

THE ITALIAN-AMERICAN PIANO SONATA:
WORKS OF PAUL CRESTON, NORMAN DELLO JOIO,
AND VINCENT PERSICHETTI

by

Kalle Walker

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for Departmental Honors in
the Department of Music
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

May 2, 2022

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Project Approved:

Supervising Professor: Timothy Watkins, Ph.D.

Department of Music

Tamás Ungár, D.M.

Department of Music

Nicholas Albanese, Ph.D.

Department of Modern Language Studies

ABSTRACT

As a pianist, I have always thought it a shame that so little of the standard piano repertoire is American. Having also lived in Italy and studied Italian music and culture, this project is the natural result of the pairing of these two interests.

This project examines the first piano sonatas of three important Italian-American composers of the mid-twentieth century. Paul Creston, Norman Dello Joio, and Vincent Persichetti were each successful in creating a unique style, incorporating elements of Italian music and culture learned as children with Modern techniques and rhythms, all interpreted through the lens of American individualism. Through performance of these works and analysis presented in the form of program notes, I will shine a light on these forgotten American piano works, encouraging teachers, performers, and audiences alike to be more adventurous in their musical choices, and expand their knowledge of 20th Century piano repertoire.

Paul Creston lived what is perhaps the quintessential life of an immigrant. Born in 1906 as Giuseppe Guttoveggio to illiterate parents from Sicily who only arrived in the United States in late 1905, Creston grew up in poverty on the south side of Philadelphia, the oldest son of his parents. Despite their economic circumstances, his parents ensured he received a cultural education, allowing him to take part in expositions and shows from a young age. Most of his neighbors were also recent immigrants from Italy, so he grew up surrounded by traditional Italian art forms, especially Neapolitan song and dance, which would prove to be hugely influential to his compositional style. Creston was forced to take a job at age fourteen, permanently leaving school in order to provide for his family, but that did not put an end to his studies; instead, he would spend all night in the local library, reading everything he could find, and accumulating a vast breadth of knowledge in many fields. He particularly enjoyed pulling operatic scores from the shelves, studying them intently for many nights consecutively, gleaning troves of knowledge on structure, form, orchestration, rhythm, and singing. While primarily self-taught as a composer, he took organ lessons with Pietro Yon, and quickly earned a position as organist at St. Malachy's Church in New York, where he met Henry Cowell.

Cowell would serve as a sort of musical mentor to Creston, introducing him to the New York avant-garde movement; however, this association had little effect on Creston's compositional output. The many years of autodidacticism had left their mark, with his style emanating from a unique philosophy of music, completely self-contained and resistant to any outside perspective. Much of Creston's remarkable ability to remain impervious to external stimuli stems from his habit of writing copiously on every topic that interested him, both inside and outside of music. He continued this habit late into life, eventually publishing several books and articles, as well as leaving many more unpublished essays, treatises, books, and letters to

various libraries around the country. As a result, his compositional style remained largely unchanged even from his earliest published works; he seems to have been reticent to compose before his philosophy was fully developed, and his music perfectly reflects what Walter Simmons calls his, “Idiosyncratic individualism.”¹ Both his individualism and his strong opinions on music epitomize a true American spirit, defining him not simply as the child of immigrants, but as intentionally American, taking the knowledge of generations past and forming it into something new, something different and something sincere. As he himself wrote, “I conscientiously work to be my true self, which is a composite of several factors, sincere and honest in thought, and in nationality, Italian by parentage, American by birth.”²

The singular most important factors to his musical output are the preeminent position of rhythm and his rigid, formulaic compositional process. The extent to which his childhood experiences listening and dancing to the songs sung by his Italian friends and family consciously affected his musical philosophy can be debated, but there is no doubt they left their mark on his music. He firmly believed, “All music is either song or dance,”³ and his compositions, including his Piano Sonata, Op. 9, show the emphasis on beautiful, declamatory melodic lines, derivative of Italian song, and rhythmic sophistication, that yearns for footsteps on a dance floor. Unsurprisingly, Creston believed rhythm was the most important element of music, for as often states in his 1961 book, *Principles of Rhythm*, “Rhythm can exist without music, but music cannot exist without rhythm.”⁴ As a result, when composing, he always created the rhythm first, conceived independently of all other elements, following it with harmony, only adding the

¹ Walter Simmons, *Voices in the Wilderness: Six American Neo-Romantic Composers* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2004), 193.

² Paul Creston, “A Composer’s Creed,” *Music Educator’s Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 7 (March 1971), 93.

³ Quoted in Henry Cowell, “Paul Creston,” *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (October 1948), 539.

⁴ Paul Creston, *Principles of Rhythm*, (New York: Franco Colombo, 1961).

melodic material after all other elements were fully formed. Despite rarely deviating from this mold, his music, and in particular his piano music, remains intriguing and worthy of study, especially as it has been neglected for so long.

Before delving into his Piano Sonata, Op. 9, several of his definitions of musical elements must first be articulated, as he re-interpreted many standard terms and created several more. He believed five rhythmic structures have dominated Western music since its beginnings: 1) Regular subdivision, “The organization of a measure into beats of equal duration;” 2) Irregular subdivision, “The organization of a measure into beats of unequal duration;” 3) Overlapping, “The extension of a phrase rhythm beyond the barline;” 4) Regular Subdivision Overlapping, “The organization of a group of measures into equal beats overlapping the barline;” 5) Irregular Subdivision Overlapping, “The organization of a group of measures into unequal beats overlapping the barline.”⁵ Crucial to these definitions are his distinctions between, pulse, beat, and unit, carefully depicted in Example 1. “Pulse is the term used to designate what is commonly called beat.” “Beat is the accented rhythmic beat which may or may not coincide with the pulse.” “Unit is the subdivision of a pulse or a beat.”



Example 1: Creston's Submetrical distinctions.⁶

⁵ All structures defined, with many examples from all eras, in *Principles of Rhythm*, (New York: Franco Colombo, 1961).

⁶ Janice Shan-Chen Hu, “The Structure of Paul Creston’s Sonata Op. 9 for Piano” (master’s thesis, Central Washington State College, 1975), 3-9.

His personalized definitions extended to more than just rhythm, with his formal structures and techniques also redefined. Modified Sonata-Allegro form is any form “based on the principal of tonal contrast, but not in ternary form,” while Free-Sectional Form, “consists of a series of contrasting sections in any order, but which must be unified by some elements.” Harmonically, his works tend toward pantonality, “the inclusion of all tonalities,” which yields a lush, everchanging foundation upon which numerous other musical elements thrive. His melodic writing, placed on top the pantonal framework, features what he termed Tangential Variation, “A tangential variation of a melody begins a phrase with any segment of the melody, and then develops it differently than in the original statement, i.e., goes off on a different tangent.”⁷

Creston’s Piano Sonata, Op. 9 showcases his musical style, including a lush, orchestral texture, rarely seen in piano music of any era, produced as a result of the innumerable sound possibilities rising from the combination of tangential variations and pantonality. Set in four fairly straightforward movements, *Allegro appassionato*, *Allegretto grazioso*, *Andante*, *Presto scorrevole*, it was written in 1936, though not premiered until 1939, and features a dizzying array of textures, rhythms, emotions, and techniques, all unified into a complex, yet stable, whole. While an academic discussion of Creston’s compositional process and musical philosophy might lead some to think his music is boring and unworthy of performance, nothing could be further from the truth, as there is never a lack of interest or inspiration, with new ideas constantly being introduced.

⁷ All of Creston’s various definitions on music, including these two, are collected from his various writings and collated as part of Janice Shan-Chen Hu’s Central Washington State College master’s thesis, advised by Creston himself. “The Structure of Paul Creston’s Piano Sonata, Op. 9”, 1975.

The first movement, set in free-sectional form, as diagrammed below in Figure 1, presents the two primary themes in the opening nine measures before developing them via tangential variation for the remainder of the movement and concluding with an extended coda.

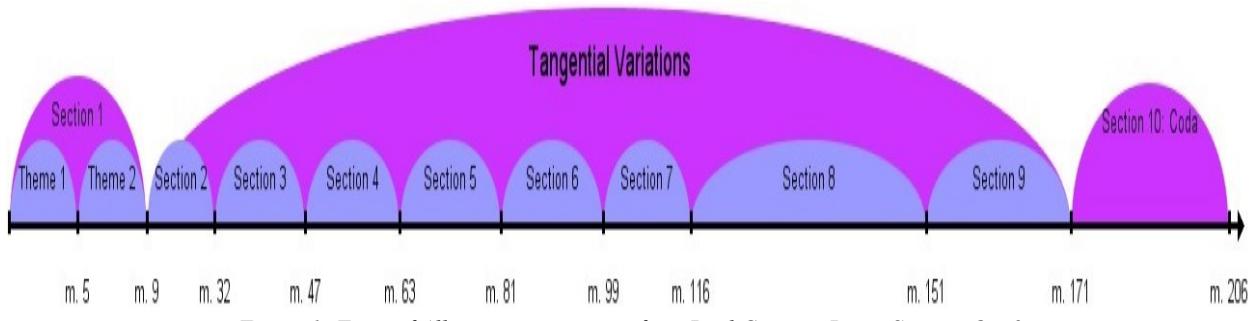
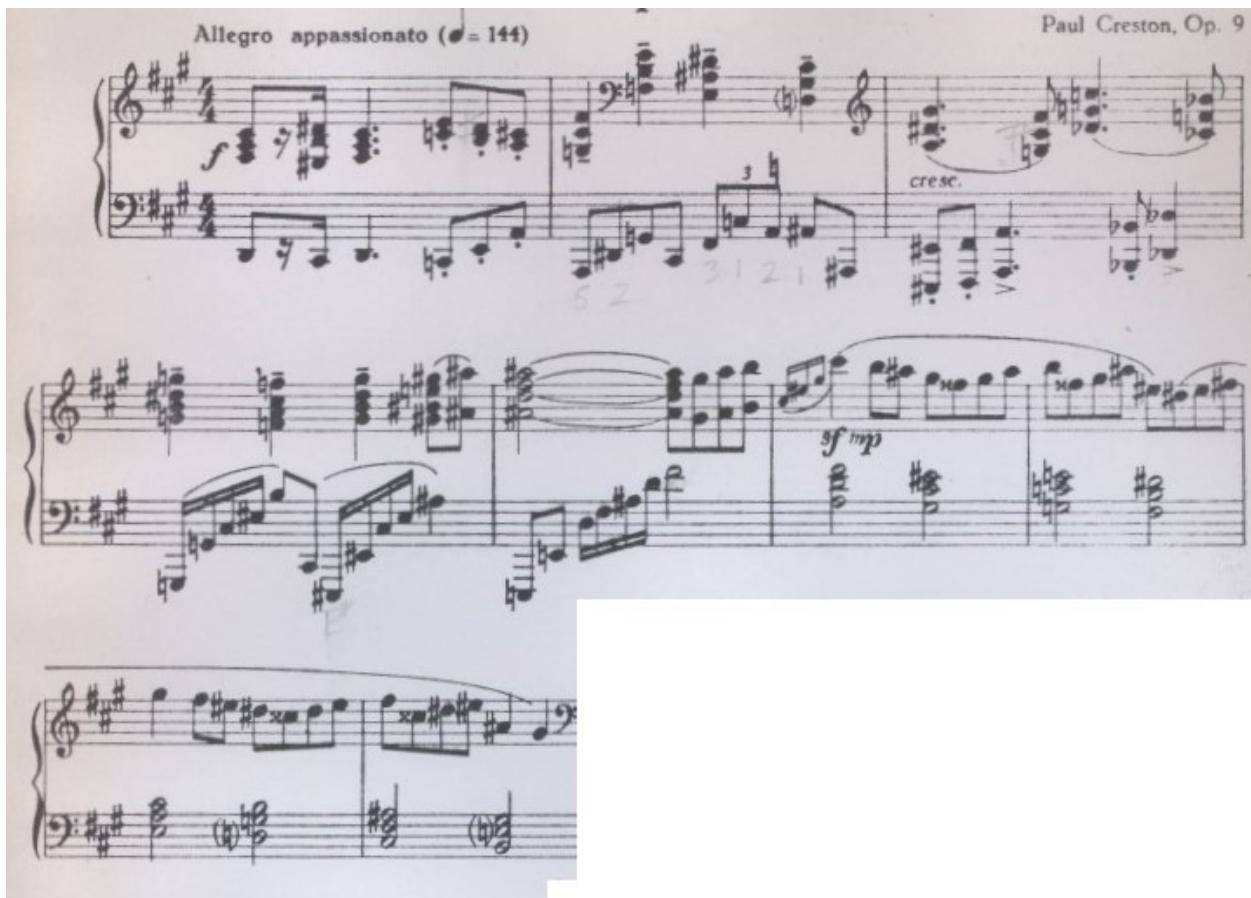


Figure 1: Form of Allegro appassionato, from Paul Creston, Piano Sonata, Op. 9

The first theme is warm and powerful, recalling the heroic strains of Italian tenor lines, expertly supported by a large orchestra. Alternating between dotted and straight rhythms, the primary melodic motive creates a direct, energetic sound, before climbing almost two octaves to a peak which nobly transitions into the second theme at measure six, a heart wrenching melody, representing the entrance of the lyric soprano. As seen in Example 2, interpretive indications are sparse, rare for music from this period, giving the performer more freedom in interpretation.

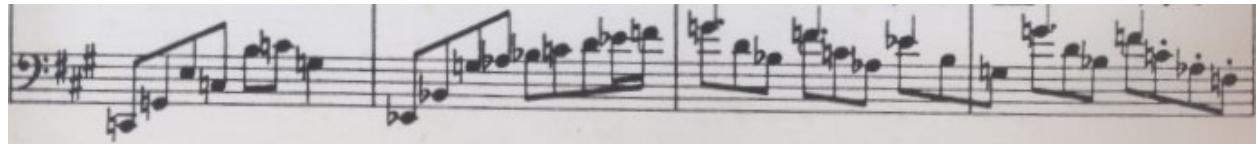


Example 2: Paul Creston, Piano Sonata, Op. 9: Allegro appassionato, mm. 1-9.⁸

The tension between these two themes throughout the movement serves as the basis of the nine other sections which together constitute the free-sectional form. Already in the second section, the two themes are presented together, with the upper voice repeating the heroic theme in both rhythm and melody, while the lower voice sings a conjunct, lyrical line, tumbling over itself with eagerness. Throughout the entire section, inner voices burble in a perpetual motion reminiscent of string instruments, carrying the music forward. The third section restates the lyric theme in the soprano verbatim, in flute-like double thirds, while the bass reverts back to single

⁸ All musical examples of Piano Sonata, Op. 9 from Paul Creston, *Piano Sonata, Op. 9* (New York: Templeton, 1954).

line, thinning the texture. The left hand also introduces the third rhythmic structure, overlapping, for the first time, with Creston's characteristic fluidity, as shown in the next example.



Example 3: Paul Creston, Piano Sonata, Op. 9: Allegro appassionato, mm. 33-36, Left Hand. Third Rhythmic Structure

The fourth section thickens the texture once more, emphasizing the first theme, bringing in a full orchestral palette, concluding with some imitative runs between the hands. The fifth section thins back out, returning to the lyrical second theme. Overlapping rhythmic structures dominate section six, extending the feel only briefly hinted at previously, creating an unbalanced, almost awkward motion, especially as melodic fragments come and go in the blink of an eye. In contrast, section seven features longer melodies, still rhythmically overlapped, to create a happily unraveling rush into section eight, the fullest, warmest, most majestic moment not just of the first movement, but of the entire sonata. After several more sections which toss melodic fragments back and forth pairing the two complementary characters against one another, an extended cadence at measures 169-170 leads into the final section, which functions as the coda. Starting small, in a pared-back texture of two single lines, perhaps suggesting a love duet, the music gradually thickens, eventually climaxing with the force of a full orchestra in a resonant, sonorous display that quickly diminishes in power, only leaving room for the two singers to echo each other's words as the curtain falls on the first act.

The action resumes with the second movement, a subdued scherzo, marked *sempre una corda* in a conscious break from the raw emotion of the *Allegro appassionato*. In what Hu calls triple binary form, AB, A¹B¹, A²B², the scherzo shows its humorous spirit through a constant

shift of rhythmic emphasis, utilizing all but one rhythmic structure.⁹ Opening with regular subdivision, the most familiar rhythmic structure, the movement quickly shifts to the fourth structure, regular subdivision overlapping, notated through a change of beaming and accentuated melodic motives, as shown in Example 4.



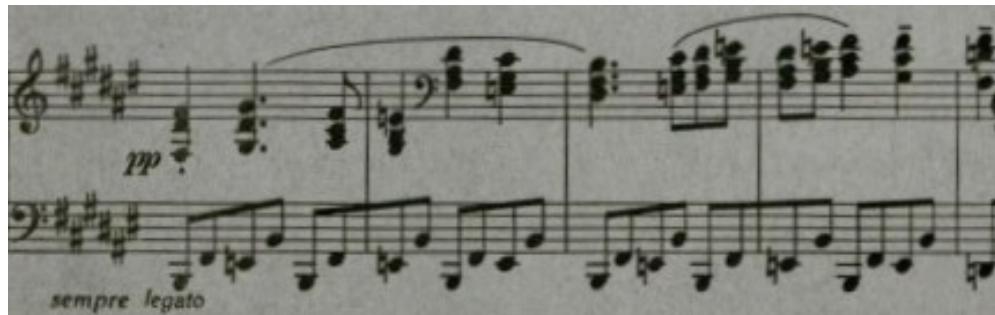
Example 4: Paul Creston, Piano Sonata, Op. 9: Allegretto grazioso, mm. 1-5. Fourth Rhythmic Structure.

Immediately following in the inner voices, is a legato motive in thirds, with a solitary horn call superimposed above them, which soon descends into another two measures of the fourth rhythmic structure. The entire A section is then repeated, with thickened texture throughout.

The B section contrasts with A not just rhythmically, but also melodically. Whereas A featured a narrow melodic range, with concise, rhythmically precise motives, B features longer melodic lines over wide leaping, impatient jumps, perfectly suited to a bassoon. The two melodic lines continue in counterpoint with one another, not quite as a duet, but rather with unresolved intervals which never quite catch up with their counterpart, even at the cadence. The bassoon-like line bubbles a bit more, before becoming a legato ostinato, while the upper voices finally resolve their harmonic conflict, moving downward in a smooth sequence of double thirds. Eventually, the thirds become fourths, but are no longer in tension, while the bass ostinato increases its range, growing in sound until the first return of A.

⁹ Hu, “The Structure of Paul Creston’s Sonata Op. 9 for Piano” (master’s thesis, Central Washington State College, 1975), 24.

While A¹ shifts the rhythmic emphases and features a brief interpolation, the real change happens in B¹, when the fifth rhythmic structure makes its appearance. The bass ostinato prominent in the first B section recurs, transposed for its new context, giving stability in its use of the third rhythmic structure. The upper voices, in an earthy, melancholic song, showcase the fifth rhythmic structure, irregular subdivision overlapping, as shown in Example 5.



Example 5: Paul Creston, Piano Sonata, Op. 9: Allegretto grazioso, mm. 76-81. Fifth Rhythmic Structure.

The rhythmic combination of the two competing structures, while precisely notated, bestows a sensation of melodic freedom and tempo fluctuation in the style of Neapolitan song, yet another indicator that Creston's childhood experiences profoundly impacted his personalized musical philosophy. The melody over ostinato continues until measure 94, where a brief transition leads into the final statement of A, unchanged from the opening. The movement closes with an extended descending sequence of double thirds, covering half the keyboard, over an unchanging ostinato bass which gradually dissipates until the final bar is but a single line in each voice, sounding pianissimo.

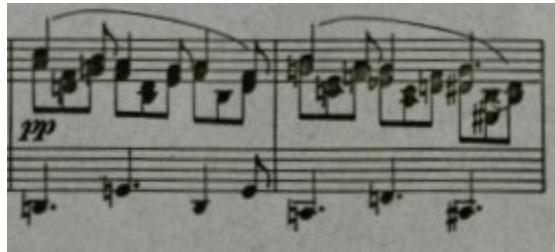
After the whimsical interlude of the second movement, the operatic melodies return for the third, a lilting barcarolle consisting of a two-part theme with three variations. Much like the majority of the first movement, this slower movement features two easily identifiable vocal lines with dense, continually shifting string-like accompaniment between them. The theme opens with

a duet in contrary motion, filled in with the gently murmuring permanence of the violas and cellos, as shown in Example 6.



Example 6: Paul Creston, Piano Sonata, Op. 9: Andante, mm. 1-3. Theme 1.

The second motive of the theme recalls aspects of the second movement through its use of descending thirds; however, despite their range of motion, these are more tranquil and lyrical, split in two, with the upper, more lyrical line reserved for the soprano, while the lower line is recalls wind instruments, in a change of color compared to the opening, as seen in Example 7.



Example 7: Paul Creston, Piano Sonata, Op. 9: Andante, mm. 7-8. Theme 2.

The first variation, beginning in measure 11, retains the rhythm and general melodic shape of the theme, but offers several opportunities for different tone colors and features a tender duet between the two primary lines, unhindered by a dense accompaniment. The buildup into variation two recalls the humor of the second movement, with a syncopated, rhythmic pulse looking back to the impatient, bassoon-like jumps which characterized the first B section. The second variation opens in very similar fashion to the theme, with a vocal duet bookending a lush, lilting line; however, it soon builds into something much greater, almost exceeding the resources of the piano, but being beautifully suited to the color palette of an orchestra.

After a slow crescendo through the duet, the texture thickens tremendously, continuing to grow, as brilliant, virtuosic melodic lines begin to show themselves, piercing through the sound. While still nominally pantonal, the second half of this variation borders on polytonality, with many chords featuring seven and eight different pitches sounded simultaneously, increasing the volume and intensity. Just when the high point seems imminent, a terrace is reached, with everything dropping down a level; yet this only succeeds at pushing the music upward and onward, recharging to climb the final mountain and overcome the moment of highest tension. Like so many Italian songs, the resolution is short and simple, nicely balancing the prior emotion. The final variation contains the first true tonal passage of the sonata, firmly entrenched in the gentle key of E Major, slowly fading away before the energy of the final movement.

The fourth movement, in keeping with the greatest Italian operas, not only synthesizes disparate elements from the previous movements, but wraps them up with a fitting end. Opening in complete contrast to the end of the third movement, with rapid, violin-like figurations in the right hand paired with a sprightly staccato in the left hand, there is an air of excitement in the music, despite the indicated pianissimo. The duet, actually the introduction to the modified sonata-allegro form movement, soon gives way to the first theme, a warm, cheery melody in A Major, with the right hand figurations becoming a countermelody, shown in Example 8.



Example 8: Paul Creston, Piano Sonata, Op. 9: Presto scorrevole, mm. 10-13. First theme.

The second statement of theme, more vocal in nature, leads directly into a lively chromatic descent culminating in a perfect authentic cadence in E Major, signaling the arrival of the second

theme. While the melody itself lies in the same range, the support has flipped, now being in the bass, as shown in Example 9.

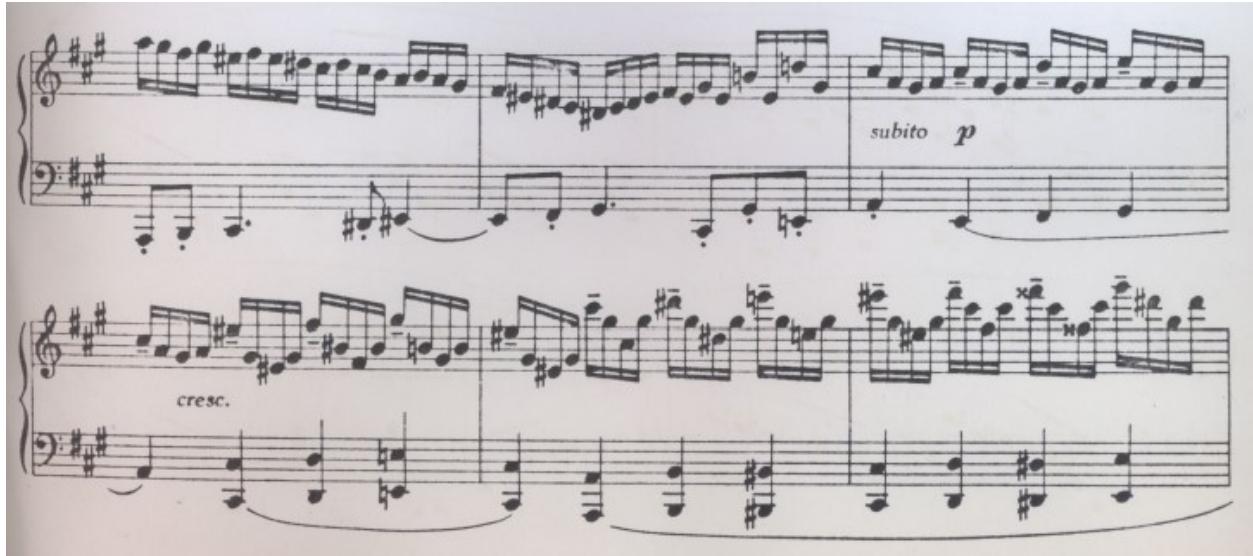


Example 9: Paul Creston, Piano Sonata, Op. 9: Presto scorrevole, mm. 29-33. Second theme.

The melody reaches another chromatic descent, similar to the first, which serves to transition into a third theme, this time in the treble, only supported by an Alberti bass which could easily have been taken from the second movement. This theme culminates with an explosive upward run, taken over once more by the virtuosic passagework which opened the movement, signaling the beginning of the development section.

The development begins with first theme, still supported by rapid passagework, before beginning to transition to the next stage. Part of the third theme is heard in inversion before the second theme begins development through the use of melodic fragments placed in different rhythmic structures. After a few different iterations, a lyrical theme, based on the first part of the first theme, recurs tossing itself between voices. The music crescendos to a high point, after which the first theme reappears in its entirety, in the same range as the opening, but centered around F#, accompanied as always by rapid figurations in the strings. After a single statement, however, the uppermost voice picks up this heroic theme and the accompaniment shifts to the bass to accommodate, the first suggestion that the development changed the character of the theme. After a short, but virtuosic transition, taxing the performer's stamina, the full second theme is heard, confirming this is the recapitulation.

An extended passage ensues, developing the second theme even more and broadening the scope of the movement, before the first theme finally returns in A Major, augmenting note values to further emphasize the close is near. As shown in Example 10, when the first theme reappears with its refrain for the last time, the upper voice joins, doubling the theme in sixths in a melodic duet, not heard since the opening.



Example 10: Paul Creston, Piano Sonata, Op. 9: Presto scorrevole, mm. 153-158. Final Statement.

The inner voices join them in chorus, before falling back to prepare for the exuberant joy of the coda. Following extended cadential preparation, the harmonies resoundingly resolve into an A Major chord as cello-like figurations furiously fill the space with energetic harmonies in a dazzling display of virtuosity. A single bass melody sings the primary theme for the last time, before a series of octaves fittingly brings the sonata to an exuberant close, worthy of the drama inherent in Italian music.

Norman Dello Joio was one of the most successful American composers of the 20th Century, though performances of his works faded after his retirement in 1978. Born into a family of musicians, organists of Gragnano, Italy, Norman began music lessons at the age of four with his father Casimiro, who, having grown restless in Gragnano, had joined the US Navy band stationed in Naples, immigrated to the United States, and married a fellow Italian immigrant. By the time of Norman's birth in 1913, Casimiro held a position at a parish church in New York and worked as an accompanist for the Metropolitan Opera. As a result, Norman grew up surrounded by both opera and Roman Catholic church music, both of which would profoundly impact him and prove to be consistent influences to his compositional and musical style. At school, away from the watchful gaze of his father, he was surrounded by the sounds of the era: Jazz, Tin Pan Alley, and the Gershwin brothers' latest hits, all of which would influence his ideas on rhythm and bestow what his biographer, Thomas Bumgardner, describes as a natural sensitivity to the American audience, focused on well-crafted, easily comprehensible music.¹⁰

In addition to the theory and counterpoint lessons of his father, Dello Joio studied organ with his godfather, Pietro Yon, organist of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York, who would cultivate the Italian musical traditions already studied at home. Shortly after beginning formal lessons, he was appointed to his first job as church organist at age twelve, in keeping with the family profession, allowing him the opportunity to take an active part in preparing each week's services, becoming even more familiar with Catholic chant. After a few years, the parish recommended him for a special program to study all aspects of sacred music in Rome, an endeavor which would have forced him to devote his life to church music; he refused, despite his father's wishes, intentionally distancing himself, in true American fashion, from the expectations

¹⁰ Thomas Bumgardner, *Norman Dello Joio* (Boston: Twayne, 1986), 6-7, 24.

of the Old World. Soon after, he decided to devote himself to performance, enrolling at Juilliard to study organ with Gaston Dethier.

At Juilliard, finally free from his overbearing father, Dello Joio's passion for composition slowly blossomed, with his first official compositions dating from 1936. His music features free-flowing, seemingly unmeasured melodic lines based on chant, exuberant rhythmic energy learned from his forays into jazz and popular music, and concise, well-structured forms based more on following the melodic lines than any tonal or harmonic contrast. Dello Joio incorporated his other passion, baseball, into his music through the use of his musical signature, a descending minor third. As recounted by Dello Joio to Bumgardner, while diligently copying exercises for his father, his friends would mill around outside his window, yelling at him to come play baseball with the refrain, "Norman, Norman" in the interval of a descending minor third; so, he embraced the call himself, adding it to his music.¹¹ From 1941, he studied with Paul Hindemith, who introduced him to musical modernism, but admonished him to retain his own musical voice. Thus, Dello Joio's mature musical style is rarely dissonant or highly complex, focused on direct appeal, rather than any special techniques or ideas.

Dello Joio's Piano Sonata No. 1 showcases the salient elements of his musical style, perhaps most importantly the vocal nature of his writing, influenced primarily by Gregorian chant. In three movements, whose titles, "Chorale Prelude", "Canon," and "Capriccio," are inspired by his past role as an organist, it was written from February 1-4, 1943.¹² As Bumgardner relates,

One day near the end of January 1943, Dello Joio was caught in a sudden downpour on the streets of New York. He ducked inside a doorway where concert pianist Sidney Foster just happened to be standing to await the end of the deluge. The two engaged in conversation. Foster said, "I'm playing a recital in Carnegie

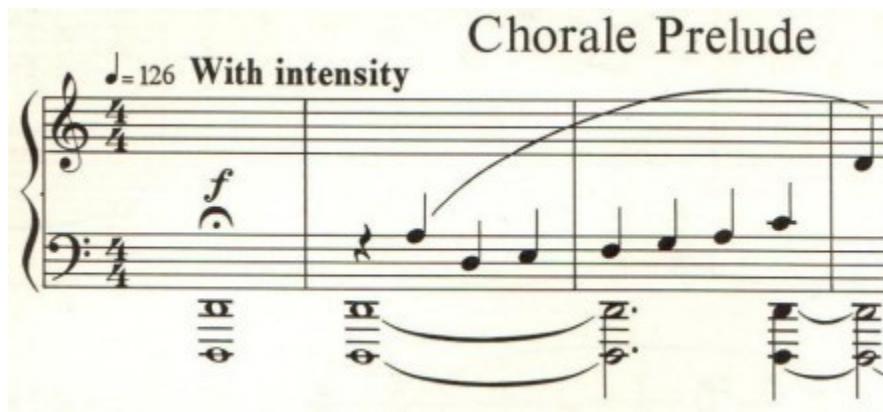
¹¹ Ibid, 5.

¹² Norman Dello Joio, *Piano Sonata No. 1* (New York: Hargail, 1947), 14.

Hall in two weeks. Why don't you write something for me?" Dello Joio replied, "Well, it's short notice, but sure, I'll do it."¹³

Even though organ music clearly inspires the movement titles, the focus remains on the beauty of the melodic lines, as they create the structure. In contrast to Creston's sonata, not a single movement is based on tonal contrast, as they are all crafted through the relationship of the individual lines. This trait is grounded not only in church music, but also in the operatic arias he heard at home, a quintessential cultural element in the childhood of any Italian immigrant. Not having a text to unify each movement results in shorter, more concise movements, one of the hallmarks of Dello Joio's style.

The first movement, in two broad sections, opens with a single melody in the tenor, an originally composed chant-like tune in D Dorian, over an unchanging open D pedal point. As seen in Example 11, the low D resonates first, setting up the entry of the main melody.



Example 11: Norman Dello Joio, Piano Sonata No. 1: Chorale Prelude, mm. 1-3.¹⁴

The chant tune itself consists of four well-balanced phrases, each beginning where the last ended, each gradually introducing non-diatonic tones, and each separated by a breath. The restriking of the pedal D overlaps with each phrase so that there is constant forward motion, creating the

¹³ Thomas Bumgardner, *Norman Dello Joio* (Boston: Twayne, 1986), 94.

¹⁴ All musical examples of Dello Joio's Piano Sonata No. 1 from Norman Dello Joio, *Piano Sonata No. 1* (New York: Hargail, 1947).

sensation of listening to a church choir accompanied by organ, even as the bass builds in intensity, breaking the pedal to signal the first cadence. The D pedal resumes after the cadence, while the chant tune is moved to the soprano and developed; however, quartal and quintal chords enter at the tenor range, thickening the texture, and introducing new sound qualities. Once again, the music builds to a climax point, with the bass pedal finishing before the cadence. Everything is then repeated in octaves to finish the first section of the movement. The melodic lines exist independently of one another, each driving itself forward, but together create a complex whole, reminiscent of the contrapuntal style of the Counter-Reformation, with which Dello Joio was intimately familiar due to his musical education and upbringing.

While the first section features a pedal on D, the second features two pedal points, one on A below the melodic motion, and one on E above the melodic motion. In contrast to the first section, the primary thematic material is bell-like, with slow, drawn-out peals in fourths and fifths, reflecting yet another element of church music, while also recalling the quartal and quintal harmonies of the first section. After this statement, the melody which opened the movement

returns in stretto in the upper voices, even as the bass strikes the same theme in augmentation, as shown in Example 12.

Example 12: Norman Dello Joio, Piano Sonata No. 1: Chorale Prelude, mm. 56-63.

With the voices beginning to be more integrated, a slow build to the climax of the movement begins. A series of undulating ninths, further reinforcement of the quintal harmonies, begins creeping up the keyboard in the bass, while fragments of the opening theme toll in the other voices. The pattern continues, slowly growing in volume and power before reaching a fortississimo maximum, heralding the first statement of the “Norman” interval, Dello Joio’s musical signature, in the bass.

Mirroring the rise to the climax, the music decays through the use of traditional developmental techniques, namely fragmentation, augmentation, and stretto, slowly thinning until but a single voice remains. The last complete statement of the opening chant tune is heard, in placid isolation for the first time, immediately after which open fourths and fifths ring, hearkening back to the bell tolls of the second section, thus successfully synthesizing the primary

elements of each main section. The movement closes exactly as it opened, with a solitary D, ringing in the bass, unfettered by the demands of the sounds above it. So, as this analysis shows, “Chorale Prelude” displays a reliance on chant-like melodies, organ pedal points, traditional contrapuntal techniques, modal scales, and quartal and quintal harmonies.

“Canon” utilizes the same stylistic elements, but increases the importance of the Norman motive, opening not with the cantus firmus theme to be developed in canon, but with a peaceful, rhythmically free, minor third, B_b–G, repeated twice, as shown in Example 13.



Example 13: Norman Dello Joio, Piano Sonata No. 1: Canon, mm. 1-2

The first two measures, with their open space and lack of motion, point back to the opening of the Chorale Prelude, with its solitary D, while also pointing forward to the canon’s dependence on the Norman motive. Indeed, as Example 14 shows, the primary melodic motive, first heard in measure 3, also begins with a descending minor third, but while the full theme lasts two measures, the second statement, initiating the eponymous canon, occurs before the completion of the first statement. The stretto effect, heard so soon, signals that the descending minor third, Dello Joio’s own theme, is the true musical king in this movement, tying all else together. Example 14 also shows the chorale texture which dominates the movement, fulfilling the first movement’s promise as a prelude. In addition to the ever-present organ pedal, there are four distinct voices: soprano, alto, tenor, bass, each filling a distinct role, yet each reliant on the others to create a complete, cohesive whole. The soprano states the theme first, followed by the tenor

one measure later, in stretto. Meanwhile, the bass echoes the minor third before joining the alto in harmonic support to create quartal and quintal intervals against the two melodic voices.

Example 14: Norman Dello Joio, Piano Sonata No. 1: Canon, mm. 1-7

The mood and framework of the movement established, each subsequent phrase develops the thematic and musical elements introduced by the opening phrase. The second phrase features staggered rhythmic interruptions in the manner of Medieval hocket, while the pedal sounds the Norman motive. The next two phrases utilize hemiola, shifting to a duple meter, $\frac{6}{4}$, in the upper three voices, while the bass and pedal keep the triple meter, creating a sense of rhythmic tension which propels the music forward. After this disagreement, the music realigns rhythmically, forming a homophonic texture, discarding the polyphonic texture prominent since the opening. The new texture, however features alternating quartal and quintal chords in the accompaniment, while the notated meter changes almost every measure. After a small climax, the meter stabilizes, but the Norman motive increases in prominence, sounding in the pedal, followed shortly thereafter in the soprano, as shown in Example 15.



Example 15:Norman Dello Joio, Piano Sonata No. 1: Canon, mm. 24-25.

One final statement of the full cantus firmus brings the movement to a close, launching directly into an eight-measure coda, unified by the descending minor third. Starting mezzo forte, the coda, shown in its entirety in Example 16, gradually builds to a sonorous climax, the high point of the movement, before dying away into nothingness, all while the persistent, bell-like tolling of the pedal voice rings with the interval of a minor third. The upper voices rise up the keyboard in a series of thick quartal chords, each higher than the last, while the bass and tenor voices create an ostinato pattern of alternating fourths, filling in the space above the pedal. Closing in the same manner as the Chorale Prelude, the final chord retains the pedal G which opened the movement, placing open-voiced chords above it, synthesizing the principal musical elements depicted throughout the movement.



Example 16: Norman Dello Joio, Piano Sonata No. 1: Canon, coda, mm. 31-38.

As if to further emphasize intervallic harmonic structures, rooted in the modal harmony of Gregorian chant, the third movement, “Capriccio,” centers on neither the D of the Chorale Prelude nor the G of the Canon, but rather a third pitch, A, creating harmonic balance between the movements. Structurally the most familiar of the three movements, utilizing theme and variations form, the third movement nonetheless continues Dello Joio’s characteristic appeal, again returning to simple, directly stated melodic motives. Although the first two movements do not require too much technical finish from the pianist, the Capriccio requires a mature technique, most notably in the opening before the statement of the main theme.

The brief introduction serves to cleanse the auditory palette from the tranquility of the second movement and create the layered texture prominent throughout the movement. The Capriccio opens with three distinct sound levels, interlocked in a unique sound structure which returns between variations throughout the movement. There is a low pedal voice, featuring the Norman motive, a chordal middle voice composed of traditional tertian harmonies, and a chordal upper voice composed of quintal harmonies, continuing the intervallic language of the first two movements. Overall, the energetic introduction reflects Dello Joio’s upbringing, seeming to

describe afternoons spent listening to the sounds of New York on the street below, with friends calling his name from the diamond, while he was stuck completing exercises in counterpoint.

The first statement of the theme comes after two transitional measures, which shift the harmony back to quartal chords from the tertian and quintal chords of the introduction. Without a doubt the most joyful melody of the entire sonata, it is bright and boisterous, beginning with an upward rising fourth, before continuing into a jaunty descending series of sevenths, all over a sustained A pedal tone. As shown in Example 17, the pedal breaks just before the cadence to create a countermelody culminating in an imitative sweep down towards the first variation.

Example 17: Norman Dello Joio, Piano Sonata No. 1: Capriccio, mm. 11-18. Transition and theme.

Rather than using the well-established variation techniques of altering the melody, modulating, or shifting harmonic modes, the Capriccio varies the theme almost exclusively through changes in range and texture, showing Dello Joio's willingness to break with tradition and chart his own path, away from the expectant eyes of his father. Variation 1 states the theme a fourth higher, adding extra notes below the thematic material. The pedal moves up a fifth to E, mirroring the pedal motion from D to A in the Chorale Prelude. After the first return of the

introductory texture, Variation 2 moves up another fourth, returning the pedal point to A. Variation 3, displaced an octave down, thickens the lower voices, creating a more acrid, biting sound, before blossoming into the first important harmonic change via the layered texture from the introduction. Variation 4 narrows the range between treble and bass, softening the sound by modulating from the A/E axis to F#, while the left hand retains the thicker texture and open fifths of the transition, as shown in Example 18. In addition to these changes, this variation retains the sharper, more immediate emotion of the previous variation through the use of accents and staccatos.



Example 18: Norman Dello Joio, Piano Sonata No. 1: Capriccio, mm. 45-47.

The first example in the movement of Dello Joio's lyrical writing, inspired by Italian opera, ensues after a lengthy transition featuring constantly shifting meters when the soprano voice sings an extended melodic line, on top of a motoric, rhythmically driven ostinato bass. The melody builds to a high point before the bass introduces another theme, creating, for the first time in the Capriccio, a polyphonic texture. As in the other movements, this polyphony favors the individual melodic lines over an integrated, complex whole, recalling the modal counterpoint of the Renaissance and further demonstrating Dello Joio's familiarity with church music. After a return to $\frac{4}{4}$, a stable metrical pulse, a second lyrical theme sounds in the right hand, while the left hand slowly returns to quartal chords after extending its excursion into melodic development.

The second important harmonic moment soon follows, accompanied by a change not of texture, but of tempo.

As shown in Example 19, the half speed section experiences a total return to tertian harmony, with the right hand forming triadic chords, while the left hand plays a fragmented, song-like melody, centered around D-flat.



Example 19: Norman Dello Joio, Piano Sonata No. 1: Capriccio, mm. 79-81.

The low, lilting melody quickly becomes a humorous melodic moment at the other extreme of the instrument, with grace note figurations creating a quirky, charming change of character, returning to a tonal center of F-sharp. After a brief pause, the movement reverts to the original tempo and the primary theme returns in the form of a bass ostinato.

As the last section of the last movement, the final variation synthesizes the most important musical elements of the entire sonata, ultimately emerging from the previously used vocal models to become a fiery finale of pianistic passion. Even before the return of the tempo primo, the left hand iterated a series of descending minor thirds, but after the tempo shift, the Norman motive appears in octaves before transitioning directly into a restatement of the opening theme, clearly heard again for the first time in forty-eight measures. The right hand, meanwhile, reiterates the texture of the opening introduction, replete with both quintal and tertian chords. After four repetitions of the ostinato bass dictating the theme, a single chord is sustained as a pedal on E, while the upper two layers weave an open tapestry of sound, requiring both dexterity

and agility from the performer. The intensity weakens somewhat until a stepwise descent in the pedal from E to B creates the most intense sound yet, ushering in a melodic sequence utilizing the full range and resources of the modern concert piano. A metrically unbalanced series of parallel thirds, heard *subito piano*, heighten the tension, before a triumphant return to quartal and quintal harmonies carries the sonata to its joyful, energetic conclusion.

In conclusion, Dello Joio's Piano Sonata No. 1 showcases more than just his musical style—it also serves as an example of his compositional craft. Combining his formal education, his personal background, and the necessity to quickly fulfill Foster's commission, Dello Joio used his first sonata as a vessel for concise composition. Obviously based in Roman Catholic sacred music, each movement slowly builds in scope and sound, adding more elements as they progress, until almost all vestiges of the vocal character have vanished, drowned out by the virtuosic pianism which closes the third movement. Furthermore, the harmonic tension which endures throughout, whether produced through modal ambiguity or clashing intervals, resolves in the closing statement with quartal chords centered on A winning out. Finally, Dello Joio's control of melodic motion, wrapped in warm, lyrical lines reveals his Italian roots through their unceasing singable nature, whether heard individually or in polyphonic counterpoint, even as his American mindset shines forth through the unique intentions inherent in this piano sonata.

Though forgotten by many today, Vincent Persichetti was one of the most important American composers of the 20th Century, successfully synthesizing traditional forms and structures with new-fangled Modern ideas and American idiosyncrasies. While born into a family of immigrants in South Philadelphia, he did not have a difficult upbringing, as his father achieved the American dream at a young age, working as a realtor and providing a stable income to his family. When Persichetti was two years old, his father bought a player piano for the family which became the first vessel demonstrating young Vincent's prodigious musical talent. By age six, he had performed his first live radio broadcast and started formal studies at the Combs Conservatory of Music, where he studied piano. He eventually ended up concurrently studying piano with Olga Samaroff at the Philadelphia Conservatory, conducting with Fritz Reiner at the Curtis Institute, organ with Pietro Yon privately, and was appointed professor of theory and composition at the Combs Conservatory in 1939, where he would remain until 1962. In 1947, while still teaching in Philadelphia, he took a position at the Juilliard School, eventually becoming chair of the composition department.

His teacher, Samaroff, introduced him to another of her students, Dorothea, who would not only marry him, but also go on to premiere many of his works and continually inspire him to compose for the instrument; indeed, the dedication on the collection of complete piano sonatas reads, "All of these Sonatas were written for and because of Dorothea Persichetti."¹⁵ As a result, much of his output is for piano, in total twelve piano sonatas, one sonata for two pianos, and three piano concertos, all of which show an intimate knowledge and idiomatic grasp of the instrument. In addition, most of his piano works require mature pianism and a well-developed understanding of the musical techniques involved. During his years with Samaroff, Persichetti

¹⁵ Vincent Persichetti, *Piano Sonatas* (Bryn Mawr: Elkan-Vogel, 1988), i.

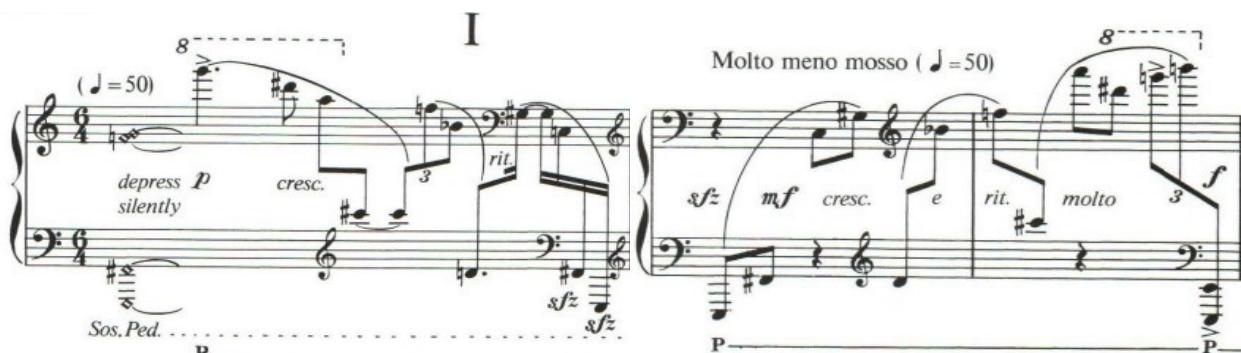
also began to craft his own musical language, which he would later divide into two competing qualities, grazioso and grit. According to Persichetti, “Each piece is a happy combination of the two, although a piece is usually mostly gritty or mostly grazioso.”¹⁶ His style is characterized by rhythmic vitality, polyrhythm, polytonality, use of non-tonal scales, angular melodies, and a vibrant virtuosity.

Originally entitled *Sonata in E Minor*, the first piano sonata was written in 1939, though not published until 1982. It demonstrates Persichetti’s compositional style and showcases the undeniably pianistic nature of the writing. In contrast to the orchestral outlook of Creston’s sonata and the vocal character of Dello Joio’s sonata, Persichetti’s sonata could only have been written for the piano, perfectly exploiting the musical and expressive possibilities of the keyboard. For example, the very first measure opens with an indication to silently depress a chord, while placing the sostenuto pedal to catch the intended sonority, an effect ideally suited to the piano as expressive medium, and but the first of many such indications throughout the sonata. Moreover, damper pedal indications are meticulously marked, particularly in more harmonically dense passages, showing Persichetti’s knowledge of the sound capabilities of the instrument. Finally, and perhaps most idiomatic of all, no matter how knotty, complex, or dissonant a passage, the music is a joy to play because it fits so well under the hand; there is not a single note that is awkward, difficult to reach, or uncomfortable, a quality only possible through the composer’s intimate relationship and skill with his instrument.

Cast in a traditional four movement form, the First Piano Sonata is bookended by the primary harmonic motive, which he would later describe motive as “freely serial,” in a letter to a

¹⁶ Quoted from Andrea Olmstead, *Vincent Persichetti: Grazioso, Grit and Gold* (London: Rowan & Littlefield, 2018), xxv.

student.¹⁷ However, closer analysis reveals the harmonic language to be consciously not twelve-tone in nature, but rather bridging the gap between strict serialism and traditional tonality. These harmonic signposts which bookend the sonata signal Persichetti's willingness to use Modern techniques in his characteristic tongue-in-cheek manner while not compromising his own artistic ideas. As seen in Example 20, the sonata opens with a slow descent covering the full range of the keyboard, including eleven of the twelve tones (prime form), finishing on E, while consciously avoiding B. The last measures of the fourth movement reverse the process, climbing the keyboard (retrograde form), this time adding the missing B, before reinforcing the tonal structure with heavy, powerful repetitions of E and B in the bass.



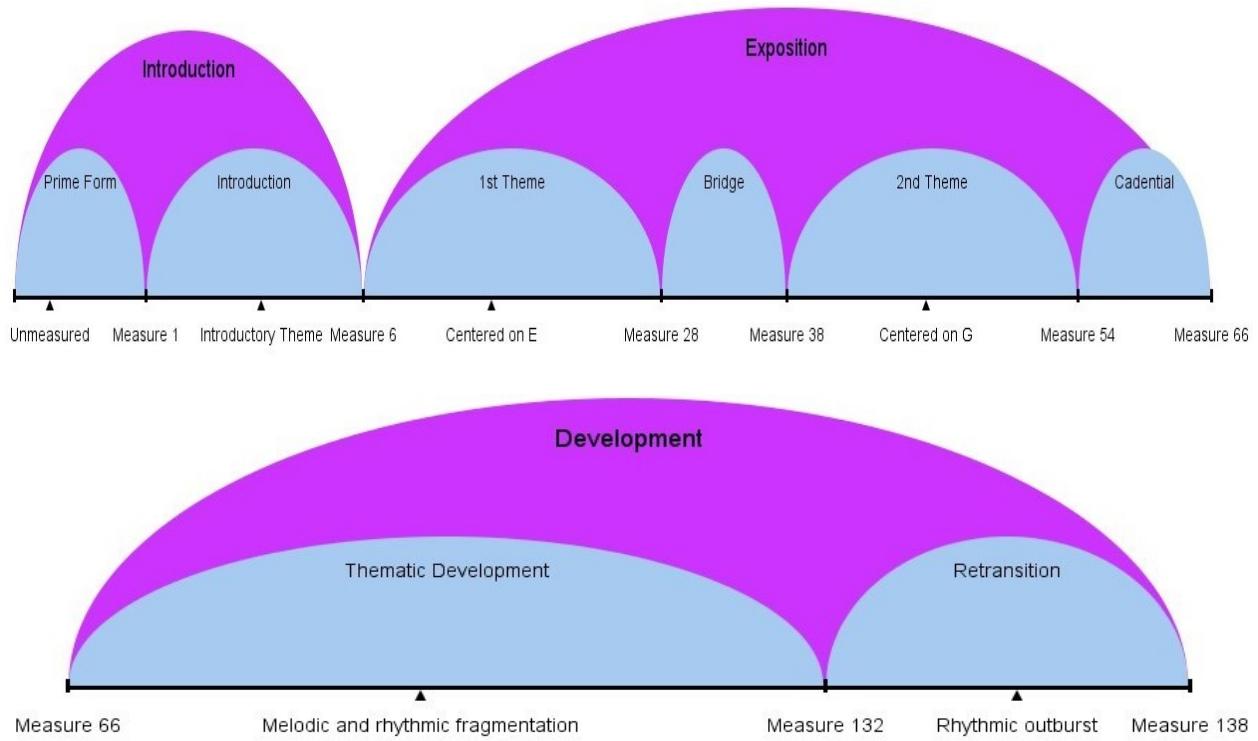
Example 20: Vincent Persichetti, *First Piano Sonata*, Op. 3. Prime form (left), Retrograde form (right)¹⁸

After the opening gesture, the first movement, *Allegro moderato* is in a fairly typical sonata form, as shown in Figure 2, despite the lack of traditional tonality, with a brief introduction followed by a jaunty, angular first theme, representing grit, beautifully contrasted with an ardent, lyrical second theme, representing grace. The first theme centers on E, though is highly chromatic and accentuates the interval of the tritone, removing itself from any tonal implications. The use of articulation and dynamic indications in the first theme are carefully

¹⁷ Laurence Farrell, "Vincent Persichetti's Piano Sonatas from 1943 to 1965" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 1976), 263.

¹⁸ All musical examples of *First Piano Sonata* from Vincent Persichetti, *First Piano Sonata*, Op. 3 (Bryn Mawr: Elkan-Vogel, 1982).

controlled, serving as structural elements themselves, pointing towards total serialism, thus demonstrating Persichetti's knowledge of current trends in American composition. The second theme, marked *teneramente* and centered on G, features a flowing, singable melodic line, with linearly oriented contrapuntal accompaniment. The thematic material overlaps constantly, often in stretto, with a marked use of tertian and quartal harmonies, contrasting with the previous use of the tritone. After a lengthy development, mainly utilizing thematic fragmentation and rhythmic variation, the recapitulation returns, slowly building to a rich, warm second theme in octaves. The movement concludes with an exacting coda marked *presto* requiring pianistic agility and strength from the performer.



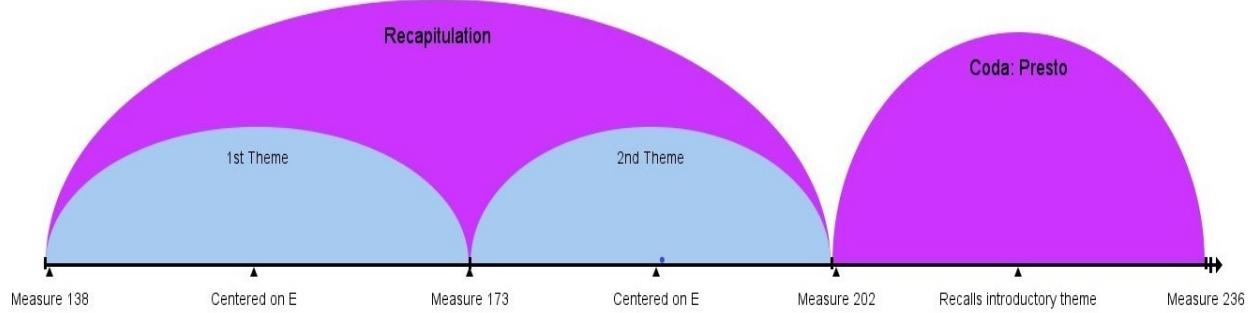
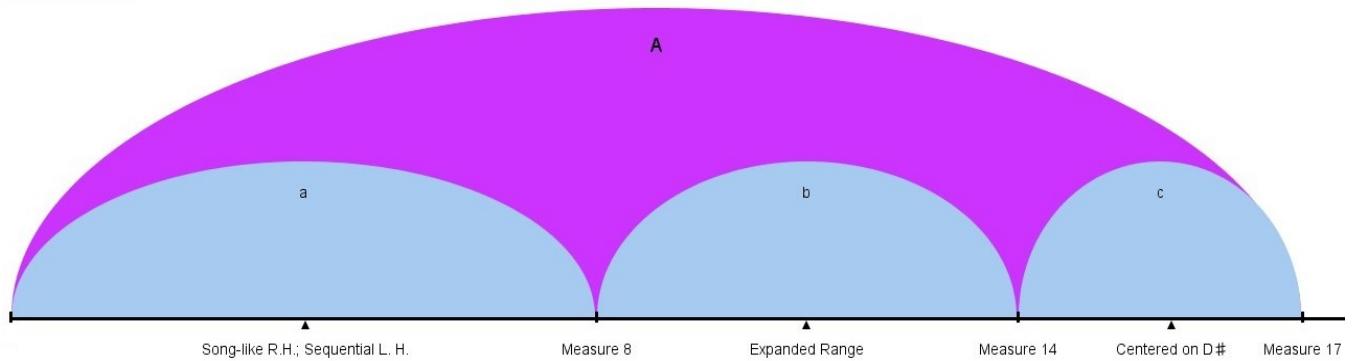


Figure 2: Form of Allegro moderato, from Vincent Persichetti, First Piano Sonata. Op.3

Unlike the first movement, the second movement, *Adagio*, is strikingly dissonant throughout, Expressionist in character, and atonal in harmonic language. Polyphonic and polyrhythmic, the unrestrained flow and songlike qualities of the individual melodic lines, juxtaposed against the Modern techniques utilized, create the perfect tapestry to depict Persichetti's musical personality and further demonstrate his compositional style. Structurally, this movement is in ternary form, ABA' Coda, with an extended transition between A and B, unified by a steady stream of eighth note triplets paired with lyrical, singable melodic lines, as diagrammed in Figure 3



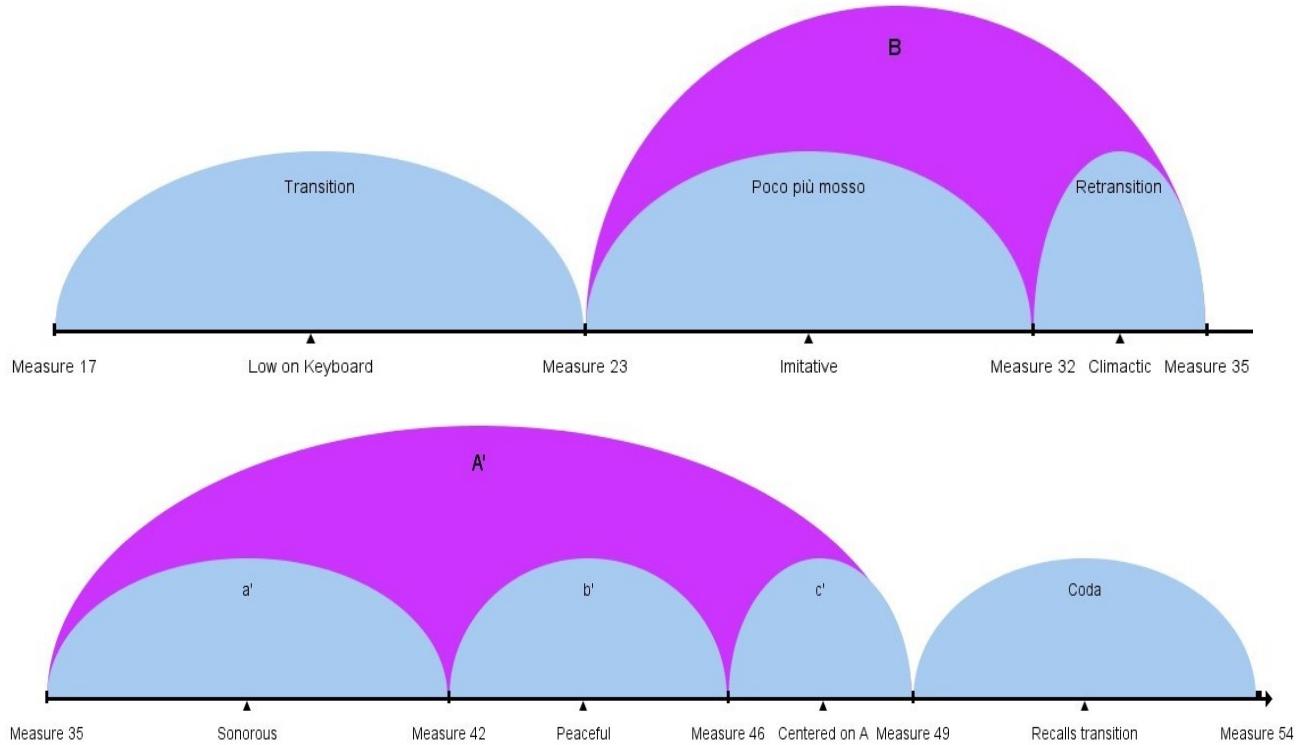


Figure 3: Form of Adagio, from Vincent Persichetti, First Piano Sonata, Op. 3

A consists of three irregular periods, delineated by expressive indications. The first period, a, seven measures long, marked *espressivo con sensibilità*, features long, flowing, expansive melodies in the right hand with a time signature of $\frac{4}{4}$ over short, lilting, sequential melodic motives in $\frac{12}{8}$ in the left hand. As seen in Example 21, the phrases are completely

independent, thus showing that the linear motion is more important than any vertical sonority, a procedure rooted in the linear, lyrical melodies of traditional Italian song.

Example 21: Vincent Persichetti, First Piano Sonata, Op. 3: Adagio, mm. 1-4. A.

The right hand and left hand phrases only realign at the beginning of the second period, b, marked *dolce e calmo*. The right hand plays 8va, as the left hand moves an octave down, increasing the range between the hands, but the unbalanced phrase structure and independence of the melodic lines continues. The third period of A, c, *teneramente*, is short, only three measures, leading directly into the transition, but incorporates both hands into the same texture, with a treble melody over a bass ostinato in triplets.

The transition into B, *affettuoso*, creates the most gracious sound yet, warm and clear, with thick, meaty chords in the right hand set against a motoric left hand melody, which gradually descends into the lowest ranges of the piano. Having also decreased to pianissimo, this transition quickly becomes guttural, smoothly setting up the gritty B section. Marked *misterioso* and *espressivo assai*, B begins with a single voice, pianississimo, on the second lowest note of

the piano, adding one voice every two measures in imitative counterpoint. With each new entry, the first of which is seen in Example 22, the dynamic indication also rises one level. Because of the carefully crafted crescendo and the imitative polyphony, the hands are less independent, no longer carrying two separate melodic and rhythmic lines, perhaps the most striking contrast to A. As if confirming the shift, the right hand takes a time signature of $\frac{12}{8}$, also seen in Example 22, highlighting the new found dialogue between the hands.

A musical score for piano. The top staff is in bass clef, with a dynamic marking of *ppp misterioso* and a tempo of *Poco più mosso* ($\text{♩} = 60$). The bottom staff is also in bass clef, with a dynamic marking of *pp*. Both staves show a series of eighth-note patterns.

Example 22: Vincent Persichetti, First Piano Sonata, Op. 3: Adagio, mm. 24-26. B

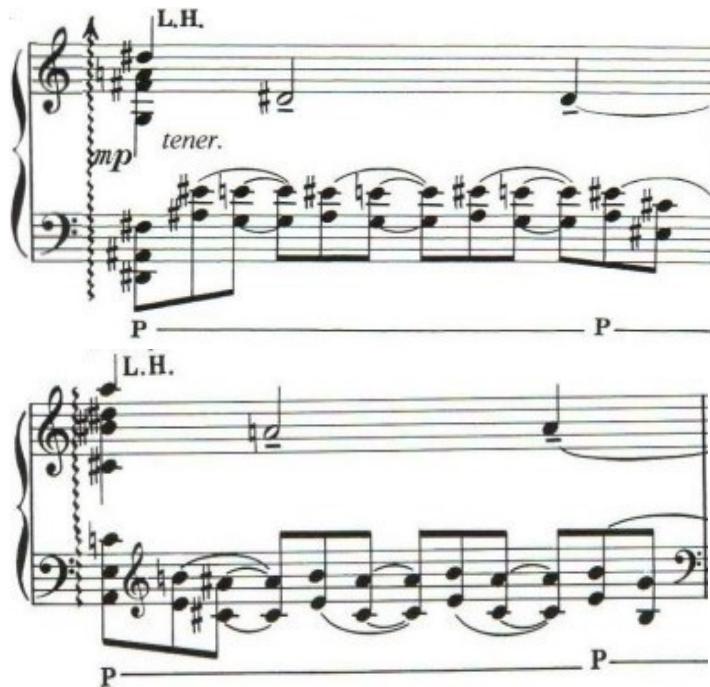
After the fourth entry, the right hand returns to $\frac{4}{4}$, signaling the beginning of the retransition, which continues building to a furious climax, maximizing the capabilities of both the instrument and performer. The zenith of the movement, shown in Example 23, occurs at the triumphant

return of A, this time marked *ardente*, which features the right hand melody in octaves, while the left hand traverses five and a half octaves with its strident, sonorous chords.

Tempo primo ($\text{J}=48$)

Example 23: Vincent Persichetti, First Piano Sonata, Op. 3: Adagio, mm. 35-36. A'

Interestingly, while A' does follow the same structure as A, the third period is centered a tritone away from its counterpart in the original A section, as seen in Example 24. These two parallel passages reinforce the importance of the tritone, so vitally important to the first movement. The coda descends both in pitch and volume, recalling the transition into B, before segueing attacca into the third movement.

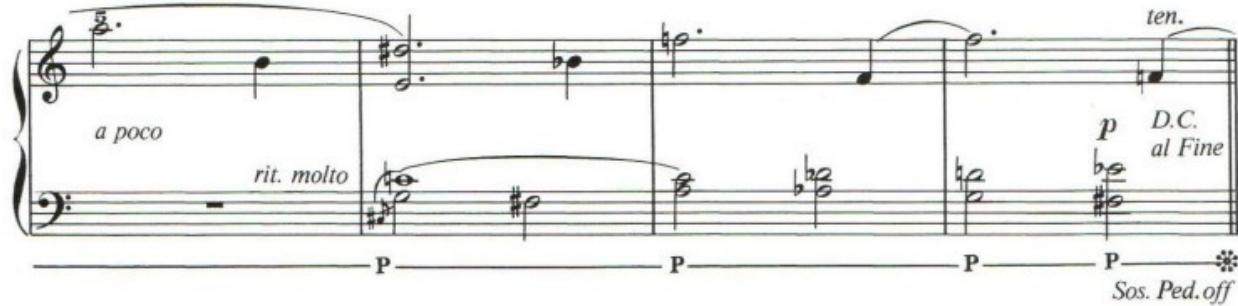


Example 24: Vincent Persichetti, First Piano Sonata, Op. 3: Adagio, m. 14, m. 46. Tritone separation.

A light scherzo and trio marked *Vivace*, the third movement returns to a tonal center, with the scherzo primarily utilizing an F-centered octatonic scale, although it also passes through a variety of other scales. The scherzo features a series of rapid, downward moving scales in one hand, interspersed with adroit staccato chords in the other. Quick, sudden dynamic changes contribute to the overall sense of direction, while sharp, energetic articulation markings ensure the humor in the music does not fade. In keeping with the sparse nature of this movement, a single theme is repeated twice, finishing with a downward sweeping diatonic scale in parallel sevenths, closing on a single, bell-like C-sharp.

The trio, *Meno mosso*, transitions to C-sharp minor, with the previously struck C-sharp held throughout via the sostenuto pedal. The right hand carries a graceful, declamatory melody, repeated, but transposed up a fourth for the second statement. The left hand accompaniment is sparse, one chord per measure, but does just enough to lend harmonic support to the otherwise independent melody. The retransition back to the scherzo increases the role of the left hand,

exploiting the held C-sharp, while emphasizing the tritone, by striking a G at important metrical moments, such as when the left hand first enters after a total absence of two measures, as seen in Example 25.



Example 25: Vincent Persichetti, First Piano Sonata, Op. 3: Vivace; Meno mosso, mm. 71-74. Retransition.

The fourth and final movement is a passacaglia in three voices, synthesizing the disparate elements of the first three movements. Returning to a freely composed twelve-tone harmonic framework, the eight measure passacaglia subject, shown in Example 26, is meticulously written, recalling the first movement by opening with a tritone, providing ample room for variation, and showcasing the versatility of both the form and performer.

Passacaglia
Andante ($\text{♩} = 69$)

Example 26: Vincent Persichetti, First Piano Sonata, Op. 3: Passacaglia, mm. 1-8. Passacaglia subject.

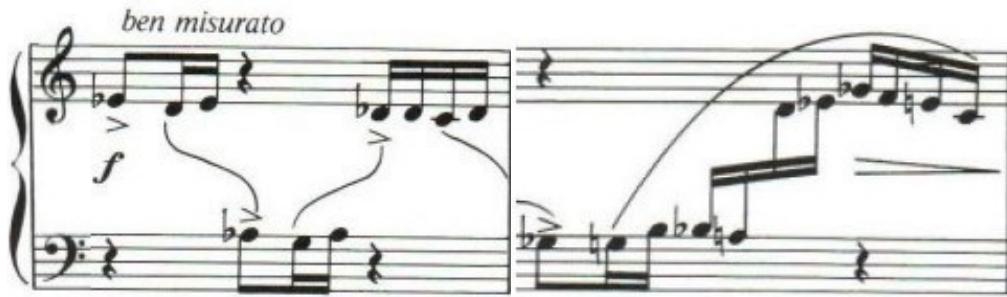
Each variation introduces a new element. Variation 1 is calm and graceful, keeping the subject in the bass, with song-like phrases in the upper voices, similar to the second theme of the first movement. Variation 2 is polyrhythmic, recalling the opening of the second movement, featuring lilting triplets in the soprano voice, superimposed over homorhythmic motion in the other two voices. Variation 3 switches the roles of the hands, with the subject being on top for the first time. Marked *Poco più mosso* and mezzo forte, it is also the first indication of the slow build to triumphant climax which characterizes the movement as a whole. Variation 4, *Ancora più mosso*, changes the rhythmic shape of the subject to become bouncier and more driven, reminiscent of the pulsating drive of the scherzo. Variation 5 is a dry, almost humorous variation, featuring a grotesque canon for two voices, marked *misterioso*, similar in character to the gritty B section of the second movement. Variation 6 expands the range of the scope of the movement, thickening the texture, stating the subject in bass octaves, and building to the first climax of the movement. The upper voices develop the rhythmic and intervallic form of the subject in virtuosic double sixths, taxing the performer's abilities, before cadencing using octaves in stretto against the bass.

The next three variations constitute a much-needed interlude, developing the passacaglia theme with lyrical melodies juxtaposed against thick chords and biting rhythms. Variation 7 returns to *Tempo primo* and the middle range of instrument. The subject is augmented, with changed intervals so as to be barely recognizable, while open fourths and fifths ring out in the bass, supporting the melodic line. Variation 8 is dense and knotty, with a return to homorhythmic texture. Variation 9 slows even further, with graceful, lyrical themes in all voices, juxtaposed against polyrhythmic melodic lines, which slowly decay into the cadence. Variation 10, featuring the only *grazioso* indication of the movement, marks the end of the interlude and begins building

to the final peak. It pairs the original, unaltered passacaglia subject in the bass with bare, staccato interjections in the upper two voices, forgoing the final note to lead directly into Variation 11.

Harsh and unstable, with the subject on top, this variation builds to an angular, accentuated conclusion, marked fortissimo, after which all voices drop out and a small, but graceful, fugue ensues.

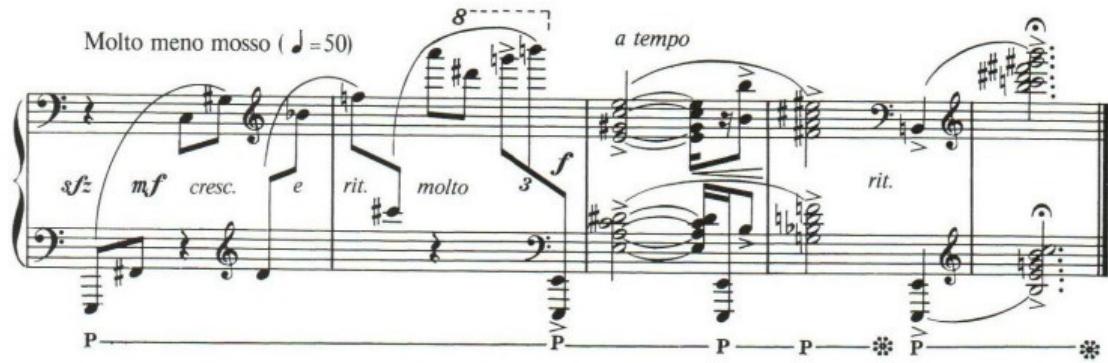
In three voices, the fugue is a pulsating engine, seemingly built on a perfect fifth. The fugue subject is a fragment of the passacaglia subject, starting on E-flat and emphasizing the fourth/fifth relationship, as shown in the Example 27. The second voice enters not at the perfect fifth, as expected, but at the tritone, on A; the third entrance follows suit, returning to E-flat. The countersubject also reinforces the tritone, falling from B-flat to E. After all three voices have stated the fugue subject, the middle voice picks it up in inversion, this time forgoing perfect intervals all together, solidifying the prime importance of the tritone. The additional entries follow the same pattern as before.



Example 27: Vincent Persichetti, First Piano Sonata. Op. 3: Passacaglia, mm. 97-98. Fugue subject.

A short four measure interpolation seamlessly transitions into the triumphant final statement of the passacaglia theme. With the subject in octaves in the bass, the upper voices climb the keyboard in four voice chords, filling in harmonies, creating a new melody of their own, and crafting a powerful, sonorous climax. Only after this full-bodied final statement has reached its zenith does the final bookend appear, satisfyingly completing the statement which

opened the first movement. This upward rising gesture, shown in Example 28, carries both E and B, a perfect fifth, having defeated the tritone, and repeats them several times, buttressing the broad tonal framework which caused Persichetti to initially give the name *Sonata in E Minor*. In this triumph, the bass notes, further fortified by the pedal in a show of idiomatic craft, deliver a sense of harmonic completion and stability to the entire sonata, only understood upon a complete performance.



Example 28: Vincent Persichetti, First Piano Sonata, Op. 3: Passacaglia, mm. 125-29.

Though none of these sonatas would ever be mistaken for another due to their differences in conception, form, texture, and harmonic language, they share several vital similarities. First, and most importantly, each composer returned to the well-established genre of solo piano sonata as a vehicle to convey their own area of musical expertise. Generally neglected during the nineteenth century in favor of character pieces, salon music, and larger collections of individual pieces, the twentieth century saw a marked revival in the number of sonatas composed. While Creston only composed a single sonata, given his eccentric habits and lack of a formal music education, this is not surprising, especially considering instrumental music of all types had long been overshadowed by opera in Italy, and had only recently experienced a renaissance, led by the likes of Gian Francesco Malipiero, Alfredo Casella, and Ottorino Respighi. Other than street bands used to accompany song and dance, a largely improvised tradition, serious instrumental composition was unheard of in the Italian diaspora; Creston's success in this field is largely a testament to his willingness to experiment and break the mold of expectation, in true American fashion. Dello Joio wrote three piano sonatas in total—still more than many nineteenth century composers—but he also wrote several other large-scale works for solo piano including *Suite for Piano*, *Introduction and Fantasies on a Chorale Tune*, and *Concert Variants*. Much like Creston, he was influenced by Italian opera, having grown up surrounded by it, but as is seen in his *Piano Sonata No. 1*, the vocal music of the Roman Catholic tradition proved to have a more profound effect. Not even the Church could hide his American tendencies, though, with his impatience and spontaneity to experience New York earning him reprimands from his more traditional father. Persichetti showed, without a doubt, an unflinching rebellion against the European musical tradition, writing twelve piano sonatas in total, more than any composer of the nineteenth

century. Yet even he, so unabashedly American, succumbed to the influence of Italian song in crafting his melodies and structuring their linear motion.

In composing their sonatas, all three of these composers displayed what is perhaps the most American trait of all: ingenuity. Creston distilled his unique ideas—rhythmic structures, pantomality, and a redefinition of form—onto the still rare medium of a piano sonata, managing to incorporate a healthy dose of Italian lyricism, influenced by opera and Neapolitan song. The result is a spacious sound, reflective of both operatic and symphonic music. Dello Joio incorporated his Italian heritage through crafting melodies based on Gregorian chant in much the same manner Respighi had begun doing twenty years before in Rome. However, Dello Joio also blended the sounds of America into his music: the energy of New York, the rhythms of Jazz, and particularly the shouts he associated with baseball, perhaps none so relevant as his own name, in a reflection that he truly was “Made in America.” Persichetti was unashamed of his Americanism, not needing to cleverly hide it in his music. He openly flaunted the newest musical fashions, intentionally straying from strict serialism, even as he wrote music which is only understood by those brave enough to perform it. His *First Piano Sonata, Op. 3* like those of his fellow Italian-Americans also shows a love for the pure lyricism of Italian song, emphasizing melodic beauty over all other aspects of music, ensuring pianists everywhere have an opportunity to experience the drama and emotion intrinsic to vocal music, without ever leaving the comfort of our beloved bench.

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