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# Eclecticism and the American piano sonata : the assimilation of neoclassicism and the twelve-tone technique in the piano sonatas of Roger Sessions, Vincent Persichetti, and Ross Lee Finney

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## Abstract

As a genre, the piano sonata holds a vital place in the development of American music in the twentieth century. With well over four hundred American piano sonatas written within the past 100 years, the sheer number testifies to the genre's popularity and demonstrates its importance within American music. In particular, the twentieth-century American piano sonata stands as a significant genre of choice for many composers. A selection of these piano sonatas illustrates a noteworthy stylistic shift from a neoclassical aesthetic to twelve-tone serial practice in the United States. Through a detailed study of the sonatas of Roger Sessions, Vincent Persichetti, and Ross Lee Finney, this treatise documents the shift from neoclassicism to twelve-tone serialism in the post-war era and the merging of these vi apparently different aesthetics. While these piano sonatas demonstrate the assimilation of two separate stylistic tendencies and contemporary languages, they also point to a broader, post-war tendency in American compositional style. The initial incorporation of the twelve-tone technique within a prevailing neoclassical stylistic framework seems but a first step toward the further integration of disparate techniques and styles, yielding an eclecticism that propels American composition through the rest of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Roger Sessions, Vincent Persichetti, and Ross Lee Finney's assimilation of separate styles and techniques shows a crucial stage in the development of a widespread American eclecticism. Their infusion of neoclassical stylistic elements into a twelve-tone language gives a glimpse of the broader prevalence of eclecticism within the American piano sonata genre and within American contemporary music as a whole.

## Department

Music

## Description

## Subject

Sessions, Roger, 1896-1985. Sonatas, piano

Finney, Ross Lee, 1906-1997. Sonatas, piano

Twelve-tone system

Persichetti, Vincent, 1915-1987. Sonatas, piano

## URI

<http://hdl.handle.net/2152/12923>

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Tang, Mengni (2019-12-07)

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Ludwig van Beethoven wrote his 32 piano sonatas between 1795 and 1822. Although originally not intended to be a meaningful whole, as a set they comprise one of the most important collections of works in the history of music. Hans von Bülow called them "The New Testament" of the piano literature (Johann Sebastian Bach's The Well-Tempered Clavier being "The Old Testament"). the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts ALBERTO GINASTERAS PIANO SONATAS: A PERFORMANCE GUIDE YinJia Lin Approved: \_ Paul Posnak, D.M.A. Professor of Accompanying and Chamber Music. \_ M. Brian Blake, Ph.D. Dean of the Graduate School. Secondly, the comparison of the popular first sonata and the relatively-unknown Second and Third Piano sonatas makes this performance guide an opportunity for performers to more fully explore Ginasteras piano output. compositional techniques employed by the composer after 1958, rather than the cultural influences the composer draw inspirations and materials from, which can be extracted from the whole of his output, regardless of the timeline. Getting the best out of the two sonata recordings has not been easy - despite running to just 45 minutes, my working files for the sonatas alone generated some 11¾ hours of music and an entire abandoned near-finished set. They were more coarsely and noisily recorded than later sonatas in the series and in order to get the best from them I've had to leave a higher level of background noise than in most of the others - my attempts to reduce noise further resulted in intolerable losses of musicality and unevenness of sound. Form: Sonata Form. F Major. EXPOSITION The second section commences in C major, with the melody in the bass. Bars 58-60 repeat the opening two-bar phrase an octave lower in C minor, and they are followed by four bars which, moving sequentially, modulate transiently into E flat major. In Bar 65, the music returns to C minor, in which key there ensues a half-cadence, several time reiterated. The mode changes back finally to the major in Bar 71 with the entrance of the concluding portion of the section, which is also in two-bar rhythm.