. They rely on the performer's good taste, judgment and familiarity with the instrument's possibilities as, ultimately, does Vincent."²¹ This compact disc recording provides Persichetti's biographical notes written by composer Bruce Adolphe, a resident composition teacher for the Chamber

²⁰ Elaine Comparone, harpsichordist, Vincent Persichetti, and Domenico Scarlatti, *Harpsichord Sonatas* (Los Angeles, Ca: Laurel Record LR-838CD, 1992), Liner notes 8. This recording contains Persichetti's second, third, fourth and fifth sonatas for harpsichord.

²¹ Comparone, Persichetti, and Scarlatti, Liner notes 9.

Music Society of Lincoln Center and teacher at The Juilliard School and New York

University. His description of Vincent Persichetti's music reads:

Persichetti's music resembles the man: high-spirited, witty, mercurial, eclectic, spontaneous. In his sleight-of-hand style, melodic figures zip by the ear, always propelling the music forward. But he also had a pensive and nostalgic side. His harmonies linger generously in adagios; he prepares and resolves dissonances with thoughtful care. Vincent Persichetti thought in terms of transparent versus dense, light versus heavy, and bright versus dark. He talked about the "fresh" note or chord and of "natural" expression. His highest praise was to call a piece "meaningful."²²

Barbara Harbach's compact disc recording of harpsichord music composed in the twentieth century contains works by Emma Lou Diemer, Gardner Read, Edith Borroff, Michael Alec Rose, Mary Jean van Appledorn, Barbara Harbach, Vincent Persichetti, Robert Starer, Robert Stern, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich. This recording includes Persichetti's *Serenade No. 15 for Harpsichord, Op. 161*. The liner notes contain brief biographical information, as well as Persichetti's indications for registration, also found on each music score of his ten harpsichord sonatas. An error that I found in these liner notes is Persichetti's year of death—1990 instead of 1987, as all the other sources state. When describing Persichetti's style, Harbach says that "His style is remarkable for the fusion of classical, romantic, and contemporary idioms into works that make sense and carry a powerful musical message."²³

There are quite a few music reviews that present aspects of some of Persichetti's music for harpsichord. In a music review dedicated to some twentieth-century pieces written for harpsichord, Howard Schott writes about Persichetti's 24th *Parable* for harpsichord, "A free-form but clearly structured one-movement concert piece, brilliant

²² Op. cit., 5.

²³ Idem.

but not over-taxing. Prize competitions as well as recitals would benefit from its inclusion.”²⁴ The reviews that regard directly the harpsichord sonatas that Persichetti wrote are even of a greater importance for the present research. For example, Kathleen McIntosh Farr²⁵ describes Persichetti’s *Sonata for Harpsichord* Op. 52 as being stylistically conservative, with each movement tonally centered. The work is compared with Daniel Pinkham’s *Partita*. McIntosh Farr lists the names of the movements of the sonata and makes the assumption that Persichetti composed this piece at the piano. In order to support this affirmation, the author mentions Persichetti’s use of sustained texture with very wide chord spacing, the rapidly repeated single pitch that cannot be executed at the suggested tempo (♩=138-144), as well as the wide-spaced broken chord in the bass figure preceded by grace notes that dissipate too quickly instead of the required loud dynamics.

The same sonata, we assume, since there is no other indication of opus number or reference to any other Persichetti harpsichord sonatas, is described by Frank Dawes as

a tidy little three-movement work. Formal designs are clear and textures are kept light and open. The easy manner tends to hide the composer’s craftsmanship, which is brought to bear in outer movements of considerable rhythmic interest and flexibility and in a harmony made piquant by touches of bitonality. The central slow movement seems to have been inspired by Baroque violin music.²⁶

²⁴ Howard Schott, “Music Reviews: Harpsichord,” *The Musical Times* 126, no. 1711 (Sept. 1985): 540.

²⁵ Kathleen McIntosh Farr, “Music Review: *Sonata for Harpsichord* Op. 52 by Vincent Persichetti,” *Notes*, Second Series, 32, no. 2 (December 1975): 398-399.

²⁶ Frank Dawes, “Music Reviews: Modern Harpsichord,” *The Musical Times* 116, no. 1591 (September 1975): 807.

Howard Schott wrote a review of Persichetti's *Second Harpsichord Sonata*. He describes this sonata as being "expertly and knowingly written, qualities somewhat rare in contemporary works for the instrument."²⁷ Schott continues with these ideas:

This four-movement sonata, quite classical in form, is composed in a sparse linear idiom that effectively exploits textures and the different registers. Because of Persichetti's penchant for polytonality, many of the chordal patterns feel familiar under the fingers even if the tonal combinations achieved sound quite fresh and novel. This sonata should prove a welcome addition to the 20th-century harpsichord repertory.²⁸

Persichetti's third and fourth sonatas are reviewed together in an article by Mark E. Smith. The author's description of the two sonatas is rich in details regarding the tonal and formal structures of the pieces. He finds these sonatas "highly idiomatic for the instrument, with transparent textures and a wealth of counterpoint."²⁹ Smith comments that both sonatas are of moderate technical difficulty and would bring considerable musical rewards to any musician who would consider working on them.

In an article that Howard Schott wrote, *Harpsichord, Old and New*,³⁰ Persichetti's third, fourth, and fifth sonatas are presented next to works by Telemann, Rameau, Francesco Durante, and Claude Ballif's. In a very succinct paragraph dedicated to all three works, one can find that the three sonatas are less polytonal than Persichetti's *Second Harpsichord Sonata*. Howard Schott considers the slow movement of the fourth sonata as well as the finales of these three sonatas as being appealing to the performer.

Another example of an article in which Howard Schott reviews more than one

²⁷ Howard Schott, "Music Reviews: Early Keyboard," *The Musical Times* 125, no. 1693 (March 1984): 161.

²⁸ *Idem*.

²⁹ Mark E. Smith, "Music Reviews: Keyboard Music," *Notes*, Second Series, 42, no. 1 (September 1985): 161.

³⁰ Howard Schott, "Music Reviews: Harpsichord Old and New," *The Musical Times* 125, no. 1701 (November 1984): 649.

sonata by Persichetti at once is the one describing the sixth and seventh sonatas.³¹ Here, the reviewer notes Persichetti's uncomplicated but varied rhythmic patterns. He also acknowledges the composer's "great sensitivity to and understanding of the harpsichord's capacities,"³² even though these pieces do not represent a novelty among Persichetti's earlier harpsichord sonatas.

In conclusion, this review of existing literature about Vincent Persichetti's harpsichord sonatas indicates the insufficiency of scholarly research that would promote the true values of these opuses. The main body of the present research following in the next chapter focuses on defining stylistic traits in all ten Persichetti sonatas for the medium, in order to contribute to the existing resources on his music and to inspire other performers to approach this standard repertoire.

³¹ Howard Schott, "Music Reviews: Modern Harpsichord," *The Musical Times* 127, no. 1720 (July 1986): 396.

³² *Idem.*

III

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE TEN SONATAS

This chapter will focus on the analysis of each harpsichord sonata, with special attention given to those stylistic characteristics that define Vincent Persichetti's compositional style. While each sonata creates a unique concept and has a different effect on the listener, there are many common traits among them. I define Persichetti's compositional style based on the recurrence of these characteristics, as well as the originality of his compositional techniques. *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* defines style as "The choices that a work or performance makes from among the possibilities available. Style thus comprehends all aspects of a work or performance."³³ Persichetti, most certainly, made his compositional choices with the intent to create a neoclassical soundscape appropriate for the harpsichord and not merely for the sake of creating particular modern and original structures. His compositional technique is well conceived and elaborate, which denotes a solid knowledge and understanding of the artistic potential of his musical language. Persichetti's concern for the clear description of the harmony as a means of expression in contemporary music is reflected in his

³³ Don Michael Randel, ed., *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Seventh edition, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 811.

authoritative music theory textbook, *Twentieth-Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice*.³⁴

The publication of Vincent Persichetti's *Twentieth-Century Harmony, Creative Aspects and Practice* (W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., New York, 1961) is an event of historic importance. Surely, this volume will take its place as one of the great books on the art of music. Persichetti's text could come only from the pen of one with his astonishing qualities and experience.³⁵

One can then assert that his compositions are the result of intentional choices and create the unmistakable Persichetti style. Persichetti referred to himself as an "amalgamator," as I found in the following quote: "My own music is an amalgamation of techniques that I've inherited—not only the 20th century. I think that you can take divergent materials and give them unity and make something."³⁶ Summarized by critic Walter Simmons, Persichetti's compositional technique is presented as "Perhaps unequalled by any American composer [...]. Viewed as a whole [...], Persichetti's work reveals a strong personal profile."³⁷

Following a lecture at DePaul University in 1985, Vincent Persichetti comments on various musical topics, including a few thoughts on his own compositional style:

My music varies, it goes from gracious to gritty very often. Sometimes it has a lot of serial in it; other pieces have less of that and are more tonal. It's a mixture. I may have had something in 1942 that was more avant-garde, more advanced than something I did this year. It is not a change, but just that you happen to hear a piece that is more avant-garde than tonal. Right next to it might be a piece that is more relaxed; my music is always enigmatic. I have never joined a camp.³⁸

³⁴ Vincent Persichetti. *Twentieth-Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1961).

³⁵ William Schuman, "The Compleat Musician: Vincent Persichetti and Twentieth-Century Harmony," *The Musical Quarterly* XLVII, no. 3 (1961): 379.

³⁶ Donald L. Patterson and Janet L. Patterson, *Vincent Persichetti: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1988), 19.

³⁷ Walter G. Simmons, "Vincent Persichetti," In *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music* (London: MacMillan Press Limited, 1986): 539.

³⁸ Jean Oelrich, "Straight Talk from Vincent Persichetti," *The Instrumentalist* (November 1992): 74.

Composer William Schuman also describes Persichetti's style:

While his music has its own unmistakably personal stamp, he uses consistently and creatively the vocabulary of musical procedures and sounds developed by the composers of this century. He has a conscious mastery of 20th century materials as well as an intuitive feeling for them.³⁹

In the following pages I attempt to bring to light the musical concepts that I believe are specific to Persichetti, by going through each of the ten sonatas in order of their publication year and supporting my findings with short musical examples. All ten sonatas for harpsichord are published by Elkan-Vogel Inc., now a subsidiary of the Theodore Presser Company.

Sonata for Harpsichord, Op. 52

Written in 1951, the *Sonata for Harpsichord Op. 52* was premiered by Fernando Valenti a year later, but published by Elkan-Vogel only in 1973. While there is no explanation for this gap in time, there is some indication that this sonata was originally reproduced by Independent Music Publishers.⁴⁰ Valenti was the first professor of harpsichord at the Juilliard School in New York⁴¹ where Persichetti taught since 1947 and served as head of the composition department beginning in 1963.

The *Sonata for Harpsichord Op. 52* consists of three movements: *Andante sostenuto-Allegro*, *Adagio*, and *Vivace*. All three movements share a cyclic theme; the first and last movements use similar pitch collections, while the middle movement employs the same theme transposed a major third down.

³⁹ Schuman, 380.

⁴⁰ Patterson, 41.

⁴¹ Virginia Pleasants, "Fernando Valenti," *The Diapason* (February 1991).

The form of the opening movement is a clear sonata-Allegro form preceded by a slow introduction. The exposition has two themes, A from m. 27 and a shorter B from m. 67. The development section that begins in m. 83 combines elements of the two themes. The recapitulation follows in m. 145 with theme A. Fragments of the B theme are introduced in m. 164. A codetta (m. 173) concludes the movement.

The slow introduction is marked *Andante sostenuto* and is characterized by a general preference for E as a harmonic and melodic center, as well as B, its dominant. There is a constant oscillation between major and minor colors, depending on the use of G-sharp or G-natural, an example of his “mijor and manor” sonorities. The melodic line in this introduction is well balanced. In the tradition of Renaissance counterpoint, the flowing stepwise motion is compensated with bigger leaps, while the harmonic intervals of the left hand sustain the pulse of the beat. Both hands begin in treble clef and the left hand has the pickup beat which seems to be an anacrusis to the right hand’s theme. The *cantabile, semplice* marked at the beginning of this first movement is reflected in the simplicity of the tune played by the right hand. The left-hand accompaniment is simple and the open fifths at the beginning gradually evolve to larger intervals through stepwise motion of either one or both sounds of the initial interval (see Example 1).

Example 1: V. Persichetti, *Sonata for Harpsichord*, Op. 52, First Movement, mm. 1-3

Andante sostenuto (♩ = ca. 63)

p

cant., semplice

mp

3 3

The expression markings throughout the introduction, such as *cantabile*, *semplice*, *dolce*, *espressivo*, *ritenuto*, and *morendo* right at the end of the introduction (m. 25) are a testament to the manner in which he delicately sets the stage in this opening, creating a calm atmosphere.

The form of the introduction is ABA', where the A section (mm. 1-10) is melody accompanied, while the B section (mm. 11-16) has a harmonic texture. The B section is relatively short and has a majority of minor triads following the same harmonic pattern in its two phrases: E Minor, F-sharp Minor, G Major, and D Minor for the first phrase, and C Minor, D Minor, E-flat Major, and B-flat Minor for the second and last phrase of the B section. Put in normal order, the pitches that represent the roots of these above mentioned chords form a major tetrachord on D and B-flat, respectively:

- D – E – F-sharp – G for the first phrase in mm. 11-13 and
- B-flat – C – D – E-flat for the second phrase in mm. 14-16.

The return of the A section (A') is somewhat different—the melody and rhythm resemble the initial A section, but with slight changes to accommodate for the arriving Allegro movement. With regard to the harmony, one finds a predominant quintal harmony in the opening A section, in contrast to the harmonically enriched B section due to Persichetti's increased use of chordal sevenths. The harmonic texture of the B section reminds one of the sonority of a chorale. The final section of the introduction has a more active accompaniment in the left hand, because of the repeated use of a rhythmic pattern

consisting of two eighth notes followed by a quarter note, superimposed with the triplets in the right hand to form intricate three-against-two rhythms.

Marked by meter and tempo changes, the *Allegro* begins at m. 27. The time signature changes from 3/4 in the introduction to the employment of various, rapidly alternating time signatures that, contrastingly, use the eighth note as its pulse in the *Allegro*, with the dotted quarter now taking on a 104 suggested metronome marking. This movement has a folk feeling: two and three notes under a short slur, mixed meters, and dance-like rhythms. Not only the eighth note gets the beat now, but the meter changes almost in every measure. The constant change of meter gives the music a sense of breathlessness and instability, a sense of urgency (see Example 2).

Example 2: First Movement, *Allegro*, mm. 1-4

Allegro (♩ = 104)

mf *leggero*

The *Allegro* is characterized by perpetual, rapid motion, extremely dissonant sonorities generated by the simultaneous use of F-sharp and F-natural—in m. 2 of the *Allegro* and even C-sharp, D-sharp, E, and F-sharp in m. 4. Throughout the movement the open fifths and sevenths were chosen as harmonic intervals to accompany the melody; the only exception is a short middle section—mm. 41-61—in which thirds and sixths bring contrast and the resulting sonority is more consonant than the beginning or the ending.

The overall effect of this movement is one of percussive, energetic, agitated, and breathless music. The articulation markings are indicated in detail, through specific slurs.

From a technical standpoint, some of the suggested dynamic markings are impossible to execute on the harpsichord, but Persichetti creates an original style of writing for the instrument. He suggests dynamics that can be observed only by changing the harpsichord's manuals or choosing the softer manual. For harpsichords with a lute stop, one could use the lute stop in one hand, and keep the melody on the more contrasting manual for the other hand. The use of dynamics is supported by author Howard Ferguson:

Bach himself indicated the necessary manual-changes in his Italian Concerto and French Overture, both for solo harpsichord, whose first movements are so fully marked that they can be used as patterns for every movement of this type. The words *forte* and *piano* here stand for the two contrasting manuals of the instrument. A *forte* in both hands represents a tutti; while a solo passage is shown either by a *forte* in one hand and a *piano* in the other, or by a *piano* in both. (An unmarked opening is understood, as usual, to be *forte*). [...] The two manuals of a harpsichord can also be used purely for effects of colour. [...] Another common use of the two manuals is to obtain echo effects.⁴²

As Persichetti states at the beginning of all ten sonatas, except the first one, these works are intended for a harpsichord with two manuals or keyboards. His repeated and careful notational use of dynamics in all ten sonatas is probably intended to produce potential psychological responses from the performers through their traditionally suggestive function in music. Thus, harpsichordists may attain a better grasp and understanding of Persichetti's intention for certain musical expressions when interpreting these works.

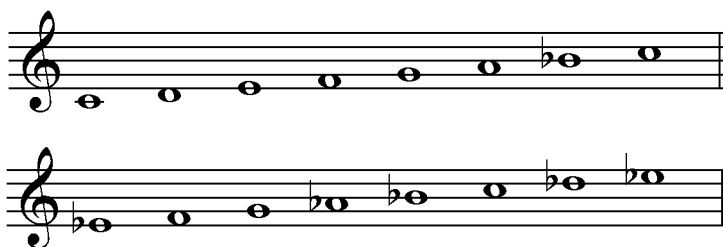
⁴² Howard Ferguson, *Keyboard Interpretation from the 14th to the 19th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 158.

Theme A of the *Allegro* is based on a pentatonic scale (see Example 3) while theme B is built on a C Mixolydian and its transposition on E-flat Mixolydian (see Example 4).

Example 3



Example 4



Although the contrasting second movement *Adagio* is only 35 measures long, it still seems of appropriate length because of the constant pulse of the extremely slow quarter note. The phrases are long and the ABA' form concludes with a Coda (the A section is from m. 1 to m. 13, the B section from mm. 14-21, the returning section A' from mm. 22-29, and the closing or Coda from mm. 30-35).

Certain melodic and rhythmic patterns are sequenced throughout this movement. The left hand exposes the monodic introductory entrance, with a response of the right hand in imitation, but a diminished fifth higher. This continuation evolves into a melody characterized by an ornamented contour and is accompanied by thirds and sixths most of

the time. Additionally, fourths and fifths form major and minor triads together with the melody (see Example 5). The character of the right hand, with its rapid rhythmic combinations and ornamented melodic formulae, resembles the style of a typical Baroque slow movement. At the same time, the left hand is tailored rhythmically in such a simple and periodic manner that complements the right hand's more sudden and meditative effects. Although the accentuation is not always clearly emulative of the Baroque sarabande, there is a certain similarity to the character of that dance that one finds in the slow tempo, meter, and use of ornamentation. We do note, however, agogic accentuation on beat two at times, as is seen in m. 3 and 4 below.

Example 5: Vincent Persichetti, *Sonata for Harpsichord*, Op. 52, Second Movement, mm. 2-5

The musical score for Example 5 shows two staves of music. The right hand (treble clef) has a melodic line with ornaments and a dynamic marking of *mf dolce, espr.* The left hand (bass clef) has a bass line with a dynamic marking of *sempre legato*. The music is in 3/4 time and consists of five measures.

The A section presents an accompanied melody, while in the B section the accompaniment is built in sixths or thirds with a more active middle voice. The parallel descending lines in the left hand generate in effect intervals of major and minor thirds with enharmonic spellings (see Example 6). The right hand of the A' section, in the tradition of Baroque ornamentation, incorporates additional written ornaments as an integrated part of the melodic line. These ornaments are built around a succession of steps in either whole-half or half-whole pattern. This process is linked directly to the

Example 8: Third Movement, mm. 1-5

(♩ = 48) Vivace (♩ = 138-144)

p espr. *rit.* *f abbandonasi*

The third movement is shaped in a sonata form. Following the two-measure introduction, the repeated notes at the beginning of the first theme of the exposition create excitement and vigorous energy for the entire movement (see Example 8). The transition continues in a similar manner through a cascade of running sixteenth notes and a brief reoccurrence of the first motive on a new key center, denoting the harmonic shift to the second theme of the exposition. Accompanying the second theme presented in the right hand in m. 31, the rolled triads of the left hand, spreading over the interval of a tenth, bring a sense of stability (see Example 9).

Example 9: mm. 31-33

The harmonic progression of these chords in the left hand contains the ascending three-step melodic figure of the beginning nucleus; this is manifested through the lowest notes of the bass. In fact, the importance of the rolled left-hand chords is emphasized by their use in anticipation of this second theme, prior to its occurrence, when the composer introduces them at the end of the transition (m. 28).

Contrary to the assumption expressed by Kathleen McIntosh Farr and described in the previous chapter that this sonata was composed by Persichetti at the piano, various elements found in his music lead me to believe that it was clearly written with idiomatic harpsichord traits in mind. In particular, Persichetti used a specific notation for his rolled triads present in this movement, namely double appoggiaturas to the main notes, which are in fact the upper two notes of the chord. The fact that Persichetti chose this technique reveals his understanding of the Baroque harpsichord technique of staggering as well as of the instrument's sustaining capabilities.

A third, more peaceful, diatonic, and lyrical theme is introduced in m. 47 of the exposition. Marked *piacevole*, it suggests a more reflective atmosphere. Following the same harmonic trend as in the first two themes, the third one alternates minor and major modes that reflect tonal ambiguity.

The development begins in m. 77, and uses an amalgam of compositional techniques based on the wealth of thematic material from the exposition. The developmental treatment includes a toccata-like section with percussive and dissonant effects that resemble the fast-paced transition of running sixteenth notes from the exposition. Fragments of the left-hand accompaniment material of the first theme combine with rhythmic elements of the third theme to form the material used at the beginning of the development section. Throughout the lengthy development, Persichetti masterfully proceeds with a full course of thematic modifications with the exception of a clear statement of the very first theme.

The abbreviated recapitulation begins in m. 173 and surprises the listener because it lacks the transition between the first and second themes as well as the entire third

theme generating a precipitating effect. The transitional cascading runs together with the rolling chords of the second theme and the melodic-rhythmic motive from the introduction conclude the sonata in a coda section that begins in m. 192. The dynamic is fortissimo *con fuoco* until the end of the piece and the effect is a continuous, almost breathless motion.

The use of parallel motion is another compositional device that Persichetti uses throughout this sonata as a cyclic element. In the last movement, parallel sixths predominate. Such examples can be found in mm. 12-14, 19-20, and 193-194. Other intervals used between the two hands for this type of writing are thirds, octaves, and tenths.

The polychords used in this movement have a powerful, striking effect on the sonority. E Major played simultaneously with E Minor (as in m. 31), F-sharp Major played together with A Minor (m. 32), G-sharp Minor played at the same time with C Major (m. 33), F-sharp Major played with G Major (m. 117), and G-sharp Minor played with E-flat Major (m. 118) represent only a few such examples.

Persichetti uses a variety of expression markings to define the character of the movement. The Italian terms that he uses cover both free and strict areas of interpretation. *Abbandonasi* (m. 3), *piacevole* (m. 47), *agitato* (m. 77), *con spirito* (m. 171), and *con fuoco* (m. 192) give the performer the possibility to create a freer and more individual interpretation, while terms such as *pesante* (m. 16), *decisivo* (mm. 30, 108, and 182), *risoluto* (m. 142), and *rigoroso* (m. 206) balance this movement with a more rigorous character of the musical expression. On the harpsichord these effects can be achieved by using varied articulation as well as dynamic changes through various registrations.

Persichetti's *Sonata for Harpsichord Op. 52* opens a whole new world to harpsichordists. It is full of color, shocking dynamic suggestions that describe the character and clearly imply changes in registration. It is also unified by a cyclic theme, while its rhythms are energetic and intricate.

Thirty years after the composition of this sonata, Persichetti shared with musicologist Walter Simmons the fact that he “discovered a whole new universe of sound: it’s called the harpsichord.”⁴³ This re-discovery proved to be prolific for the composer, since he completed nine more sonatas as well as the *Parable Op. 153*, *The Little Harpsichord Book Op. 155*, and the *Serenade Op. 161* for this particular medium.

Second Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 146

The second harpsichord sonata was published in 1983, ten years after the first sonata. With this sonata, the series of commissioned works begins. Up to Persichetti’s tenth harpsichord sonata, I will indicate the name of the commissioner and the name of the performer for which each sonata was intended. Also beginning with this sonata, even the duration is specified at the beginning of each work.

Sonata Op. 146 was commissioned by Michael Needle and Associates for renowned harpsichordist Elaine Comparone. According to biographer Gerry Kaplan, Comparone represented Persichetti’s inspiration to write more music for harpsichord. “Her avid interest in contemporary music has led to collaborations with many distinguished composers. Twenty-seven years after composing his First Harpsichord

⁴³ Walter Simmons, “Writings,” www.walter-simmons.com/articles/244.htm (October 16, 2009).

Sonata, Vincent Persichetti heard Elaine Comparone play and began to write again for the harpsichord.”⁴⁴

This sonata comprises four movements: *Allegro moderato*, *Andante sostenuto*, *Allegretto*, and *Allegro vivo*. The first movement contains 138 measures and is written in sonata form. The second theme begins in m. 25 and the development in m. 49. The recapitulation comes only in m. 78.

The first theme of the exposition is built on an alternation of arpeggiated chords and fast, running scales. These two elements become a cyclic pattern for the entire sonata. Measures 1, 3, 9, and 11 present the descending polychords on various notes or roots (major chord with major seventh to which Persichetti superimposes a minor chord with minor seventh) in a linear form, without a clear delineation between melody and harmony. The two hands do not play together in the first phrase, but unfold their arpeggios and scales by taking turns. Therefore, it is difficult to clearly define the melody from its accompanying harmony. The subsequent phrases have a clearer presentation—the arpeggios occur again (mm. 7, 8, 10, and 12), but descending and accompanied by the intervals of a second, third, or sixth. This way, the distinction between melody and harmony is clear (see Example 10).

⁴⁴ Gerry Kaplan, “Elaine Comparone,” www.harpsichord.org/bios/elaine2 (October 16, 2009).

Example 10: *Second Harpsichord Sonata*, Op. 146, First Movement, mm. 1-12

Allegro moderato (♩=138)

The musical score consists of three systems of two staves each. The first system (measures 1-4) begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and the instruction *con agilità*. The right hand plays a descending line of eighth notes, while the left hand plays a descending polychord. The second system (measures 5-8) starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand continues with a descending line, and the left hand plays a descending polychord. The third system (measures 9-12) begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The right hand plays a descending line, and the left hand plays a descending polychord. The piece concludes with a piano (*p*) dynamic in the final measure.

The harmony right at the beginning spells descending polychords, which are sequenced in the following measures, and also repeated in their ascending version. Measures 1, 3, 9 and 11 present the polychords descending, while mm. 7 and 8 bring the first two in reversed order, and ascending. The roots of these polychords are F in m. 1, C in m. 3, A in m. 9, and D in m. 11. The first measure shows a clear interest in the mirror technique; the opening polychord can be interpreted as either a superimposing of a major chord with major seventh and a minor chord with minor seventh, using the middle note as common note, or as a cascade of three major triads with common notes as roots. Since the

major triad with major seventh is used again, but alone this time, in mm. 68, 69, and 71, we can assume that the first interpretation of the polychord is the one intended by Persichetti (see Example 11).

Example 11

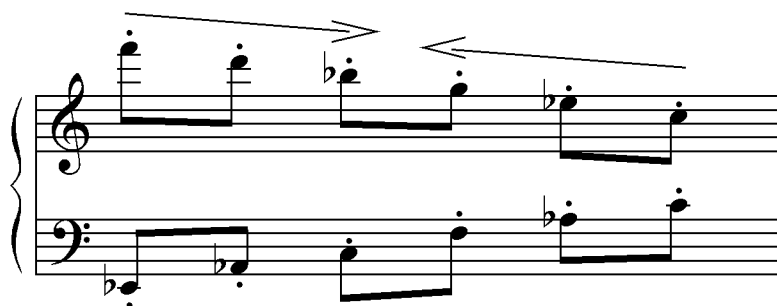
Example 11 displays four measures of polychords on a single treble clef staff. The measures are labeled 'm. 1', 'm. 3', 'm. 9', and 'm. 11'. Each measure contains a complex chord structure with multiple notes and accidentals (sharps and naturals) stacked vertically, creating a dissonant effect.

The mirror technique is present frequently in this second sonata. Measures 54, 55, 58, and 59 show this aspect being extended to two different levels: linear and vertical at the same time (see Example 12). In these measures, both voices have mirroring structures within the broken chord and mirroring each other, as well. Interestingly, in m. 57 Persichetti chooses to slightly modify the pattern of arpeggiated polychords in the left hand in order to keep the resulting dissonant effect between the two hands (see Example 13).

Example 12: mm. 54-55

Example 12 shows two measures of music, measures 54 and 55, in 3/4 time. The notation is presented in a grand staff with a treble clef on top and a bass clef on the bottom. The music features arpeggiated polychords in both hands, with curved lines indicating the arpeggiated structure. The notes are complex, including sharps and naturals, and are mirrored between the two hands.

Example 13: m. 57



Measure 60 presents points of imitation based on a minor tetrachord on E, C-sharp, and B, and is followed by octave doubling in mm. 61-67.

Measure 68 can be considered a false recapitulation or maybe a transition to recapitulation. The main cell is sequenced, with a descending first phrase, plus counterbalanced by an ascending motive with stepwise motion as a second phrase. The first twenty-three measures of the recapitulation are identical with the very first twenty-three measures of the movement (mm. 1-23 are identical with mm. 78-100).

Measures 3 and 7 as well as mm. 1 and 8 use the same pitches in the right hand, but with changes in direction and rhythm. On the same note of ascending sixteenth comes the transition between the first and the second themes in the exposition. These eight measures (mm. 17-24) are written in a toccata style, with three different levels of registration: low, medium, and high, where the left hand crosses over the right hand. The same pattern returns in mm. 94-101. When comparing m. 24 with m. 101 we discover that Persichetti “modulates” through very small changes made in the starting note of the motive in each hand (see Example 14).

Example 14: mm. 24, 101

This reminds one of Bach's "melodic mutations" (interval modifications) for modulation purposes, while keeping the patterns intact. It becomes more of a sequence this way. The interval change between the left and right hand—the initial fifth—becomes a sixth. There is also a change of interval in the left hand, where the initial perfect fourth in m. 24 is augmented to a perfect fifth in m. 101. Both changes were made for modulation purposes, since the recapitulation brings the theme a major second higher than its first appearance in the exposition. From m. 102 to m. 130, the music is transposed a whole tone higher.

Measures 131-138 conclude the first movement in a coda that reiterates the opening motive cascading until the end. The metrical dislocation exhibited in this coda is the result of the harmonic progression of the arpeggios that determined Persichetti to split their ascending or descending flow between the two hands. The triple meter is altered in effect by starting the arpeggios on various beats of the measure. He also asymmetrically groups the notes of each arpeggio under the same phrase marks. The initial generating motive of six eighth notes is transformed in the coda in groups of four eighth notes, precipitating the character of the ending.

The second movement has only thirty-nine measures. Marked *mf espr.* at the beginning, this is an extremely chromatic movement, written in ABA form. A

characteristic of Persichetti's style is his use of complementary rhythms to enhance the structural two-voice counterpoint. This is a rhythmic principle that features the distribution of rhythmic attacks among multiple voices so that they complement one another through their individual, contrasting rhythmic elements, thus creating an individual sense of line among them.

The right hand's material is based on a minor chord with minor seventh and major ninth. The chord appears a few times arpeggiated, as part of the melody, and is transposed from F in m. 2, to C in m. 6, and to E in m. 15. These iterations of the opening motive are always modified melodically and rhythmically, though they maintain a common ground through the type of the chordal structure, namely a minor triad with minor seventh and major ninth (see Example 15).

Example 15: Second Movement, mm. 2, 6, 15

The image shows three measures of musical notation in a two-staff format. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The first measure (m. 2) shows a right-hand melody starting with a triplet of eighth notes (F4, G4, A4) and a left-hand accompaniment of a minor chord with a minor seventh and major ninth (F4, A-flat4, C5, E-flat5). The second measure (m. 6) shows the right-hand melody transposed to C4, G4, A4 and the left-hand accompaniment transposed to C4, E-flat4, F4, A-flat4. The third measure (m. 15) shows the right-hand melody transposed to E4, G4, A4 and the left-hand accompaniment transposed to E4, G4, A4, C5. The notation includes arpeggiated chords and melodic lines with triplets.

In m. 26, the opening theme is back in an ornamented form, giving the impression of variation. The theme is hidden among the ornaments, but present with various rhythms. The left hand's material is often generated by the initial interval of a second. The melodic content of the left hand accompaniment evolves with small steps. This accompaniment is a series of harmonic intervals that are dissonant in nature, with an emphasis on secundal harmonies with a chromatic feeling.

Another notable harmonic aspect is the use of a major triad with major seventh on which the first movement is based, while the second movement uses a contrasting minor triad with minor ninth.

The major second of the opening is treated as minor seventh at times, bringing a flavor of a dominant-seventh, without clear tonal centers. The seconds gradually evolve to thirds and fourths through stepwise motion. The overall dynamic of the melodic lines is complementary.

Measures 33 to the end (m. 39) mark a short coda with the same material contained at m. 9, but denser this time. This closing phrase is very chromatic. The right hand starts from a minor second, while the left hand starts from a major second. The left hand ends with parallel fifths and a C Minor chord in the very last measure, which has an effect of an opening and positive attitude.

The third movement, marked *Allegretto*, comprises 125 measures, and has a quick “in one” feeling, since the metronome marking reads $\downarrow = 76$. Rests have a very important role leading to a more expressive discourse and the overall impression is that of a dance. In contrast with the previous movement, here Persichetti uses leaps that create multiple melodic lines. Octave doublings are present in this movement as well; their first appearance can be found in mm. 15-17, and then at mm. 81-83 (see Example 16). This movement feels shorter because of the fast tempo.

Example 16: Third Movement, mm. 15-17 (identical with mm. 81-83)

There is an original approach to chord building in this movement—the major chord with major seventh and major ninth on E-flat (right hand) cascades by alternating hands on E. If the chord is considered without the seventh and ninth, it can be broken into two major chords, so the pace is faster. The following downbeat of each chordal structure could be counted as part of the chord, in which case the result is a polychord. Descending lines and mirrored structures are reminiscent of previous movements. Measures 1-3 and 13-15 by comparison are an example of a mirrored structure, but keeping the same ascending direction (see Example 17).

Example 17: mm. 1-3, 13-15

Any leaps used here are counterbalanced by the extensive use of stepwise motion. The form of this movement is ABA', with the B section beginning in m. 35, and the return of the A' section in m. 67. In the B section, m. 35 and m. 43 are the same, with the latter transposed a minor third higher. A' is identical with A up to m. 85 (the first 18

measures are the same). The short notes (eighth notes marked staccato) suggest a pointillistic effect, but remind one of the very first measure of the sonata, in the first movement. The difference is that this time there is only one eighth note, as opposed to the first movement where there was a whole measure motive that included six eighth notes. This detail can be tied to the same cyclic concept that Persichetti chose to use so many times in these sonatas.

The last movement, *Allegro vivo*, comprises 89 measures. The two motives found in the opening of this movement—staccato eighth notes in the first measure, and legato thirty-seconds in the second measure—were used in the previous movements, and therefore are a cyclic element for the entire sonata (see Example 18).

Example 18: Fourth Movement, mm. 1-2

Allegro vivo ($\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 120$)

p *ben articolato*

f *p*

The five measures that introduce this movement reappear identically in bars 13-17, then again in mm. 40-44 with two eighth rests inserted for a metric dislocation, followed by a shortened version in m. 52, and a last appearance in m. 76. This latter appearance of the opening motives continues with a development of the second motive that builds up to the end in a cascade of descending scales. Measures 28-39 can be found

at 64-75. Measure 5, and its repetition in m. 17, is based on the second motive of fast running thirty-seconds, initially present in the second measure of this movement. In m. 5, the Phrygian scale is transposed a half step lower, and then sequenced a diminished fifth lower. The result is a powerful gesture that comes back several times throughout the movement, with slight changes, but in the same character. As this movement and therefore the entire sonata approaches the end, the second motive of the opening two motives takes over, and the overall effect is one of precipitation, and less of joyful and dance-like staccato notes. The Phrygian scale appears a few times throughout the movement, on E (m. 2, m. 14), E-flat and A (m. 5, m. 17), C (m. 77), and B (m. 83). Another mode that is used in mm. 31-32 is Ionian or major on C and A. In these two measures, the left hand parallels the right hand with the same pattern (m. 31) or mirrors it with arpeggiated major triads in false relation with the major scales of the right hand (see Example 19). Parallel motion can also be found in mm. 34-35, as well as mm. 70-71 a tenth apart, and 81—a diminished fifth apart.

Example 19: mm. 31-32

The musical notation for Example 19, measures 31-32, is presented in two staves. The right hand (treble clef) features a series of eighth-note patterns with slurs, while the left hand (bass clef) plays arpeggiated major triads in false relation with the right hand's patterns.

Out of the ten harpsichord sonatas by Persichetti, this is the only four-movement work. Its finale is very striking, with the dashing eighth-note scales in descending

passages played about as fast as the hands can move. The staccato notes and the rapid descending scales of the opening motive of the fourth movement are cyclical in nature, because Persichetti creates similar motivic elements in all the preceding movements. The use of chordal structures is limited throughout the sonata; their appearance at the very end of the piece is very effective. These major chords with major sevenths suggest a stop in the musical discourse, announcing the end of this breathless and fast-paced sonata.

Third Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 149

Published in 1983, Sonata Op. 149 was commissioned by Elaine Comparone, and has three movements: *Allegro moderato*, *Adagietto*, and *Allegro molto*.

The first movement is written in sonata form as described in the following outline: introductory phrase (mm. 1-8), theme 1 of exposition (9-25), transition (26-34), leading back to a reiteration of the first theme (35-49), second theme (50-76), development (77-98), first theme in recapitulation (99-115), transition (116-124), reiteration of first theme (125-139), second theme in recapitulation (140-165), and a brief coda section (166-173). The introduction begins with a G-sharp Minor triad, and progresses to a D-sharp Minor triad. Moreover, the introductory first eight measures are based on these two triads, harmonically speaking. The melody evolves through step-wise motion, with gradual changes in one voice at a time, the result being a chromatic melodic line (see Example 20).

Example 20: *Third Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 149, First Movement, mm. 1-8*

Allegro moderato (♩ = c. 116)

mp dolce *rit.* *poco* *a* *poco*

(♩ = c. 60)

The second phrase is in contrast with the first phrase: larger intervals, same chromatic lines but presented in latent polyphony style. There are complementary rhythms between the two lines of both hands (see Example 21).

Example 21: mm. 9-14

a tempo

mf *grazioso*

Measures 9-14 are sequenced in mm. 15-20 a step higher and sequenced again at 21-26, another step higher, this time with slight changes in patterns and with the two hands inverted.

A new pattern begins at m. 27. This pattern is characterized by continuous motion through eighth-note pulses, and inspired by the melodic and rhythmic formula found in bar 13. The phrase that is born in m. 27 has eight measures (mm. 27-34). Measures 35-42 bring back the same phrase found at mm. 11-18.

A comparison of m. 19 and m. 43 reveals a favorite technique that Persichetti “borrowed” from Johann Sebastian Bach’s compositional style, naming the intervallic modifications for modulating purposes (see Example 22; compare the intervals of the left hand).

Example 22: mm. 19, 43



The changes mentioned above are followed by a phrase (mm. 45-50) comparable with the phrase at mm. 20-26. While the left hand undergoes only minor changes, the right hand moves in an opposite direction at mm. 44-49, with descending intervals and different quality for some of them (see Example 23).

Example 23: mm. 20-25, 44-49

This technique is reminiscent of Persichetti’s mirror music and his so-called reflective playing. He refers to the “strictly inverted intervals in symmetrical reflection” in his *Twentieth Century Harmony* treatise.⁴⁵ Persichetti appreciated the usefulness of mirror music, as we read in the following:

All my life, I’ve kept my fingers in shape by playing a unique kind of mirror music that develops both (hands) simultaneously. Reflective playing introduces a kind of finger manipulation neglected throughout the history of keyboard instruments. I couldn’t keep these forty-eight studies from blossoming into music: the result was the *Mirror Etudes*.⁴⁶

Measures 140-164 are comparable with mm. 50-76, but a major third down – from G to E-flat.

Measures 10-29 are identical with mm. 100-119, and m. 30 can also be found at m. 120, this time transposed a half step lower, from C-sharp to B-sharp. Compared to the

⁴⁵ Persichetti, *Twentieth-Century Harmony*, 172.

⁴⁶ Rudy Shackelford, “Conversation with Vincent Persichetti,” *Perspectives of New Music* 20 (1981–2): 112.

exposition, the recapitulation sequences the main melodic line on different pitches: G in m. 124, and A in m. 129, while in the exposition the opening theme at m. 10 is repeated exactly the same at m. 34. The first movement ends with a short conclusion that uses the opening idea once again.

The second movement of this sonata is shorter than the first, with only 61 measures. Of the first twelve measures that constitute the A section, six are chordal, and six have a two-voice structure. This movement follows the same contrapuntal idea as the first movement. The *Adagietto* is a very expressive movement, with frequent indications: *espr. assai*, *doloroso*, *affettuoso*, and *teneramente*. Numerous leaps in sevenths that were so important in the first movement are kept here too.

The structure of the second movement follows this scheme:

A.....	B.....	A'.....	B.....	A.....	Coda
mm.: 1-12.....	13-22.....	23-34.....	35-44.....	45-54.....	57-61

Quintal and tertian harmonies characterize this movement. It offers a welcomed hymn-like texture, a necessary smoother and quieter atmosphere that is effective especially because of the way Persichetti placed it between two quick-paced and pointillistic movements. The phrases are long and the overall homophonic texture has a meditative and expressive effect.

The third movement is the most extensive of all movements in this sonata. This movement is written in an arch form.

A.....B.....A'.....C.....A.....B'.....C.....A.....Coda
 mm.: 1-34...35-46...47-87...88-120...121-154...155-169...170-190.....191-200.....201-244

It is an *Allegro molto* ($\text{♩} = c. 160$), in which chromaticism and the interval of a seventh generate the melody and harmony again; this is a cyclic element in the sonata (see Example 24).

Example 24: Third Movement, mm. 1-8

Allegro molto ($\text{♩} = c. 160$)

The musical score for Example 24, Third Movement, mm. 1-8, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 1-4) is marked *p* (piano). The second system (measures 5-8) is marked *mp semplice* (mezzo-piano semplice). The tempo is *Allegro molto* with a quarter note equal to approximately 160 beats per minute. The score is in 2/4 time. The melody in the right hand consists of stepwise motion with rests, while the accompaniment in the left hand maintains continuity through long note values and ties.

Stepwise motion contributes to flowing melodic lines, well balanced by contrary motion in at least one of the two voices of the accompaniment. Regardless of how short or how many rests the melody in the right hand has, the accompaniment maintains the continuity of the music through long note values with some of them connecting into the next measure through ties. The melody is more expansive and based on motivic

development. An appropriate way to interpret such a combination of extensive melody and its accompaniment is to simultaneously use both manuals on the harpsichord.

Some of the general characteristics of this movement are: well crafted long phrases throughout, very frequent use of the seventh—fifth—second sequence in the left hand accompaniment. The musical material presented in mm. 1- 6 occur three times (also at mm. 47-52, and 121-126), identically for the accompaniment, but the second time (mm. 47-52) accompanying a slightly changed tune—only the first three measures of the phrase are different, in descending motion this time, while in the second half of the phrase the tune is kept the same as in the other two instances.

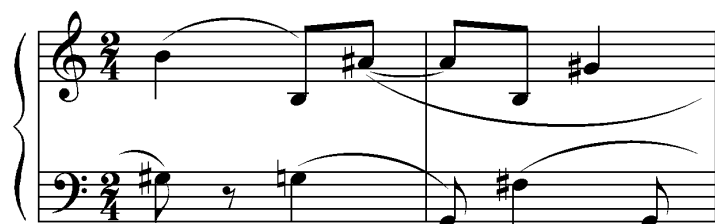
The generating intervals (seventh, fifth, and second) of the harmony can be found in many measures throughout the movement. At times, the accompaniment starts at a different point in the aforementioned pattern (mm. 21-24 or mm. 67-72) where an enharmonic change at the end of the pattern makes it longer and modulatory (see Example 25).

Example 25: mm. 22-25, 68-72

The image displays two systems of musical notation for harpsichord. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The first system (measures 22-25) shows a melodic line in the treble and a harmonic accompaniment in the bass. The second system (measures 68-72) shows a similar structure, but with a change in the melodic line in the first measure and the instruction *f risoluto* in the right hand.

The interval of a seventh first appears harmonically and later on melodically, creating even more tension when used on a syncopated rhythm (see Example 26). Fifths and seconds are used both harmonically and melodically. From m. 201 to m. 209 in a *forte* and *ben proclamato* section, both hands play in unison.

Example 26: mm. 101-102



Towards the end of the third movement, a choral-like structure is reminiscent of the second and first movements as follows: mm. 217-229 of the third movement—mm. 13-22 of the second movement with its harmonic structure, and mm. 10-14 of the first movement for its melodic line.

The C section is based on material from the A and B sections and is characterized by imitation between the two hands. Section B' uses the same material found in the B section, but transposed a minor third lower. The ending (coda) is characterized by a melodic line played in parallel octaves between the two hands as well as by the vigorous statement of a hymn-like section—a cyclic element in this sonata, and by leaps of large intervals that recall similar dissonant intervals from the opening of the movement. Persichetti chose a less striking chord to end his third sonata. This last chord is short, accented, and marked *fortissimo* and consists of a harmonic perfect fifth in the right hand, preceded by a melodic perfect fifth in the left hand with two of the notes doubled at the

octave. However, this chord is an unusual polychord, in which the chord in the bass is spelled melodically while the top one is sounded harmonically. Of great effectiveness, its sonority is somewhat diluted if compared to a typical polychord, in which both chords would be sounded together.

While in the previous two sonatas Persichetti used thematic reoccurrence between movements, in the third sonata this compositional device is enhanced by the cyclic nature of his use of certain expressive marks, syncopated rhythms, and concluding open fifths.

Fourth Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 151

This sonata was published in 1983, and commissioned by Shippensburg State College for Joan Applegate, who taught music history and literature as well as performance courses in the music department of that school. She also served as department chair for several terms and performed as soloist and accompanist on the piano and harpsichord. Applegate earned her undergraduate and doctoral degree from the Eastman School of Music.

The *Fourth Harpsichord Sonata* has three movements: *Allegro moderato*, *Andante*, and *Vivace*. The first movement employs the following structure:

A.....	B.....	A'.....	B.....	CODA
mm.: 1-33.....	34-88.....	89-149.....	150-198.....	199-206 (1 phrase)

The A sections are written in 3/4 time, while the B sections are in 3/8 time. The transition from 3/4 to 3/8 is preceded both times by a preparatory measure whose division

of beats is meant to ease one's ear into the new meter and feeling of the beat (see Example 27).

Example 27: *Fourth Harpsichord Sonata*, Op. 151, First Movement, mm. 33-34, 149-150

The image shows a musical score for a harpsichord. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, with a brace on the left. The score is divided into four measures. Above the first and third measures, there are annotations: a quarter note followed by an equals sign and another quarter note, indicating a rhythmic value. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings. The meter changes between measures, with time signatures of 3/4, 3/8, 3/4, and 3/8.

This is a fast paced movement ($\text{♩} = \text{c. } 144$), with complementary rhythms and busy texture. A' begins somewhat similar to A, this time a major ninth lower, on middle C. A' is a rhythmic variation as well, and its texture differs too—imitative, with the left hand responding a minor sixth down. The imitation characterizes the first phrase only (mm. 89-96). The second phrase (mm. 97-108) has a chordal structure, and is followed by a third phrase (mm. 108-118) that prepares the return of the opening as found in the A section: descending scales, points of imitation, and a gradual evolution toward the same pitches as in the first measures of the movement. Measure 119 brings back the opening (from mm. 1-22). At m. 138, there is a small change for modulating purposes, where the same material is kept in the following measures. Here, it is transposed an augmented second higher.

Through the enharmonization in m. 148 (A-sharp is enharmonic with B-flat in this measure), the augmented second (transposed) becomes a minor third when B' begins in m. 150 (compare to section B in m. 34).

The coda (mm. 199-206) summarizes the opening theme at a faster pace—running sixteenth notes this time. The whole first movement seems breathless and with a continuous melody. Changes from a key center with sharps to one with flats is done by enharmonic treatment of a note (see Example 28). An identical move can be found in m. 122.

Example 28: mm. 5-7

Example 28 shows a musical passage in two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature changes from one sharp (F#) to one flat (Bb) between measures 6 and 7. The melody in the treble clef consists of sixteenth notes, and the bass clef provides a simple accompaniment.

The second movement, *Andante*, comprises 48 measures. Enharmonic modulations are used even more in this movement, on the same idea of the first movement: mm. 4-5, 16-17 (A-flat—G—G-sharp), 23-24, and 29 are some of such examples (see Example 29).

Example 29: Second Movement, mm. 4-5

Example 29 shows a musical passage in two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature changes from one sharp (F#) to one flat (Bb) between measures 4 and 5. The melody in the treble clef consists of sixteenth notes, and the bass clef provides a simple accompaniment.

Measures 1-7 are also used at mm. 20-26, and almost in the same form at mm. 39-44. This latter time, the left hand is the same while the right hand is an embellished variation of the previous right hand part. Measure 27 uses the same material as m. 8 but transposed a half step lower.

When compared, mm. 2, 8, and 12 reveal some small but effective changes in the compositional technique. While mm. 2 and 8 have two out of three voices identical, m. 12 takes the motive of the right hand further and develops it in the following measures (see Example 30 a, b, c).

Example 30:

a) m. 2

Musical notation for measure 2. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melodic line: G4, A4, B4, C5. The left hand (bass clef) plays a bass line: F3, G3. The right hand part is slurred over the first four notes. The left hand part is slurred over the first two notes.

b) m. 8

Musical notation for measure 8. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melodic line: G4, A4, B4, C5. The left hand (bass clef) plays a bass line: F3, G3. The right hand part is slurred over the first four notes. The left hand part is slurred over the first two notes. The left hand part is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

c) mm. 12-15

The harmony created in the left hand evolves from simple intervals and stepwise motion. The left hand is also characterized by chromatic writing.

The closing movement, *Vivace* (206 measures), is written in rondo form.

A.....B.....C.....A.....D.....A'.....E.....A.....B'.....A'.....C'.....Coda
 (1-12...13-28...29-44...45-56...57-72...73-92...93-116...117-124...125-141...142-164...165-177...178-206)

There are several notable aspects here. In mm. 61- 62, and mm. 63 - 64, the left and right hand imitate each other. This technique is suggested back in m. 42, but continues throughout the movement, with a climax beginning with m. 168, where the mirror technique is used as well (see Example 31).

Ex. 31: Third Movement, mm. 168-171



The articulation is specific and written in detail. A particular example is used frequently and represented by a two-note tie continued with a staccato note; the effect is even greater when this occurs in the middle of the measure. Such examples may be found in mm. 117, 121, 125, and many others. Two notes marked with a legato that ends with a staccato, such as in mm. 118-119, 122-123, 128, and so forth, is another example of very particular articulation one can find in this movement. Measures 68-69 contain accents in the right hand, continued in the left hand a measure later (see Example 32).

Example 32: mm. 68-69



In the same area of accents, mm. 73-78 display strong, irregular accents, as well as parallel writing—in tenths, as seen in mm. 77-79, and at a sixth over the octave, as found in mm. 105-107. Measures 80-92 bring almost a break in the fast paced movement, realized through a harmonic writing. The idea of imitation mentioned above is

accentuated in mm. 101-104 by using running scales split between the right and left hand (see Example 33). This passage is masterfully written, with such a smooth flow, especially by superimposing the last note of the descending scale in one hand with the first note of the subsequent scale in the other hand, a step lower.

Example 33: mm. 101-104

The B' section's first four measures are similar to the original B section, while the right hand parallels the left hand in the following measures with its toccata-like writing. The motive at mm. 68-69 comes back at mm. 138-140, this time in the top notes, in octaves, and a whole-tone higher.

The left hand of the returning A' (m. 145) is comparable to the original A of the beginning of this third movement, but this time is a variation of the original. Measures 157-161 have a certain tension given by the closeness of the two voices; one voice has a chromatic scale in quarter notes, and the other voice doubles the first one with a scale in half notes (see Example 34).

Example 34: mm. 157-161



The C' section reminds one of the C section at least rhythmically. The coda, which spans from m. 178 to m. 206, is written almost entirely in parallel octaves.

Vincent Persichetti's music frequently displays melodic formulae of stepwise motion where the motive is abruptly interrupted by an octave leap in the opposite direction of the melodic motion, thus changing the register without any modification of the melodic scale pattern. This compositional device is known as "Baroque dislocation," a term referred to by Romanian music theoretician Teodor Tutuianu,⁴⁷ because it was frequently used in the music of that era, in particular Johann Sebastian Bach (see Example 35 a, b).

Example 35:

a) J.S. Bach, *Prelude XIV (Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1)*, mm. 16-17, right hand



⁴⁷ Teodor Tutuianu, *Course of Bach Counterpoint Techniques* (Bucharest, Romania: National University of Music, 1995-96), notes from the lecture.

b) V. Persichetti, *Fourth Harpsichord Sonata*, Third Movement, mm. 23-25, left hand



“Latent polyphony” is another term that I apply in order to describe Persichetti’s structural dualism of the melodic content. It is defined in the writings of Swiss music theorist Ernst Kurth (1886-1946):

However, besides the fullness of harmonic effects, yet other systematic, technical means of melodic shaping are directed at the goal of evoking the impression of polyphony and a fuller texture by means of a single voice. Countless admirable, skillfully applied *allusions* to additional parts woven into the voice reach beyond the capacity of what can actually resound in the material of a single voice. There is a technique developed in Bach’s lines such that *polyphony is latent* in the monophonic linear unfoldment [Entwicklung]. It suggests an aural comprehension and supplementation of musical procedures that are richer and more diverse than *actually sound* in the one voice.⁴⁸

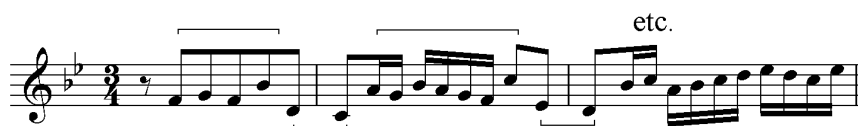
This term is also known as “implied polyphony,” “pseudopolyphony,” or “compound melody” and reminds one of solo Baroque music, such as Bach’s solo works for string instruments. “Latent polyphony” is the perception of multiple voices within the single line of the solo instrument (or in one hand of a keyboard solo work), producing a sense of counterpoint (see Example 36 a, b). Another reference to this compositional technique can be found in composer Pierre Boulez’s words: “a polyphony which remains latent.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ernst Kurth, *Selected Writings* (Cambridge Studies in Music Theory and Analysis, edited and translated by Lee A. Rothfarb, Cambridge, Great Britain: University Press, 1991), 76.

⁴⁹ Pierre Boulez, Susan Bradshaw, transl., and Richard Rodney Bennett, transl., *Boulez on Music Today* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), 137.

Example 36:

a) J.S. Bach, *Fugue XXI (Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1)*, mm. 1-3, right hand



b) V. Persichetti, *Fourth Harpsichord Sonata, Third Movement*, mm. 16-20, right hand



The final movement is one of the only two movements of all ten sonatas to be marked *Vivace*, with the metronome marking of 152 for a quarter note. This is a tempo that almost exceeds the physical capacity of the instrument to still be able to communicate true pitches. However, in the only available recording of this sonata, renowned harpsichordist Elaine Comparone masters the instrument very well and the music is yet acoustically perceptible.⁵⁰

Fifth Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 152

The fifth sonata was published in 1984 and was commissioned by Arizona State University for pianist and harpsichordist John Metz, who served there as faculty between 1980 and 2004 and created and developed the early music program of that university. Metz holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in harpsichord from the Juilliard School of Music where Persichetti had been a distinguished member of the faculty since 1947.

⁵⁰ Elaine Comparone, harpsichordist, Vincent Persichetti, and Domenico Scarlatti, *Harpsichord Sonatas* (Los Angeles, Ca: Laurel Record LR-838CD, 1992), Liner notes 9.

This is the first sonata in which Persichetti includes specific indications for registration, stop changes, and manual changes. These details are in addition to the composer's note on the title page of all the sonatas with the exception of the first.

In some of my harpsichord works the registration is indicated to help clarify the expressive intent. Adjustments should be made to approximate these medium colors on the instrument at hand. A harpsichord with two keyboards and three sets of strings is desirable. There should be at least an 8' and 4' on the lower manual (I), and 8' on the upper manual (II), a buff stop and coupler. In those works where the registration is not indicated, the performer should allow the dynamics and musical content to create the register settings.⁵¹

Persichetti asks for what harpsichordists regard as a standard double manual harpsichord. Such an instrument would have two keyboards and three sets of strings. A set of strings sounds at concert pitch on both keyboards while another set of strings on the lower keyboard sounds an octave higher than written. The 8' and 4' stop terminology is derived from the pipe organ—8' being concert pitch and 4' one octave higher than written. In terms of the quality of the two sets of 8' strings, both are of the same metal; however because of the different plucking points they sound different. The bottom 8' sounds round and fluty while the upper 8' sounds more nasal because it is plucked closer to the bridge. The harpsichord has a mechanism for coupling the two keyboards together so that all three sets of strings can be played together. There is also a buff stop (sometimes called a lute stop) where the strings on one of the 8' sets are muted by having a piece of soft leather pressed lightly against them at the nut. With the buff stop engaged upper harmonics are minimized. With the composer's indications of registration and manual changes rather than simply dynamic marks, which are only a suggestion of the expressive intent, the harpsichordist finds it easier to deal with questions of interpretation.

⁵¹ Vincent Persichetti's note from the title page of his harpsichord sonatas numbers 2 through 10.

Persichetti uses the same indications for the rest of the sonatas, except the ninth, which has dynamic and expression marks only.

The *Fifth Harpsichord Sonata* is written in three movements: *Moderato*, *Andante*, and *Allegro*.

The overall writing of the *Moderato* movement is clear, with obvious sections of a sonata form. This movement shows a preponderance of two-part writing. The two themes of the exposition, A between mm. 1-24 and B from m. 49 to m. 60, are connected by a highly imitative transition section from m. 25 to m. 48 (see Example 37).

Example 37: *Fifth Harpsichord Sonata*, Op. 152, First Movement, mm. 1-2, 25-26, 49-50

The melody is continuous in the A theme while the harmony mainly uses intervals of fifths and sixths to enhance the right hand's melody. Following the same idea of continuous melody, in the transition section Persichetti uses both hands in dialogue with alternating sequences, which generates more dynamic energy. Here, the composer takes two elements from the A section, namely the eighth-note figure from the opening and the dotted rhythm from m. 14, and molds them into a polyphonic texture. The registration of the entire transition requires a 4' stop for both hands, which in the context of the already written high range, is perceived in effect an octave higher. The outcome of this technique is a more ethereal sonority. The second theme B presents a slightly contrasting character

that generates expressive effects by breaking the discourse through interruptions of rests and staccato eighth notes. Persichetti maintains the thematic unity of the movement by transferring the interval of melodic third present in the first theme and transitioning to harmonic thirds in the second theme as well as by keeping the accompanying sixths that bring more definition to the theme as a more integrated part of the melodic discourse.

For the development of the thematic material beginning in m. 61, Persichetti chose half notes as primary note values with a calming and more reflective atmosphere, supported by a simple homophonic texture and long phrase marks that suggest breathing continuity. At the end of the development section, Persichetti reiterates the opening motive of the exposition (mm. 79-92), transposed a major ninth lower in the left hand and a perfect fourth higher in the right hand. He then processes this motive through sequences and intervallic augmentation.

The recapitulation unfolds as follows: A (mm. 93-116), transition section (mm. 117-140), which is transposed a perfect fourth lower, and B (mm. 141-152), also transposed a perfect fourth lower. The coda (mm. 153-165) contains concluding ascending scales played *non legato* in the right hand over pedal points in the left hand.

In the context of soft consonances and mild dissonances found in this first movement, Persichetti's use of melodic augmented seconds and harmonic tritones spices up the sonority. This terminology is explained by Persichetti in his harmony treatise where he categorizes musical intervals as follows:

perfect fifth and octave—open consonances
 major and minor thirds and sixths—soft consonances
 minor seconds and major sevenths—sharp dissonances
 major seconds and minor sevenths—mild dissonances

perfect fourth—consonant or dissonant
 tritone (augmented fourth or diminished fifth)—ambiguous, can be either neutral
 or restless.⁵²

In the ensuing *Andante*, the left hand has indications of change of keyboards, is characterized by stepwise motion, and accompanies the melody of the right hand mainly with harmonic intervals, such as seconds, thirds, fifths, and sevenths. The right hand is based on the same intervals mentioned for the left hand, but in their melodic representation and alternating in opposite directions. This movement is written in ABA' form (mm. 1-18, 19-32, and 33-50, respectively). Sections A and A' use primarily eighth notes, while the B section brings a contrasting motion in sixteenths. The only indication with regard to expression is at the beginning, namely *con espr. e libertà*.

The changes that prepare the end of this movement appear in m. 40. This is an enharmonic spelling of the downbeat of m. 8 followed by an intervallic modification in the melody played by the right hand. The “modulation”—the flats replacing the sharps—and the interval of a perfect fifth replacing that of a minor third change the musical context and evolve towards a slightly higher register in the right hand, as well as chromatic suspensions in the left hand. The last few measures present in reverse order three of Persichetti's most favorite intervals, going from the seventh to the fifth, and ending with the third harmonically in the left hand, and melodically in the right hand.

⁵² Persichetti, *Twentieth-Century Harmony*, 14.

The final movement, *Allegro*, is the lengthiest of the entire sonata (269 measures), but fast, since it is marked $\text{♩} = c. 72$. Similar to the first two movements, it has specific indications for registration changes, and the articulation is detailed as well. This is a melodically active movement. There is complementary writing between the two hands. The phrases are long, connected and smooth, and are interspersed with strong accents and a few passages marked staccato for balance. Another way of counterbalancing the music is represented by parallel playing (see mm. 39, 47, 48-55, 103, 104, 249, and 250). Leaps are followed by scales and latent polyphony, as seen in mm. 11, 12, 33-36, 41-44, and 53-54 to name only a few; this type of texture can be found in either one of the hands or in both.

This movement displays dissonant, chromatic sonorities. The chromaticism develops on two different levels. The first one is the opening sequence of transpositions of the Dorian mode used as part of the melodic material. It advances progressively from C-sharp to D and D-sharp transpositions in the right hand. Secondly, the progression of harmonic minor seconds in the left hand accompaniment evolves in chromatic steps (mm. 17-20). The resulting sound is extremely dissonant, but balanced at times with soft consonants of thirds as part of the passages of parallel playing mentioned in the previous paragraph.

While in the majority of his harpsichord compositions Persichetti focuses mainly on the middle range of the instrument, with this fifth sonata he seems to push the boundaries by expanding the use of the lower register as well as the higher one when

engaging the 4' stop only. This way, the full range of the harpsichord is exploited creating more possibilities of musical expression.

Sixth Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 154

The one movement sonata Op. 154 has two different years at the copyright entrance, 1977 and 1984, which reflect the year of composition and the one of publication, respectively. The dedication on the first page of the printed edition indicates that this sonata was commissioned by Southern Methodist University for renowned faculty member, harpsichordist, organist, scholar, and teacher Larry Palmer. However, Frances Bedford⁵³ notes that the sonata was commissioned by Palmer, but was incorrectly attributed to the university. Persichetti himself writes a personal note to Larry Palmer on the manuscript cover of another work commissioned by Palmer, the *Serenade No. 15 for Harpsichord*, in which the composer acknowledges the error in a humorous manner—“Dear Larry: This I hope will help fade the flawed dedication words of the ‘Sixth.’ Practicing this, I hope will keep you out of the rain.”⁵⁴

The sonata begins with an *Andantino* introduction (mm. 1-57), for which the ♩ = c. 126, and is followed by the *Allegro con spirito* sonata form, marked ♩ = c. 132, which begins at m. 58. The first ten measures of the introduction are presented exclusively monodically and contain germinating cells for the main themes of the sonata. There are two elements that are stated at the beginning and will be developed throughout the

⁵³ Frances Bedford, *Harpsichord and Clavichord Music of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, California: Fallen Leaf Press, 1993), p. 79.

⁵⁴ Transcribed from a facsimile copy found in Bedford, Op. cit., 79.

introduction, as well as used as concrete thematic components for the *Allegro* sonata form (see Example 38).

Example 38: *Sixth Harpsichord Sonata*, Op. 154, mm. 1-2, 7

The first motive is initiated by a repeated C-sharp on a 3:2:1 rhythmic formula (♩ ♪ ♩) followed by an ascending stepwise line that has a mirrored structure (whole-half-half-whole steps), and ends with two leaps, a descending seventh and an ascending third. The second motive is a first glimpse of a later theme-generating cell of ascending minor third and augmented fifth used consistently in combination with a quick rhythm (two thirty-seconds and a quarter note or a derivation of it). This latter motive sounds like an ornament, but a written-out version of it. The only recurring phrase in the introduction is represented by mm. 11-16 that are stated identically again in mm. 38-43. Interestingly, this phrase or elements of it are not used at all in the *Allegro* that is to follow.

The first theme of the sonata form is shaped in the same manner as the opening of the introduction, namely with the initial repetition of a note (this time it is G-sharp), the ascending mirrored structure, and the descending seventh. However, the fast tempo, the new time signature (the asymmetrical 5/8), the doubling of the melody at the lower

octave, as well as the subdivision of the initial rhythm of the repeated G-sharp bring new energy to this theme. The ornament-like motive is also present in the left-hand arpeggiated downbeat, even though the third note is enharmonically spelled—B-sharp becomes C-natural (see Example 39).

Example 39: mm. 58-60

Allegro con spirito (♩ = c. 132)

ben marc. e deciso

Persichetti continues to develop the three-note cell starting in m. 66 in a long transition to the second theme. The shortness of the first theme (eight measures) is compensated by its occasional fragmentation in the transition. In m. 84 he transforms the augmented fifth of the three-note cell into a perfect fifth, with more mellow resulting sonorities.

The second theme is first prepared by thinning the texture and bringing a sense of calmness through repeated notes and a descending melodic line in the left hand while the tempo slows down in anticipation. Compared to the first generating cell from the introduction, the second theme, which begins in m. 103, is less expansive and unfolds in small intervals while the left hand creates a supportive harmonic context of gradually opening intervals (from seconds to fourths and even sixths). The expression mark *espr. assai* suggests a contrast in character of this second theme, which is also phrased over

several measures at a time and transposed almost entirely a half step down beginning in m. 118 (see Example 40).

Example 40: mm. 103-107

Beginning in m. 140, a major change in dynamics (Persichetti marks forte in the score) and registration, a reiteration of the first theme with new articulation markings and transposed, as well as a change in direction of the three-note cell (mm. 147-148) define the development section of the sonata form. Elements of the two themes are combined in a cascade of modified versions that interact with each other and are either adjacent or superimposed (see Example 41).

Example 41: mm. 158-160, right hand

The first theme returns in m. 178 and Persichetti transcribes identically mm. 59 through 92 (first theme and the transition) to mm. 179 through 208. In this recapitulation, the transition to the second theme becomes more dramatic through a toccata-like passage

(mm. 217-222) in which the forte dynamic and the coupling of the two keyboards anticipate a more energetic approach to the second theme. In m. 223, the second theme presents a transposed and modified contour in the context of a thickened texture through the doubling of the harmonized theme (see Example 42).

Example 42: mm. 223-224

The musical score for Example 42, measures 223-224, is presented in two staves. The top staff is in Treble clef and the bottom staff is in Bass clef. The key signature is G major (one sharp). The tempo marking "a tempo" is written above the first staff, and the dynamic marking "ardente" is written below the first staff. The music consists of two measures. In the first measure, the right hand plays a series of chords and eighth notes, while the left hand plays a bass line with a prominent octave doubling. In the second measure, the texture continues with similar harmonic doubling and rhythmic patterns. The overall effect is a thickened, energetic texture.

The coda begins in m. 243 and its considerate length suggests a second development (thirty-seven measures). The energy is still increasing in the coda through the use of fragmentation of the percussive first theme, as well as from the toccata-like section, accents, contrasting dynamics (*piano subito* to *fortissimo*), octave doubling, and expressive markings (*energetico*, *pesante*, and *sforzando*). The final chord of the sixth sonata is an example of Persichetti’s original tonal ambivalence through his principle of “mijor and manor” (see footnote 8 and Example 43).

Example 43: m. 280



The entire introduction consists of a relatively free form in which Persichetti masterfully develops the motives and introduces harmonic seconds (mm. 52-54) that will become an integral part of the second theme of the sonata form.

The overall articulation is very specific, creating colors, various atmospheres, with many accents, staccato and legato lines.

The passage found at mm. 83-92 is repeated at mm. 203-212. Measure 217 opens a toccata-like section, percussive, complementary, with unison-octave interventions with either scale characteristics (as found in mm. 223-224 and 239-242) or chromatic scale as in mm. 250-252.

The melody and harmony are based on the intervals of a first, second, third, fifth, and seventh throughout the sonata. A section of imitations begins at m. 83—two beats apart, and a third over an octave (tenth) apart (mm. 83-88), and then in mm. 88-91 a perfect fourth higher for both hands.

“Frstrngqt” reads right at the end below the double bar line. This is another example of Persichetti’s quote from one of his own works. The coded inscription refers to the composer’s use in this sonata of a theme found in the second movement of his *First*

String Quartet, Op.7 (compare Example 44 and Example 39). Interestingly, the published sonata has this abbreviation, but the manuscript does not.

Example 44: V. Persichetti, *First String Quartet*, Second Movement, mm. 1-4

Allegro molto energetico (♩ = ca. 152)

The musical score consists of four staves. The top two staves are for Violin I (VI. I) and Violin II (VI. II), both in treble clef. The third staff is for Viola (Vla.) in alto clef. The bottom staff is for Violoncello (Vc.) in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/8. The music starts with a forte (f) dynamic. The first measure is a half rest for all parts. The second measure begins with a series of eighth notes in the strings, followed by sixteenth notes in the subsequent measures. The tempo is marked 'Allegro molto energetico' with a quarter note equal to approximately 152 beats per minute.

Seventh Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 156

The seventh harpsichord sonata was published in 1985, and commissioned by harpsichordist, organist, and composer Barbara Harbach. It comprises three movements: *Allegretto*, *Andantino*, and *Allegro molto*.

An unusually short first movement, the opening *Allegretto* consists of only 68 measures in an ABA form with coda. The first section (mm. 1-23) is based on the first cell—m. 1 motive. This motive's development can be followed in m. 6—a half step higher, and then in mm. 11, 14, 17, and 21. In m. 11 we are back to E, but with a modified interval—a repeated note is used instead of a half step higher. Measure 14 brings the same motive, a perfect fourth higher, and with modified intervals. Measure 17

is a rhythmic variation of the initial cell, augmented this time. Compared to the previous two modifications, the interval at m. 21 is augmented to a fifth. The opening motive is based on a minor second which in bar 14 becomes a minor third for variation, and then in bar 21 a perfect fifth (see Example 45).

Example 45: *Seventh Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 156, First Movement*,
mm. 1, 6, 11, 14, 17, 21

The musical score for Example 45 is presented in two systems. The first system shows measures 1, 6, and 11. The second system shows measures 14, 17, and 21. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melody of eighth notes, while the left hand (bass clef) provides a bass line with chords and single notes. The tempo and dynamics are marked *mp espr. assai*.

The harmony of this first section develops from an initial harmonic second, into stepwise motion (melodic seconds) or sevenths (its inversion), from which more seconds are created, in contrary motion.

Measures 24-36 bring a new section based on thirds, and their complementary sixths.

The whole first movement of this sonata has long, smooth, and flowing melodic lines. While the first section (mm. 1-23) had an accompanied melody, this second section (mm. 24-36) is more imitative, and once again the two hands complement each other.

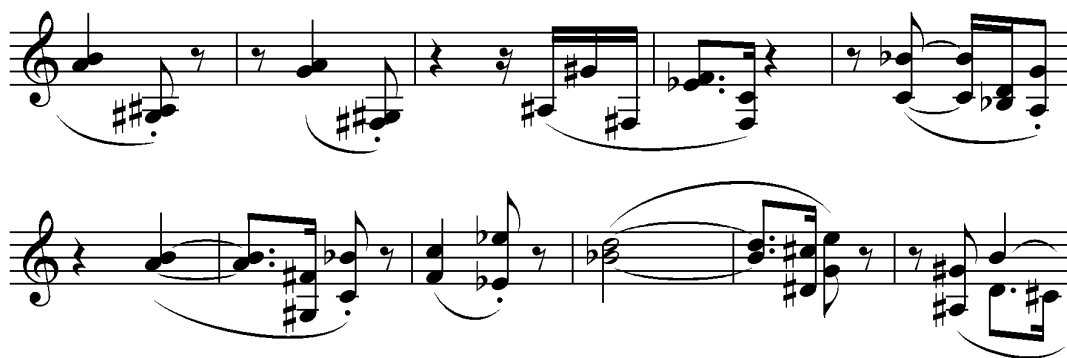
The return of the opening theme in the next section that starts in m. 37 is prepared by a scale (B Minor in m. 33), and also by the mirrored reoccurrence of the opening cell on C, in m. 34, followed by a transposed regular cell on E-flat, with a syncopated extension added to it, and only in m. 37 the actual cell on E returns.

There are similarities between mm. 1-11 and 37-47, where the music for the right hand is preserved while the left hand is a variation of the initial material, with very interesting modifications. There are some pillar-harmonies that are kept the same, mainly on the down beat of some of the measures, while other intervals are used in their reversed version, or even in their original version but dislocated rhythmically and placed an octave lower for a more expansive effect. Another modification that some of the intervals in the left hand go through is a transposition of the initial interval, while the surrounding material is kept intact (Examples 46 a, b; compare the left hand parts of the two sections and their differences).

Example 46:

a) mm. 1-11, left hand

b) mm. 37-47, left hand



As always in Persichetti's harpsichord sonatas, each new section is marked by a very precise indication of the tempo, dynamic or character. Therefore, in m. 50 of this movement a new short section begins, and the idea of interval augmentation (expansion) is adapted again: m. 1 = second, m. 24 = third, m. 37 = m. 1 = second, m. 50 = fourth and fifth, with actually a more conclusive resultant theme, that slowly cascades back with the cell on B in m. 52, on F-sharp in m. 54, and on C-sharp in m. 57. All these reoccurring cells are a fourth apart as well. The coda (mm. 63-77) is written more like a musical gesture.

The second movement, *Andantino*, is relatively short—seventy-seven measures only and is entirely based on the motive of the opening measures (see Example 47).

Example 47: Second Movement, mm. 2-4, right hand



We can therefore follow the development of this motive. The opening gesture can be found throughout the movement with either the same rhythm or in an augmented form (see m. 31 in Example 48, where the formula dotted eighth note followed by three thirty-seconds becomes a group of even sixteenths, while the melodic line reminds one of the original).

Example 48: mm. 3, 31, right hand



The left hand is characterized by many staccato notes that complement the right hand's rhythm, and bring contrast in articulation. Melodic lines flow, are long with almost continuous slurs, and are very chromatic, with big leaps (see mm. 7 and 9 in Example 49).

Example 49: mm. 7, 9

Measures 21-45 form the middle B section. Both hands feature linear writing throughout, but especially in this middle section, where the two voices create smooth lines and complement each other, with melodic responses—like a dialogue. The opening and closing phrases, however, have more of the accompanied melody character. Here the left hand brings seconds, thirds, sixths and sevenths as accompaniment. As we have seen in the previous sonatas, the left hand often comments with staccato harmonic intervals during the right hand's longer note values—another idea of complementary rhythms. When both hands have melodic lines, each of the two could very well be considered the melody by itself. Each line is well balanced in intervals, ascending—descending contours, rhythm, and even in articulation. In m. 63 the main theme appears once more for a coda, this time with the same material in both hands.

The last movement is marked *Allegro molto*. Thirds, both harmonic and melodic, are very important right from the beginning. The gesture characteristic is kept here too: expressive accents, slurs leading into staccato notes, and short slurs over only one measure mostly connecting sixteenth notes.

This is a quick movement ($\downarrow = c. 126$), with long, flowing phrases. The rhythm is built mostly of eighth notes and only a few phrases contain groups of four or six sixteenths. The movement culminates though with a section rich in sixteenth notes (found in the last page of music). Once again, the sixteenths are grouped in four or six. The concluding section of the movement is characterized by indications such as: *ff agitato*, *Full* [hps.], *con fuoco*, *pesante*, staccato and accented eighth notes, and expressive eighth rests that precede those groups of four sixteenth notes.

At mm. 69-94, the opening section comes back, but this time the introductory thirds that sound somewhat like drums are spelled enharmonically in the right hand (compare m. 1 with m. 69, where G-flat—B-flat becomes F-sharp—A-sharp). Also worth mentioning is the fact the both hands go up an octave at mm. 69-83 section. From m. 83 on, both hands go back to *loco*, as in the beginning, up to m. 94 where everything changes (see mm. 26 and 94).

Since the following interval combination appears throughout the movement, it will be referred to as a “melodic generator.” This motive can be found both ascending and descending, as well as transposed on many notes (see Example 50).

Example 50: Third Movement, m. 5, right hand



Also notable here is that the same pattern is sometimes presented with a different rhythm, in which case the component intervals seem to be compressed, as we can see at m. 7, in the right hand (see Example 51). We see here that C-natural is a common note for the two formulae. Sometimes this melodic cell is present in both voices as a dialogue. Both rhythms seem to be used equally, without any preference for either one of the two.

Example 51: m. 7, right hand



Another cell that is used throughout the movement appears first in m. 15 (see Example 52).

Example 52: m. 15, right hand



The group of four sixteenth notes is a clear contrast from the perpetual six eighth notes that dominate the entire movement. This group is used mainly towards the end of phrases, and eventually develops to a six-group of sixteenth notes, as in m. 24, or mm. 67-68, and m. 92. The final page of music culminates with repeated groups of six sixteenth notes, also doubled in both hands, in a percussive toccata-like concluding section. The same rhythm and intervals of both hands have even a stronger effect because of the mirrored writing—opposite direction of the two hands. This conclusive section is marked with *ff agitato, con fuoco, pesante*, so the contrary motion is another element meant to increase the tension of a climaxed finale. “Rgrsns” reads at the end of this sonata, possibly referring to the changes of registration throughout this sonata.

Eighth Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 158

The eighth sonata was published in 1987, and commissioned by Michael Needle for concert harpsichordist, chamber musician and scholar Linda Kobler. She holds degrees in harpsichord, musicology and piano, is a regular commentator for National Public Radio’s *Performance Today*, and is married to composer Albert Glinsky.

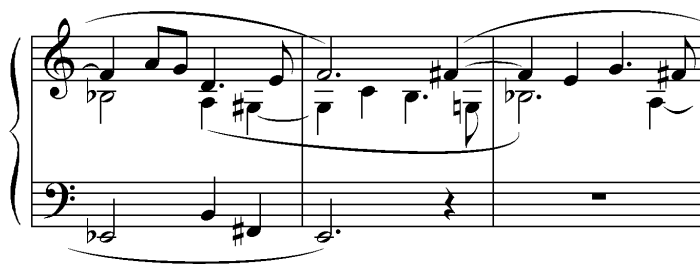
Sonata Op. 158 comprises three movements: *Andante sostenuto*, *Allegro ma grazioso*, and *Allegro con moto*.

The first movement is unusually short for an opening act, since it comprises only sixty-six measures. It has frequent indications for tempo changes that help delineate the form. As in previous sonatas, the instructions for dynamics and manual usage are very detailed and interconnected with the structure:

A.....B.....A.....B.....A.....Coda
 mm.: 1-15. . . .16-23. . . .24-38. . . .39-46. . . .47-61. . . . 62-66

The texture of the initial A section is mostly homophonic. There are mainly minor triads, which sometimes are combined with quintal harmonies. There are four phrases that are marked to be played smoothly through legato markings. The need for continuous playing is showed by Persichetti in his use of legato markings that appear in one of the three voices, and in between the phrases of the other two voices. With this technique, there is always one voice that keeps playing, while the other two voices “breathe” (see Example 53).

Example 53: *Eighth Harpsichord Sonata*, First Movement, mm. 8-10



This movement defines Persichetti's writing style very well—the top-voice melody of the A section (mm. 1-15, 24-38, and 47-61) is characterized by small intervals and a well-balanced feeling of direction. Large leaps are directly compensated by their opposites—ascending with descending, and vice versa (see Example 54).

Example 54: mm. 1-5

Andante sostenuto (♩ = c.76)

I
coupled *f sonoro*

The music develops with fluency and is never static, even though the homophonic texture is predominant. Another compositional technique that Persichetti uses very often, one that ensures the continuity of the music, is a melodic bass line. Even when it is part of the vertical harmony, the bass line keeps moving in stepwise motion, as well as small leaps (thirds, fourths, and even fifths sometimes), and is always well balanced—both rhythmically and melodically.

The A sections are different among themselves: the first and last sections begin with the same notes—a perfect quintal chord in its third inversion, while the second section is transposed a minor third higher. However, only the first nine measures are kept very close to the original, at least in the right hand. The left hand varies each time, from

slight to more significant changes. After the ninth measure of each of the three sections, even the right hand's material is altered.

Due to the recitative-like characteristics of the B section, this movement has an unusual number of tempo changes, especially for its short length. Some of these changes occur only briefly—at every two measures (see mm. 16-17, 18-19, as well as mm. 39-40, and 41-42), or at four measures (as in mm. 20-23, or 43-46).

In those sections marked by tempo changes, the rhythm and the texture are changed as well. Contrast is created by the use of sixteenth notes (e.g., 18, 23, 45, and others). Every time the sixteenths are used, they are either preceded by a sixteenth rest, or they are coming from a preceding tied note. This principle contributes to a more expressive transition that precedes the three occurrences of the A section in this movement—sections that are marked *Tempo I*, and that use similar texture, melodic and rhythmic materials.

The last five measures of this movement can be considered a short coda, still able to incorporate all the elements used previously, somewhat as commentary upon the contrast between the opening chordal structure and the more individualized melody that was present in the short B sections (see Example 55 a, b, c).

Example 55: a) mm. 16-17

Meno mosso (♩ = c. 66)

II

p desolato

b) mm. 39-40

Meno mosso ($\text{♩} = \text{c.}66$)

c) mm. 62-66

a tempo
uncoupled

The middle movement, *Allegro ma grazioso*, is of moderate proportions and monothematic. The initial motive is developed throughout the movement in a very fast tempo (the metronome marking suggests 184 for the quarter note), and a constant dotted rhythm of the melodic line. The melody in the right hand is based on “reversed chromaticism” (also referred to as “inverted” or “returning chromaticism”⁵⁵)—the technique that reverses the order of two notes of a chromatic scale (or part of a chromatic scale)—and its sequences (see Example 56). Persichetti hovers over three pitches—E, F, and G—and each pitch is presented both in its natural state and its inflected state. This constitutes a very distinctive feature of this movement.

⁵⁵ Olivier Messiaen and John Satterfield, transl., *The Technique of My Musical Language*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Leduc, 1956), 31-32.

Example 56: Second Movement, m. 1, right hand

Allegro ma grazioso (♩ = c. 184)



mf *leggero*

The left hand has predominantly harmonic minor thirds. The vertical resultant chords are root or first inversion of minor triads. The right hand has an almost constant pulse of dotted rhythm (dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth note).

The articulation, registration, and dynamics are written in detail. The first twelve measures can be found identically at mm. 19-30. Also to be mentioned here is the comparison between mm. 13 and 31, where the resemblance continues, this time an octave higher.

The following few lines of music use some mirroring techniques and parallel writing. Examples can be found at mm. 34, 36, 38-39, and 41-42 (Example 57 a, b, c).

Example 57:

a) mm. 34, 36



b) mm. 38-39

Musical notation for measures 38-39. The notation is presented in two staves, likely representing the left and right hands of a harpsichord. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with dotted eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and eighth notes, often beamed together. There are several accidentals, including flats and sharps, and the piece concludes with a whole rest in both hands.

c) mm. 41-42

Musical notation for measures 41-42. Similar to the previous example, it shows two staves with intricate rhythmic figures. The notation includes many beamed notes and accidentals, creating a dense and rhythmic texture. The piece ends with a whole rest in both hands.

The very small rhythmic change in the section at mm. 43-60 announces the closing section that follows in m. 61. This has a high impact on the listener because of its rhythmic and intervallic combination: the rhythm of a dotted eighth rest followed by a sixteenth note and an eighth rest is combined with descending sevenths. The sevenths appear to come from the initial second that generated the material of this entire movement, only this time dislocated (Baroque technique, found often in Persichetti's harpsichord sonatas). In m. 62 the main theme returns, and is either accompanied or combined with the very articulated sevenths. The effect is that of an abrupt, quick gesture (Example 58).

Example 58: mm. 61-64, left hand

Musical notation for Example 58, showing the left hand part for measures 61-64. The notation is on a single bass staff. It begins with a fermata over a whole note, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. A fingering '(II)' is indicated above the first note. The piece concludes with a whole note marked with a fingering 'I'.

Persichetti's prominent and unifying use of the fifth is significant: even though it has a hidden appearance, one can hear it on a vertical level (the melody is a perfect fifth above the bass note and vertically perceived as triads), or a horizontal level, given the fact that each new phrase and appearance of the theme is a fifth higher than the preceding one. Even the last page of music is marked by the same characteristic (see mm. 62 and 66, as well as mm. 70 and 73), with each entrance a fifth lower than its preceding entrance. The last six measures (mm. 70-75) form a Coda. These measures are actually a repetition of mm. 16-18 and 43-46, with the only exception of an omitted quarter note—so that a complete moment of silence is created in preparation for the end of this movement (see Example 59).

Example 59: mm. 16, 44, 71

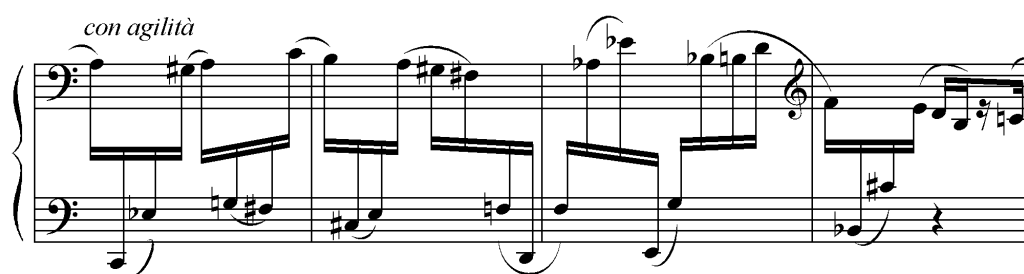


The final movement, *Allegro con moto*, follows the typical rondo-sonata form. Since the time signature is 2/4, the basic pulse moves at a rather rapid pace. The first sixteen measures are introductory in nature; the texture is harmonic, and the right hand dominates with long note values creating a static feeling. The music is written very symmetrically right from the beginning. Persichetti writes three complete lines in the bass clef. This reminds one of the classic French practice such as Louis Couperin's. The

classic harpsichord sounds rich in the bass register, some would argue, better than the treble register.

The first theme that follows in m. 17 displays a toccata-like writing of sixteenth notes. The predominant rhythmic formula is the group of four sixteenth notes marked *con agilità* in m. 17, and split between the two hands in a toccata-like writing, with the same register and hands close to each other. The split is intentional and not just for technical purposes. Thus, the right hand reminds us of the second movement's rhythm in the right hand, just slightly modified, while the left hand now spells the accompanying thirds that were present in the previous movement in the left hand, in their harmonic version. Now the thirds are presented melodically, as part of the four-group of sixteenth notes, and sometimes they are dislocated above an octave, in intervals of tenths, giving the impression of "latent polyphony" (see Example 60).

Example 60: Third Movement, mm. 17-20



Even though the sixteenths never stop, there is a sense of change in texture and expressive markings at m. 45, where a more linear and lyrical section begins smoothly. The first theme returns in m. 81 and leads into a new section in 109. This middle section, though developmental in nature through the use of running sixteenth notes, has its own character that stands out by itself. The return of the first theme happens in m. 165 while

the second theme is present in 193, but transposed up a major sixth. A long coda starts in 213 and recapitulates the thematic and rhythmic materials of the movement.

From a harmonic point of view, the opening is shaped by minor triads. This is a cyclic element—also found in the second movement. Those first measures are marked *piano espr.*, while at m. 17 one can read *con agilità* for the perpetual motion of the sixteenth notes. Furthermore, at m. 36 there is a *con fuoco* performance indication with a *forte* dynamic, followed by *piano capriccioso* at m. 109. Soft and loud dynamics alternate in this movement. There are also markings such as *vigoroso* (m. 165), *marc.* (m. 189), *ben articolato* (m. 209 and 61), *impetuoso* (m. 221), *ff brillante* (m. 234), and *marziale* (the last four measures of the sonata), intended to support the dramatic effect of the music.

This movement has a *perpetuum mobile* feeling, because of the constant use of sixteenth notes. The constant flow of sixteenth notes is sporadically interrupted by a group of only two staccato eighth notes and sometimes even one short eighth note. This is well represented in the passage at mm. 51-60 in the left hand (see Example 61).

Example 61: mm. 51-54, left hand



An imitative dialogue between the left and the right hand begins in m. 57. The mirror technique is present in two ways—direction of intervals and echo of exact same material as seen in Example 62 below. The same dialogue can also be found at mm. 129-

151. The sections at mm. 109-135 and mm.153-164 are characterized by very chromatic writing. Clusters can be found at mm. 219 and 220.

Example 62: mm. 57-59



Another cyclic detail is used in m. 221, where the idea of “reversed chromaticism” found throughout the second movement is back in yet another split section (large intervals in both hands). At m. 225 the sonority is richer because of the cluster of seconds added on the first of the four sixteenth-note groups of each beat. This technique lasts until m. 234 where two measures of octave doubling interrupt this pattern of clusters. However, they return in mm. 237-240 as well as in 246-247 as part of polychordal sonorities.

The last movement of the eighth harpsichord sonata ends with familiar elements that were previously used, such as a few staccato notes in m. 250, octaves in m. 251, a very short chromatic passage at mm. 251-252, and a chord of open fifths played short and accented as the actual last comment of the sonata.

Ninth Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 163

The ninth harpsichord sonata was published in 1987 and was commissioned by The Arcady Music Festival for award-winning pianist Masanobu Ikemiya, founder and

artistic director of the festival. This sonata is written in three movements, as follows:
Moderato, *Andantino*, and *Allegro*.

The opening movement is marked in cut time, with the half note at circa 104. The traditional sonata form unfolds in this movement as well. The right hand introduces the three-measure melody, which is actually the opening theme (see Example 63).

Example 63: *Ninth Harpsichord Sonata*, Op. 163, First Movement, mm. 1-3

Moderato (♩ = c. 104)

mf grazioso

The image shows a musical score for three measures. The top staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The bottom staff is in bass clef. The tempo marking is 'Moderato (♩ = c. 104)'. The dynamics marking is 'mf grazioso'. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur over the first three measures. The left hand has a simple harmonic accompaniment with a few notes and rests.

This stepwise and simple melody continues to develop. With each phrase, the initial A-flat Major will gradually let go of one flat: first D-flat is cancelled, then A is natural, and in m. 13 an eight-measure phrase written in sharps. There is another shift to the use of flats in m. 21. In this entire first movement (253 measures) the music goes back and forth between phrases written in flats and those written in sharps.

The harmony in the left hand is based mainly on intervals of thirds and fifths, with a sequence of major third—major third—perfect fifth that tends to become a pattern throughout the movement (see Example 64).

Example 64: mm. 3-8, left hand



In both lines of the music, the breathless feeling is balanced by flowing, stepwise motion, and long phrases. Another technique that Persichetti uses to connect the music is the manner in which the right and left hands complement each other by not starting their lines together. Persichetti chooses to rather bring in the left hand while the right hand finishes its line, and vice versa, so that the music has a continuous flow. The same overlapping idea is used at the articulation level. There is a smooth and connected line while the other line has short notes.

The traditional dominant-seventh chords are resolved to the more expansive augmented triad, such as in mm. 3, 7, 23, 155, and 159. In the opening measures, the accompanying whole notes remind one of a *cantus firmus* that is preceded in this case by the melody's entrance.

There is a contrast created between the second theme of the exposition (mm. 32-53), characterized by a short, *staccato* articulation, and the connected first theme. The second theme commences on D, a perfect fourth higher than the A in m. 26 where the short transition or interlude between the two themes begins. The recapitulation will actually keep the same interval relationship, even though there is a second and not a sixth for the first measure of the interlude. Therefore, from the D in m. 178, to the G of the second theme in the recapitulation, there is again a perfect fourth. The second theme is a combination of the new and short articulated motive and one that is more connected and

reminds one somewhat of the first theme. The accompanying harmonic intervals—seconds, thirds, fifths, and octaves—represent another element reminiscent from the first theme. This latter element gives a unifying quality to the entire movement (Example 65).

Example 65: mm. 32-40

The development begins in m. 53, in its original A-flat Major center. Compared to the exposition, in the development section there is more dialogue between the right hand and the left hand, and therefore more imitation involved. The sense of imitation is sometimes realized by a split between the two hands; one hand begins exposing the theme and the other hand continues, completing the other hand's part this way. Thus, there is flow, simple and unaccompanied, and both hands collaborate for a smooth line (see Example 66).

Example 66: mm. 123-125

Another technique used in the development is the imitation of small cells with complementary rhythm: long note values are held while the other voice brings the imitative motive, and vice versa (see Example 67).

Example 67: mm. 140-146

In mm. 68 and 69, one can find the mirroring technique that Persichetti likes to use so much, with a reversed and developed presentation in the right hand after the left hand's exposure. Also part of the development is the presence of the theme (very close to its original form) in the left hand, while the right hand plays the accompanying harmonic thirds found also in the original. This textural inversion is another way of mirroring for Persichetti (mm. 71-81).

The recapitulation, which begins at m. 153, is a complete restatement of the material in the exposition, up to m. 178 (the first 25 measures). At m. 178, the initial interval of a major sixth becomes a major second, for a change of path. A comparative look at mm. 25-26 and 177-178 illustrate this change (see Example 68).

Example 68: mm. 25-26, 177-178



The initial theme is reiterated in its original form (both hands are kept the same). This last detail is quite unusual for Persichetti, since in his previous harpsichord sonatas he used the same theme in recapitulations, so often unchanged for the right hand, but harmonized differently by the left hand. There were other cases when a recapitulation of the theme (both hands) was at least transposed to different notes, or there was a mutation for the left hand.

In m. 228 a coda begins, and together the two hands present all the elements of the first and second themes, including the accompanying thirds. The left hand brings the theme first this time and is followed by the right hand that enters with the first theme in imitation, a perfect fifth higher, in a polyphonic manner. The very last eight measures bring the opening theme one last time, but with the rhythm slightly altered and the thirds in the left hand now a perfect fifth lower. In fact, the right hand lands a perfect fifth lower as well.

The second movement of the ninth sonata is an *Andantino*. The opening A section (mm. 1-16) evolves in simple phrases, both melodically and rhythmically. While the A section resembles the first movement's ascending tetrachord and has both minor and major flavors, the B section (mm. 17-37) is homophonic in texture. The two sections alternate in this movement as follows:

A.....B.....A'.....B.....A''

mm.: 1-16...17-37...38-56...57-72....73-89

The A' section is a variation of A, but with a fuller melody and varied rhythm—the last beat has four sixteenths instead of two eighth notes. A'' is also varied, this time at the melodic level—the opening cell of the melody is sequenced on various pitches for a more energetic ending.

The overall atmosphere of this movement is that of calm, being characterized by markings such as *p comodo*, *mf dolce e calmo*, *comodo*, for a set of running sixteenth notes, and *mp reposatamente* for the closing section.

This is another movement where the perfect fifth and the major third are used as accompanying intervals—a cyclic element from the first movement.

The final *Allegro* is the busiest of all three movements of this sonata. It is written in a contrasting 6/8 meter, and is marked *mp con tenerezza, e semplice*. Both hands play almost continuously, again in complementary rhythms. The right hand begins two measures later than the left hand and uses some imitative elements. Throughout the movement one can find very long phrases, and a flowing discourse.

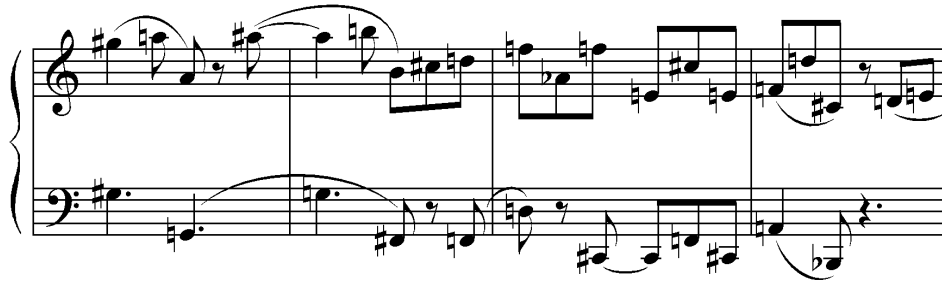
The first phrase (mm. 3-7) is repeated (mm. 13-17), with the first four measures exactly the same for both hands. In the fifth measure we find an interval augmentation: the ascending perfect fourth in m. 7 becomes a major sixth in m. 17. This same technique is later used again at m. 142.

Syncopations are a constant presence. In m. 23 there is a new formula – short notes and eighth rests that bring contrast with the beginning and a dance feel to it, conforming the marking at the beginning, *con tenerezza, e semplice*. This is also a reminder of the second theme from the first movement of the sonata. The *leggero* performance indication at m. 23 applies to the ensuing ten measures. In m. 33 the flowing writing of the opening section returns with a combination of a new and more expansive theme in the left hand, marked *f preciso e ben ritmato*, against scales in the right hand. There are larger intervals that are used here (major seventh, augmented eighth, minor ninth, and diminished eighth), somewhat negating the smoothness of the scales in the right hand.

Measures 37-40 bring a mirrored chromatic scale in the development of the music and the tension created is enhanced because of the leaps between the notes that are moved up or down the octave at times (dislocated, see Example 69).

Example 69: Third Movement, mm. 33-40

The musical score for Example 69, Third Movement, mm. 33-40, is presented in a grand staff. The right hand (treble clef) begins with a piano (p) marking and a melodic line consisting of eighth notes and eighth rests. The left hand (bass clef) plays a chromatic scale of eighth notes. The score is divided into four measures. The first measure shows the initial piano marking and the start of the chromatic scale. The second measure introduces a forte (f) marking. The third and fourth measures continue the chromatic scale and melodic line. The score is written in G major and 3/4 time.



Persichetti uses the scale in one hand, while the other hand displays a steeper melodic line. At times, this writing is reversed between the two hands (see mm. 46-68). This way, there is a feeling of dialogue and equal activity of both voices/hands. Another contrasting element is brought at m. 69 and is used up to m. 126. This section is reminiscent of the thematic material presented in the section that begins in m. 23, only this time the sixths become thirds and also the harmonic intervals are now spelled melodically. There is a *f sub.* marking here and the eighth notes have staccato and accent markings. Throughout the section there are markings that refer to preciseness: *p agilmente* (m. 75), *f risoluto* (m. 89), *molto preciso* (m. 95), and *ben misurato* (m. 107). In mm. 113 and 114, first the right hand and then the left hand play a minor pentatonic scale on F, and lower C-sharp respectively. The interval combination found in m. 121 is very interesting to follow because its sonority effect also occurs in mm. 161-162, 200-201, and 266. It is remarkable how the same character of these measures seems to be kept, but the intervals used are different each time this motive appears. It is a very active motive (see Example 70).

Example 70: mm. 121, 161-162, 200-201, 266-267

The cyclic element can be found at mm. 127-130 where the minor triad comes back. All voices move in parallel in these four measures.

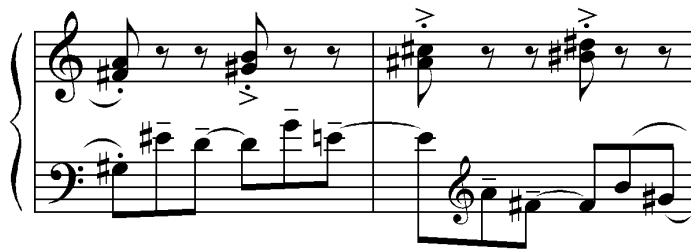
There are twelve measures that make up a transition back to the opening theme—in its exact form for the first four measures of the right hand—but once again harmonized differently for the left hand. After comparing m. 6 and m. 142, one can find the ascending perfect fourth being augmented to the interval of a minor seventh. This is only one of a series of changes made in the original material of the right hand. By comparing m. 8 and m. 144, we find that inversion is used. The same intervals are present but in opposite direction.

Parallel motion is used in several places (e.g., 161-162, 183, 200-201, etc.) to balance the thickness of texture and melodic discourse. The frequency by which the parallel motion is used seems to go from preparatory to climactic as seen in the closing section that starts with m. 251, and is marked *ff trionfante* and for a *Full* harpsichord. As a final statement, the last nine measures bring back the staccato melodic thirds also used previously in mm. 75, 77, 83-89, 91, 93, 107-109, and 166-172. Measures 23-29 are

repeated without any alteration at mm. 202-208. This phrase can be related to the more extended section where thirds are used, by its harmonic minor sixths. Both cases are marked staccato.

Persichetti's preference for thirds and fifths is obvious throughout his harpsichord sonatas. In this movement, minor thirds in particular are present extensively as part of the melody, and harmonized with harmonic perfect fifths, evoking natural harmonics. Harmonic and melodic thirds are superimposed in mm. 180-182 (see Example 71).

Example 71: mm. 180-181



There is another passage that uses the chromatic scale dislocated again and this time a diminished fourth higher. The higher pitches make the sonority even more expressive (see mm. 174-175).

As the ending approaches, the music becomes thicker, richer, and more vigorous. Quartal chords with added seconds are used in both hands and on different notes in mm. 231, 232, and 233. The result is an almost striking sonority enhanced (emphasized) also by the repeated use of arpeggiated chords marked staccato and accented with an already short note value—eighth notes. Persichetti often uses this technique for a percussive effect.

A comparison of m. 69 with mm. 237-240 and mm. 255-257 shows that from a single-note motive in m. 69, to two notes/intervals (perfect fifths and minor thirds) in mm. 237-240, and culminating with seventh chords omitting one note, the result is a three-note motive in mm. 255-257. The octave doubling that follows at mm. 258-264 creates a clear and welcomed contrast.

Even when spelled as augmented seconds, the enharmonic minor thirds are heard until the very end of this piece (see mm. 271 and 273). Persichetti is very precise in his intentions until the final measure. He puts a fermata on the left-hand chord, but also marks *lunga* over it. In addition, for balance and precision, he also places a fermata and *lunga* on the right-hand rest.

Overall this sonata is a bit less demanding technically than movements in the other sonatas. After the first movement of this sonata introduced an extended scalar motive as well as the soft consonant intervals of thirds and sixths, these elements were further developed in the subsequent movements, thus generating a cyclic treatment of the thematic motives.

Tenth Harpsichord Sonata, Op. 167

Vincent Persichetti's last harpsichord sonata was published posthumously in 1994. This sonata has no indication of being commissioned for a certain musician. It is written in three movements: *Con gravità*, *Moderato e misurato*, and *Con fantasia*.

The first movement has only thirty-nine measures. Expected or not, this sonata is the most complex of the ten works. It makes this researcher think of Ludwig van Beethoven's Op. 111 (his thirty-second and last piano sonata).

The rhythm is strikingly different from everything else that Persichetti used previously. This is the most complex rhythm, however more manageable because of the tempo marking—the quarter note is suggested to be played at circa 50.

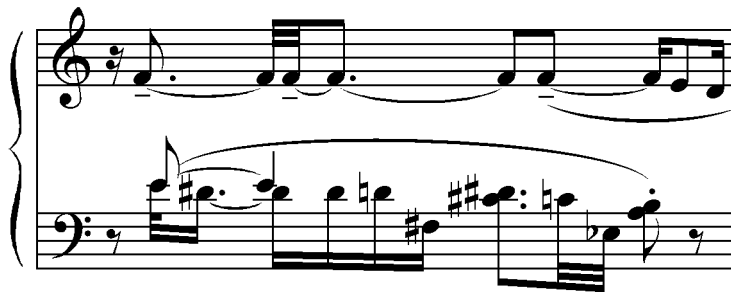
Sonorities are harsher from the very first notes. The right hand brings a major seventh, while the left hand's harmony uses a dominant seventh chord with the third omitted. Without its third the chord has a note of ambiguity. The melodic context is extremely chromatic and the closeness created is emphasized by very short note values used with these chromatic lines. Because of the chords that Persichetti used, the harmony accentuates the overall chromatic sonority. Most of the chords in the left hand represent a seventh chord in one form or another. The prevalent seventh chord has a well-established major seventh, but no third is used. This creates a tonal versus modal ambiguity. The third inversion chosen for some of the chords contributes to the same feeling of closeness. The sonority opens up slowly and the music evolves towards the treble register. This is realized through chromatic motion as well. The minor third is another prevalent interval that is used in conjunction with the chromatic steps.

There are two possible aspects to be considered when we try to understand the intervals that Persichetti used melodically and chromatically, with a preference for firsts, seconds, thirds, fifths, sevenths, and ninths. The first aspect is the natural resonance of harmonics. The second aspect might seem a speculation, but it is very possible that this last sonata is a musical testament for Persichetti—complex, extremely chromatic, harsher sonorities, and even an expression of the pain and illness that Persichetti has gone through in his last year of life.

The first movement is one of only two movements in Persichetti's harpsichord sonatas to have only thirty-nine measures; the other example can be found in the second movement of his *Second Harpsichord Sonata* marked *Andante sostenuto*. Even with only thirty-nine measures, the music seems dense in the first movement of the last harpsichord sonata because of such a chromatic content, to which the rhythm adds complexity through its use of small note values, and very expressive rhythmic combinations.

Contrary motion can be found throughout this opening movement, and the two chromatic lines evolve from a common note. Measure 4 is one such example, where two melodic lines separate from the common F (see Example 72).

Example 72: *Tenth Harpsichord Sonata*, First Movement, m. 4



This procedure is developed even more in m. 5, where there are actually three lines that move chromatically. The chromaticism used in general is either regular chromaticism or reversed chromaticism that serves the same purpose and even emphasizes sometimes the melodic aspect.

There is an improvisatory feel throughout the first movement, though Persichetti is very precise in his notation, especially regarding the character, and therefore the

articulation that should be used (e.g., *ben proclamato*, *semplice*, *cantando*, *fervente*, *timoroso*, *dolce*, *calmo*, *espr.*, *intenso*, *lamentoso risoluto*, and *ardente*).

The imitation in m. 13 contributes to the tension-build-up of the section, as well as the entire movement. This measure is marked *p timoroso*, so that the dialogue created here is discrete. The interval of a fourth is important in this measure, because the dialogue between the two hands/voices uses an augmented fourth, as well as a perfect fourth. The rhythmic formula of four thirty-second notes is based on a reversed chromaticism at the melodic level (see Example 73). As always, Persichetti's dynamic indications refer to the opportunities for changes in registration, and possibly the alternative use of the piano, since dynamics are not really technically possible on the harpsichord.

Example 73: m. 13

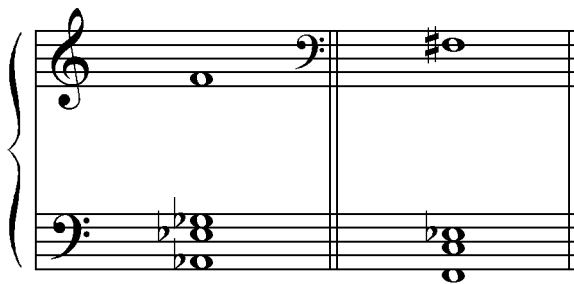
As mentioned, the difficulty of the rhythm in this movement is extreme, so from a didactic standpoint, subdividing the beat is a possible solution for an accurate rhythmic interpretation.

The movement ends with the same note of dissonance. In the left hand, Persichetti uses the same chord in the beginning on A-flat (A-flat–E-flat–G-flat), while at the end he

transposes it on F (F–C–E-flat). However, if treated together with the right hand and presented in normal order, the result of the opening chord can be interpreted as a minor tetrachord. The right hand added note to the last chord of the movement is an augmented octave above the root, which creates an extremely dissonant sonority (see Example 74, opening and ending chords). By choosing this procedure, Persichetti gives the movement a sense of closure and unity through this chromatic characteristic.

Example 74:

m. 1 m. 39
opening chord ending chord



Throughout this movement the harmony is enriched by clusters of second chords in their harmonic form, but also by their melodic unfolding as part of the chromatic line. Thus, both horizontally and vertically the music has common characteristics—the sinuous development and the dissonant sonority.

A look at the right hand shows a clear delimitation of the music in different sections. The opening interval of a major seventh used in the right hand is augmented to a major ninth in m. 10, then augmented even more to parallel double minor sevenths (harmonic major seconds of both hands can both be considered as part of the melodic line at this point) in the middle of m. 17, and diminished in m. 26—to a descending perfect

fourth this time. The last six measures provide closure to this movement. Both elements that have been used throughout the movement are present here—the expansive large intervals and the more contrasting clusters and reversed chromaticism. Each section is marked by registration plus expressive and dynamic indications.

The second movement, *Moderato e misurato*, has forty-nine measures. One cyclic element that we find here is the opening interval of a major seventh that appears again, only this time with a filling of two melodic intervals in between—a major third and a major second. Rhythmic gestures of thirty-second triplets spice up the general pace of eighth notes. The opening seventh is kept even on the same notes (F—E) as in the previous movement (see Example 75).

Example 75: Second Movement, m. 1

Moderato e misurato (♩ = c.104)

There are a few other elements that are used in this movement once again: dissonant intervals, chromatic passages, clustered harmony, expressive rests, staccato and legato contrasting combinations (articulation is always written to the smallest detail), accents marked, registration, dynamics, and character markings, and last but not least, fairly short lengthwise.

With ninety-seven measures, the final movement, *Con fantasia*, is not very lengthy either. However, this is the longest of all three movements in terms of number of measures. All the above-mentioned characteristics of the first two movements are present here too (cyclic). Compared to the rest of the sonata, there is one novelty when it comes to the music flow and texture in this particular movement, namely the occasional and brief synchronization of attack in both hands. The vertical effect on the sonority is more complex. The resulting dissonant harmony consists of five- and six-note chords, oftentimes marked with accents (see Example 76, isolating the accented chords).

Example 76: Third Movement, accented chordal structures

The image displays a musical score for two staves, treble and bass clef. Above the staves, specific measures are labeled: m. 2, m. 3, m. 34, m. 53, m. 85, m. 88, and mm. 95-97. The notation shows various chords and notes, some with accents, illustrating the accented chordal structures mentioned in the text.

The imitative nucleus found in m. 13 of the first movement resonates in m. 70 of the third movement, also in a dialogue between the two hands. This melodic reiteration is a cyclic element that characterizes this sonata as well.

Persichetti develops a very intriguing compositional technique used in mm. 7-14 and 21-29—a shadow-like or echoing technique where the two hands are very close together, and each melodic line evolves slowly, with a chromatic and echoing effect on the sonority (see Example 77).

Example 77: mm. 7-10

The musical score for Example 77, measures 7-10, is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 7 and 8, and the second system contains measures 9 and 10. The music is written for piano in G major and 3/4 time. The right hand features a melodic line with a slur over measures 7-8 and a triplet in measure 9. The left hand has a more complex accompaniment with slurs and accents. The tempo marking *misterioso* is indicated in the first system.

The right hand seems simple and some patterns can be identified at the melodic and rhythmic levels. The left hand, on the other hand, has a more complex, and somewhat stretched or “diluted” feel. The last two pages of the music represent the climax of the music. Rhythm, melody, and pattern repetition contribute to a sense of urgency. From m. 78, toccata-type writing is obvious. Reversed melodic material and contrary motion on a rhythm based on thirty-seconds, as well as smooth lines marked by accents only to interrupt the flowing discourse, are all elements that contribute to a very expressive and convincing last movement of all the harpsichord sonatas that Persichetti wrote. Once again, the complexity, the use of thirty-seconds, and the marking at the beginning of this last movement *Con fantasia* remind one of Beethoven’s last movement of Op. 111 piano sonata.

In both cases, these testament works—characterized by remarkable innovation—provide a way for the composer to communicate to future generations his unique compositional vision.

IV

CONCLUSIONS

I don't miss the orchestra when I'm writing for harpsichord. Most of the harpsichord players I know aren't very active. They spend their time playing figured bass, accompanying other instruments. I try to give them something else to do. They can play as loud as an orchestra, be whatever they want to be.

*Vincent Persichetti*⁵⁶

My focus in this research has been on the stylistic connotations of Vincent Persichetti's ten sonatas for the harpsichord. This interest was generated by my initial contact with his first sonata, a work I performed in my harpsichord degree recital. As I perused resources pertinent to my study of this sonata, I discovered that there was limited literature about the composer's output for the instrument. This spurred my interest for further research into a wonderful repertoire for the contemporary harpsichordist.

Persichetti's focus on the harpsichord in the last several years of his life denotes his passion for the rediscovered instrument. "By the end of 1981, word about Persichetti's harpsichord compositions had gotten around, and harpsichordists began to commission him. The harpsichord became the focus of his composing for the rest of his life."⁵⁷ This compositional activity was supported by the numerous commissions from

⁵⁶ Larry Palmer, "Vincent Persichetti: A Love for the Harpsichord. Some Words to Mark His 70th Birthday," *The Diapason* (June 1985): 8.

⁵⁷ Elaine Comparone, harpsichordist, Vincent Persichetti, and Domenico Scarlatti, *Harpsichord Sonatas* (Los Angeles, Ca: Laurel Record LR-838CD, 1992), Liner notes 10.

distinguished American harpsichordists of the second half of the twentieth century. This research also includes an analysis of Persichetti's tenth harpsichord sonata, composed in 1987 and published posthumously in 1994. In my research I could not find any reference to this sonata in any authoritative sources, nor of its premiere. Consequently, I hope that my research will inspire performers to study this work and discover its transcendental nature, the final artistic statement of the composer for the harpsichord medium.

The importance of Persichetti's contribution to the harpsichord repertoire through his sonatas is immeasurable. The resources consulted and quoted in this dissertation recognizes Persichetti's valuable work. As Larry Palmer states,

Such a concentration of harpsichord sonatas, unequalled, to my knowledge, by any composer since the 20th-century revival of the instrument began, has allowed Persichetti to hone his familiarity with the instrument to such a point that, beginning with *Sonata Five*, he has indicated exact registrations for a classically-disposed instrument. In the earlier works the composer's dynamic indications serve as suggestions for registration, and observation of most of these proves possible.⁵⁸

Persichetti's use of dynamics has two connotations, namely the registration to be used and the aspect of psychological implications of musical expression. Persichetti demonstrates fine creative and expressive skills through the complex atmosphere created by his music. It is remarkable how he is able to find the most suggestive musical notation to convey the desired effect for each particular sonata so that his music illustrates ideas, feelings, and circumstances of a "story." There are several references that I made throughout my dissertation to compositional techniques that J.S. Bach employed in his harpsichord works and I found to be adopted by Persichetti in his own music.

⁵⁸ Palmer, Idem.

Vincent Persichetti is very specific with regard to articulation. He uses it to a full extent for expressive purposes. Through articulation, the composer is able to create certain effects that ultimately compensate for the lack of dynamic control on the harpsichord. From long phrases to very small increments, articulation marks are a constant presence. As a result, the phrasing and formal architecture are clear, similar to classical form gestures.

Persichetti's cunning personality (described in the second chapter) emerges in his compositions for the harpsichord. He is portrayed as being brisk, energetic and optimistic, and his music is characterized by the same attributes. It reflects a certain degree of urgency produced by the fast-running descending scales in extremely fast tempi that are often close to the instrument's limitations and the performer's ability (e.g., the first movement of the second sonata). Persichetti emphasizes this aspect through mixed meters that create an irregular rhythmic feel as in the first movement of the first sonata. In the following sonatas Persichetti changes his approach. With the exception of the first movement of the fourth sonata and the one-movement sixth sonata (where time signature changes delineate the formal structure), he naturally obtains the same fluctuating metric effect through the combination of note values; thus, rhythms are complex, asymmetrical and complementary without explicit time signature changes.

In the tradition of Classical sonatas, Persichetti's compositions are written in three movements, except the second sonata (four movements) and the sixth sonata (one movement). On a structural level these movements have a clear delineation of form. The composer has a predilection for sonata form in his first movements. Ternary and rondo-like forms characterize the form of second and last movements. The registration and

dynamic changes mark most of the new sections of a movement. Persichetti takes a theme and develops it through a laborious transformational process in order to include hints of motivic unity in subsequent thematic material, which would traditionally be intrinsically contrasting. In many sonatas he introduces a germinal motive from the very beginning and variants of this motive become new thematic material in the remaining movements. This clear demonstration of Persichetti's use of cyclic musical ideas creates a close relationship between the movements. The first sonata is the only one in which the cyclic element appears in slow introductions in each of its three movements. In the later sonatas, Persichetti drops the idea of using introductions, but continues to employ thematic unity. The only exception is his sixth sonata written in a single movement. Because of this, the composer uses the slow introduction again to compensate the absence of subsequent movements that would normally display a contrasting tempo variety. The composer's need to revive the introduction section comes from his balanced formal nature and also from the desire to create a contrast between slow and fast tempi.

Persichetti carefully considers texture as an important means of musical expression. He presents a *mélange* of textures, ranging from monodic writing to homophony, and from polyphony and hints of heterophony. Persichetti uses short passages of unaccompanied melodies either for the resonance of a lyrical contour (in slow introductions) or the virtuosic passages of running notes in the fast movements. Throughout the sonatas, one can notice an alternation between long phrases of accompanied melodic lines and hymn-like chordal sections. Contrapuntal techniques vary from two-part writing to several layers of independent lines. Points of imitation are also encountered in some sonatas. An idea of heterophony can be identified in the last sonata

through the “echoing” technique. The richness of texture in these sonatas is also enhanced by the latent polyphony writing. Toccata-like and hymn-like passages are woven with long smooth phrases and together represent a considerable and integral part of Vincent Persichetti’s harpsichord sonatas.

His minute details reflect his preoccupation for continuity in music and constant pulse. This is achieved through balanced melodic lines, articulate rhythms, counterpoint, and most importantly, the resultant harmony. Persichetti’s approach to melody and harmony is noteworthy. Not only do his melodies reflect certain favorite intervals (prime, second, third, fifth, and seventh), but often the harmony derives from the same intervals. Thus, the unity of the piece is obtained through a process of superimposing the same intervals at two levels—melodic and harmonic (as seen in the seventh sonata). Persichetti uses intervallic modifications to modulate to new areas or to return to certain harmonic centers found in the opening statement of a movement.

It is quite possible that Persichetti’s preference for the above-mentioned intervals was determined by a desire for complete and rich harmonic sonorities by using the same intervals as those present in the overtone series. Seconds, thirds, fifths and sevenths are repeatedly used in chords in order to obtain a continuous sonority, often in support of the melody, which is based on the same intervals. This process is taken to a further level where chords that belong to different harmonic areas are superimposed on each other. The two chords are played simultaneously, both melodically and harmonically, the result being a polychord. One encounters this device in the first and last movements of the second sonata as well as the last movement of the third.

Another crucial element in his compositions is the mirror technique, which Persichetti realizes on two levels, linear and vertical. The linear level refers to one melodic line comprising mirroring intervals that converge towards each other. At the vertical level the direction and intervals contained in each part mirror each other. Additionally, in several scalar passages the composer employs melodic displacements of one or more notes that resemble the technique of “Baroque dislocation” as found in many of J.S. Bach’s works. Soft consonant and sharp dissonant intervals complement each other for a predominantly dissonant sonority. Chromatic passages are abundant in the sonatas and have an expressive effect.

The harmonic language is dominated by cross-relationships, seventh chords with missing thirds, polychordal structures, vertical resultant of the two-part writing, and harmonic seconds, thirds, fifths and sevenths that accompany the melody. There are no key signatures in these sonatas and the necessary accidentals are marked next to individual notes. Persichetti found the sonorities that he envisioned in an organic amalgamation of harmonic styles. Vincent Persichetti’s compositional style is a combination of typical twentieth century techniques: tonality, atonality, polytonality, and modality.

In his self-comparison of his tonal system with Renaissance tonal fluctuations, Persichetti admits that there is always a tonal grasp that characterizes his compositions. There is some tonal gravitation through harmonic structures that surround a particular note center, in which situation the major or minor third is often missing, creating a feel of openness. Or, on the contrary, both thirds are present in the same chord, resulting in a

“mijor and manor” sonority.⁵⁹ Persichetti’s intention to avoid any sonority that resembles traditional harmonic progressions and tonality in the classical sense is more than clear in his harpsichord works. However, the harmonies in his music are equally crafted, intentional and expressive.

Throughout his sonatas, Persichetti uses the traditional Italian language for his performance indications abundantly in order to describe various moods, characters, and colors. Some of these terms, however, are seldom employed in the music of other composers. This would seem to confirm the influence of his Italian family roots on Persichetti.

Some critics defined Persichetti’s style as being “eclectic.” The composer’s biographers, Donald and Janet L. Patterson, provide a list with composers to whom he has been compared:

In all their diversity they include: Prokofiev, Miaskovsky, Poulenc, Clementi, Puccini, Tchaikovsky, Mozart, Ravel, Scarlatti, Copland, Mendelssohn, Harris, Bartok, Schoenberg, Schuman, Russians in general, neo-classicists in general, and “twelve-toners” in general. The name that crops up with the greatest regularity is that of Hindemith. The critics who are making the comparisons are usually a bit vague on the particulars. Persichetti claims he was influenced the most by Haydn and Schumann, two names missing from the critics’ list. Dorothea Persichetti characterized her husband as having ears like “fly paper,” once he heard something it would stick. His critics called this imitation, Persichetti described it as an opportunity to bring together all the techniques of the past and recast them with a new and individual voice.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Vincent Persichetti, “Music in Our Time,” Lecture, University of Minnesota-Duluth Residency (May 9, 1986).

⁶⁰ Donald Patterson and Janet L. Patterson, *Vincent Persichetti: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1988), 19-20.

I believe that Persichetti was very successful in achieving just that. His individual voice is masterfully displayed in his harpsichord sonatas and speaks both of “Persichetti the man” and “Persichetti the artist.”

There is an ongoing appreciation of Persichetti’s contribution to the music world of the twentieth century. This is reflected through the foundation of several associations that promote his works, namely the *Vincent Persichetti Society* in the United States⁶¹ and the *Associazione Musicale Vincent Persichetti* in Italy.⁶²

Vincent Persichetti made a substantial contribution to many musical genres, including music for piano, organ, and harpsichord. These works represent a sizable and valuable addition to twentieth-century keyboard repertoire. The works analyzed in this dissertation are of inestimable importance for harpsichordists today and provide musicians with a unique and refreshing repertoire. I hope my research fosters more interest in the study and performance of Vincent Persichetti’s ten sonatas for harpsichord.

⁶¹ “Vincent Persichetti Society,” www.persichetti.org (October 23, 2009).

⁶² “Associazione Musicale Vincent Persichetti,” www.associazionemusicalevincentpersichetti.com (October 23, 2009).

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