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Michelle Vera Schumann

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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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Ross Lee Finney

by
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Treatise

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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

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 prevailingly 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.

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INTRODUCTION

As a genre, the piano sonata holds a vital place in the development of American twentieth-century music. With well over four hundred piano sonatas written by American composers in the past 100 years, the sheer number is a testament to the genre's popularity and demonstrates the genre's importance within American music. Virtually every prominent American composer has written at least one piano sonata, and piano sonatas by significant American composers such as Charles Ives, Aaron Copland, Elliot Carter, Samuel Barber, Roger Sessions, Vincent Persichetti, and Ross Lee Finney—to name a few—substantiate the weight and value of the genre. Yet the piano sonatas do not merely represent significance through their abundance and popularity. Selected piano sonatas illustrate a noteworthy stylistic shift from a neoclassical aesthetic to twelve-tone serial practice in post-war American composition. Through a detailed study of piano sonatas by Roger Sessions, Vincent Persichetti and Ross Lee Finney, this treatise documents the American shift from neoclassicism to twelve-tone serialism and the merging of these apparently disparate aesthetics.

To understand the relevance of the piano sonata genre in the twentieth century, the genre must be examined as a historical phenomenon. Historically, the piano sonata represented a vehicle for instruction and experimentation in which new stylistic attributes could be presented and developed; moreover, the piano sonata was

often the initial and fundamental genre of experimentation and stylistic ingenuity. Composers frequently wrote piano sonatas as teaching tools, enabling the execution of musical expression and technique at the piano. Also, composers were drawn to the nature of the piano sonata as an intimate genre, as opposed to such public, extroverted genres as the concerto or symphony.¹ The piano sonata was a distinctive genre, generally written by an individual for an individual; thus, the piano sonata was potentially one of the most personal statements of style. Perhaps inspired by the personal nature of the piano sonata, composers pushed stylistic parameters beyond the established norms. For instance, the piano sonata served as the first genre in which composers such as Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven felt comfortable to experiment. Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 31 No. 2 is often cited as a work in which he set out on a "new path." As Dahlhaus writes,

its first movement (Op. 31 No. 2) has been the object of countless analyses and has always been considered a paradigm of Beethoven's concept of form, a creation whose very irregularities illuminate the central problems of an art that is by nature "problematical."²

Dahlhaus explained that Beethoven used the piano sonata genre as a standard form from which to depart and seek out new stylistic idiosyncrasies.

¹ In 1775, J.A.P. Schultz described "in no form of instrumental music is there a better opportunity than in the piano sonata to depict feelings without words." As quoted in Sandra Mangsen, "Sonata: Classical Contemporary Definitions," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), 677.

² Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 12-13.

In the nineteenth century, the piano sonata continued to be a genre of experimentation and innovation. While there was a significant decline in the amount of sonatas written in the nineteenth century, as romantic composers focused primarily on character pieces, many important composers such as Mendelssohn, Chopin, Schumann, Liszt, and Brahms nevertheless used the piano sonata to assimilate modern stylistic features into a traditional genre. Formal, melodic, textural, and extra-musical traits of romantic character pieces began to infiltrate the more conservative but revered piano sonata genre, and the piano sonata was thus established as a genre in which composers presented and assimilated modern stylistic features with traditional, classical elements in mind.

In the twentieth century, the American piano sonata also had a pedagogical function, albeit not one that necessarily emphasized the execution of musicality and technique at the piano. Rather, the American piano sonata demonstrates the introduction of twentieth-century compositional styles and concepts to a new audience. The twentieth-century American piano sonata has introduced the new modes of expressionism, neoclassicism, atonality, serialism, and avant-garde experimentation to both performers and audiences who, while having had prior experience with the piano sonata, might not have been exposed to the new styles and concepts prevalent within twentieth-century American composition. As had composers in the past, twentieth-century American composers used the genre to extend the parameters of the established tradition; they used the piano sonata as a

vehicle to present new styles and contemporary compositional techniques into the mainstream piano repertoire. American composers not only expanded upon the basic traditions of the piano sonata but also used the piano sonata to present new stylistic concepts that consequently influenced a broader musical spectrum. The piano sonata thus represents one of the most important genres in which composers created and presented innovative styles and concepts in American twentieth-century musical practice.

Three important American composers who used the piano sonata as a genre to experiment with various styles and aesthetics were Roger Sessions, Vincent Persichetti, and Ross Lee Finney. Each composer made a significant contribution to the piano sonata literature. While adopting contemporary, stylistic features within their sonatas, Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney not only incorporate multiple compositional techniques of their time but also reconcile the differences inherent to seemingly disparate styles. Their sonatas are emblematic of larger compositional trends in the twentieth century and help to define the eclectic style that might be considered characteristic of American contemporary music. For these reasons, Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney represent a certain pinnacle of composition in regards to the American piano sonata.

Roger Sessions (1896-1985), in addition to being one of America's most influential composers, was an intellectual prodigy. Born in 1896, he entered Harvard at age fourteen and by nineteen had received both a Bachelor of Arts degree from

Harvard and a Bachelor of Music degree from Yale. At age 20 he received his first faculty appointment at Smith College. He was fluent in English, French, German, Italian, and Russian; in fact, he wrote letters to Stravinsky, Slonimsky, and Koussevitsky in their own native tongue. His awards include two Guggenheims, a three-year Rome Prize, a Carnegie Fellowship for studies in Berlin, a Gold Medal from the Academy of Arts and Letters, recognition from the Academy of Arts and Sciences, and two Pulitzer prizes (a career award as well as an award for his *Concerto for Orchestra*). In addition, he held fourteen Honorary Doctorates. In 1968-1969, he held the Charles Elliott Norton Professorship at Harvard, and his lectures were subsequently published as a book, *Questions about Music*.³ He held faculty positions at Smith College, the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Dalcroze School in New York, Boston Conservatory, Princeton, the University of California at Berkeley, and Juilliard. Among his students were Milton Babbitt, Maxwell Davies, David del Tredici, David Diamond, John Harbison, Joel Feigen, Leon Kirchner, Frederic Rzewski and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich. Sessions's compositions include nine symphonies, four concertos, two operas, two string quartets, a string quintet, four large works for voices with orchestra, and many works for the piano. His contribution to the piano sonata repertoire includes three sonatas written in 1928, 1945, and 1965.

Vincent Persichetti (1915-1987) also had a major impact on American composers in the latter half of the twentieth century. He was a faculty member at the

³ Roger Sessions, *Questions about Music* (New York: Norton, 1971).

Juilliard School from 1947 to the end of his life in 1987, and there he taught many of today's leading composers, including Philip Glass and Lowell Lieberman as well as jazz legend Thelonius Monk. His previous faculty positions included the Combs Conservatory and the Philadelphia Conservatory, where Persichetti had received his Bachelor of Music degree and both graduate degrees (MMus. 1941, D.M.A. 1945). Additionally, he received a diploma in conducting under Fritz Reiner at the Curtis Institute of Music. He was awarded honorary doctorates from six universities and conservatories. Persichetti also received numerous awards, including three Guggenheim Fellowships, two grants from the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities, a National Arts and Letters grant, plus a Pulitzer Prize for his *Piano Quintet*, composed when he was only 25. Persichetti enjoyed many commissions and performances from important ensembles and foundations in the U.S., among them the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony, Louisville Symphony, the Koussevitsky Foundation, the Naumburg Foundation, the Martha Graham Dance Company and the Pittsburgh Contemporary International Music Festival. Persichetti was extraordinarily prolific: his compositional output includes nine symphonies, eleven other large works for orchestra, numerous choral and band works, over forty solo and chamber works, and many keyboard works. Among Persichetti's most significant compositions were his twelve piano sonatas, composed between the years 1939 and 1980.

Like Sessions and Persichetti, Ross Lee Finney (1906-1997) also occupied an important and influential position in American composition. Earning degrees from the University of Minnesota and Carleton College, Finney completed additional studies at Harvard University in Cambridge with Edward Burlingame Hill, in Paris with Nadia Boulanger, in Vienna with Alban Berg, and in New England with Roger Sessions. Finney's awards are numerous and include the Connecticut Valley Prize, the Brandeis Medal, two Guggenheim Fellowships, the Pulitzer Prize, a Boston Symphony Award, a Rockefeller Foundation Grant, as well as multiple honorary doctorates. Additionally, Finney was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He held academic positions at Smith College, Mt. Holyoke College, the Hartt School of Music, Amherst College and most notably the University of Michigan. At Michigan, Finney taught and influenced many important contemporary American composers including William Albright, Leslie Bassett, Roger Reynolds and George Crumb. Several of Finney's compositions were commissioned by prestigious organizations such as the Koussevitsky Foundation and the Coolidge Foundation. He also received a commission from violinist Yehudi Menuhin for his *Fantasy in Two Movements*, which was premiered at the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels. Finney's oeuvre is vast and rather varied; he wrote several pieces for the stage, four symphonies, two violin concertos, two piano concertos, and over fifteen other works for orchestra. He composed many songs for both chorus and solo voice and wrote over twenty-five

pieces of chamber music as well as numerous pieces for the piano. Between 1937 and 1965, Finney composed five piano sonatas.

Roger Sessions, Vincent Persichetti, and Ross Lee Finney all held influential positions in American music. Their wide range of credentials demonstrates the success these composers enjoyed during their lifetimes, and their direct influence as teachers will undoubtedly continue to affect American composers and American music for years to come. For these reasons, the study of their compositions is relevant and enlightening. While these composers had a major impact on American music on the whole, their contribution to the piano sonata literature is particularly important. Each composed multiple piano sonatas: Session wrote three, Persichetti twelve, and Finney five. All of their piano sonatas were written at a definitive time, before as well as after World War II. This time frame encompasses one of the most notable changes in the aesthetics of contemporary American composition, namely the fundamental shift from neoclassicism to twelve-tone serialism. While Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney all had backgrounds in neoclassicism before writing in a twelve-tone style, piano sonatas by these three composers do not merely reflect the dominant style of the times but also reconcile and synthesize the disparate features of neoclassicism and twelve-tone serialism. Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney used the piano sonata as a definitive genre of stylistic establishment and experimentation. Their sonatas reflect prevailing compositional trends and merge their inherent

differences to produce an eclectic style that is characteristic of twentieth-century American music.

The text of this treatise is organized in two large sections that discuss the two prevailing styles within the piano sonatas of Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney. The first section, which features piano sonatas composed before 1950, illustrates the neoclassical tendency that dominated American musical style in the first half of the century. The second section presents the twelve-tone serial idiom that was central within the post-war era. Chapter 1 gives a brief overview of the international phenomenon of neoclassicism, its influence and importance in American music. Chapter 2, through stylistic analyses, specifically identifies aspects of the neoclassical style that permeate the early piano sonatas of Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney. Like the first chapter, Chapter 3 gives a brief overview of the development of the twelve-tone serial idiom and its eventual international dissemination. Stylistic analyses of the late piano sonatas of Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney in Chapter 4 illustrate how these composers individually adopt and assimilate the twelve-tone technique into their previously established neoclassical style.

Chapter 1

NEOCLASSICISM AND THE AMERICAN PIANO SONATA

Neoclassicism was an internationally predominant musical aesthetic and compositional style during the inter-war period and had an important effect on the American piano sonata. Rising out of negative responses to such conflicting trends as impressionism, expressionism, nationalism, ultra-chromaticism, and atonality during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the aesthetics of neoclassicism were adopted by many influential composers in Germany, France and the United States.¹ In particular, many important American composers applied the aesthetic principles of neoclassicism to their twentieth-century piano sonatas. The relationship between neoclassicism and the piano sonata was fundamentally established by the influence of historical ties within the neoclassical style. Scott Messing writes that features of neoclassicism include the “impulse to borrow from, be modeled on, or allude to a work or composer from an earlier era, often in the eighteenth century.”² Thus, the proliferation of the American piano sonata in the twentieth century demonstrates the ties between this quintessentially classical genre and the American modernist

¹ Carol J. Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2000), 231. Oja addresses the idea of neoclassicism as a “trans-Atlantic” phenomenon, appearing throughout the Western world in Germany, France and the US. She notes that “neoclassicism popped up all across the Western modernist spectrum, often encompassing stylistic principals of ‘clarity’ and ‘simplicity’ and a broad range of attempts to re-imagine materials from the past.”

² Scott Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music: From the Genesis of Concept Through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky Polemic* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1988), xiv.

tradition. This chapter profiles the prevalence of neoclassicism in Germany, France and the United States, concentrating on the specific relevance of the neoclassical aesthetic in the American piano sonata. Piano sonatas by Roger Sessions, Vincent Persichetti, and Ross Lee Finney illustrate the integration of neoclassicism into the genre while infusing international stylistic trends that forecast the development of an eclectic American style.

In Germany, neoclassical characteristics began to develop in the years following World War I in an aesthetic movement known as the *neue Sachlichkeit*, or “New Objectivity.” The style was directly influenced by the cultural circumstances of post-war Germany. Unstable political, social, and economic conditions following the Great War encouraged various composers to question the predominant expressionistic and ultra-romantic styles. Composers sympathetic to the ideals of the *neue Sachlichkeit*, including Paul Hindemith and Carl Orff, sought to write music that was simple, direct and almost ascetic in approach.³ These characteristics, which define a neoclassical approach more generally, evince a reaction to opposing musical trends during the early twentieth century, including the ultra-chromatic emotionalism of Richard Strauss and the free atonality and expressionism of Arnold Schoenberg.⁴

³ Bryan Simms, *Music of the Twentieth Century: Style and Structure* (New York: Schirmer, 1986), 275. Simms states: “Hindemith implies that music cannot be allowed to evolve beyond the understanding of the public. [He suggested] that a damaging esotericism had already diminished the broad communicative role of music and that this art had to be called back to a simpler and more natural order.”

⁴ See Elliot Antokoletz, “Neotonicity and Gebrauchsmusik in Germany” in *Twentieth Century Music* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1992), 284-302.

While ultra-chromaticism, atonalism, and neoclassicism had a simultaneous development and were equally prevalent in Germany and Austria, the effects of neoclassicism had the broadest international scope at that time.

In France, neoclassicism was a prevailing musical trend in the post-World War I years, likewise stemming from reactionary influences. Anti-German sentiment previous to and following the war led French composers to develop a national style that opposed the long, overbearing structures, dense textures, opaque sonorities, and overt emotionalism characteristic of the German romantic and post-romantic style. Additionally, neoclassical composers in France reacted against the vague impressionist aesthetic of Debussy and instead looked for musical expression that exuded objectivity, clarity and simplicity. Major proponents of this aesthetic style included Erik Satie, Maurice Ravel, and members from the group of French composers known as “Les Six,” including Francis Poulenc and Darius Milhaud.⁵

The international trend of neoclassicism likewise had a major impact on American composers. The urge toward neoclassicism that subsequently influenced the development of an American style stemmed from several key factors. Anti-German sentiment following World War I and leading up through World War II influenced American composers to search out a new musical identity apart from the German romantic tradition. During the 1920s in particular, as American composers

⁵ See Rollo H. Myers, *Modern French Music from Fauré to Boulez* (New York: Praeger Publications, 1971). Also, Antokoletz’s chapter on “The rise of neoclassicism in France: The Cocteau-Satie era and ‘Les Six’” in *Twentieth Century Music*, 242-264.

were seeking out a new, individual compositional style, many of the most important American composers traveled to Paris to study composition with Nadia Boulanger, although none of the composers in the present study were as close to her as such figures as Copland, Thomson, and Roy Harris.⁶ In addition to adopting the neoclassical style promoted by Boulanger's teaching, composers were influenced directly by the neoclassicism that dominated French music at the time. This influence of neoclassicism directly affected the development of an American nationalistic style. As Carol Oja explains, "American involvement in neoclassicism held firm as the long lines and clean textures promoted within the aesthetic became the basis for a new, more nationalistic idiom."⁷ The economic depression of the 1930s further inspired many American composers to reconsider their relationship to the public and to compose more accessible music. The combination of these factors caused American composers to seek out a style that incorporated features of neoclassicism.

In an attempt to define the neoclassical style, Alan Howard Levy indicates in his book, *Musical Nationalism: American Composers' Search for Identity*:

Neoclassicists all turned away from the evocative, earnest, lush indulgences of the turn of the century and pursued instead a more detached, restrained style with sharp melodic lines and overtly exact rhythms. They focused on smaller media, on horizontal elements (melody and rhythm) over vertical (harmony

⁶ Oja, *Making Music Modern*, 238. Oja states that "Boulanger inspired... the fusion of nationalism and internationalism—a fusion directly in synch with her own deeply held ideals about neoclassicism."

⁷ *Ibid.*, 363.

and texture) and on absolute music, music lacking in overt programmatic content.⁸

While general characteristics of neoclassicism emphasize clarity and simplicity, American composers who evoke the neoclassical style also employ more specific techniques. For instance, neoclassical composers tend to use traditional structures and forms such as the sonata, ternary, rondo and variation forms. Clear and direct harmonic motion is characteristic within these forms, although harmonic progressions are rarely traditional. Neoclassical composers also generally use thinner, linear textures and simple counterpoint. Finally, American neoclassicists, in particular, favored the use of traditional classical genres—most notably, the piano sonata.

The tendency towards neoclassicism in American composition had a remarkable influence on the piano sonata as a developing genre in American music. One of the quintessential genres of the Classical era, the piano sonata proved to be a genre of choice through which American composers could express neoclassical inclinations. Consequently, the piano sonata experienced a noticeable rise in popularity among American composers in the twentieth century. Ultimately, a distinctly American tradition for the piano sonata genre was established, a tradition that now extends through the twenty-first century. This tradition is relatively unique given that the piano sonata was not particularly prevalent in French or German

⁸ Alan Howard Levy, *Musical Nationalism: American Composers' Search for Identity* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 33. Levy includes in his list of the neoclassicists Stravinsky, Ravel, Poulenc, Milhaud, Satie, Rieti, Casella, Auric, Durey, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Britten, Hindemith, Sessions, Persichetti, Finney, Copland, Harris, Carter, Piston, and Thomson.

neoclassicism. Although a small number of neoclassical piano sonatas do exist by French and German composers (most notably by Hindemith), American composers made the greatest contribution, establishing the piano sonata as a twentieth-century neoclassical genre of choice.

American neoclassical piano sonatas generally feature consistent stylistic characteristics that emphasize clarity and cohesion on several levels. One of the most standard characteristics is the use of forms from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. During the classical era, sonata-allegro form was the favored structural plan, sometimes appearing in all three movements of a piano sonata. While sonata-allegro form was never so much an abstract plan to be unquestioningly followed as it was a flexible form to be adapted, its basic structural design included four parts: the *Exposition*, consisting of two themes in which the second is in a different key from the first; the *Development*, consisting of thematic or motivic development; and the *Recapitulation*, in which the two primary themes return in the same tonic key; and the *Coda*. This familiar structure has prevailed for nearly three hundred years. American neoclassical composers use elements of sonata form not only to manifest essential characteristics of the classical style but also to promote features of structural clarity and cohesion characteristic to the neoclassical aesthetic.

Motivic unity and cohesion are also strong features of the American neoclassical piano sonata. American composers were influenced by developmental procedures used by classical composers—especially as in the piano sonatas of

Beethoven. Motivic unity and cohesion is generally used throughout American piano sonatas to generate a formal coherence essential to the neoclassical ideal of clarity.

Another example of the clarity so prized in the neoclassical style is the use of transparent textures and simple linear counterpoint. American neoclassical composers generally avoided thick opaque textures, emulating instead the crystalline textures of Mozart's piano sonatas and the contrapuntal clarity of J.S. Bach's keyboard works. This textural clarity was characteristic of the neoclassical aesthetic and piano sonatas by American neoclassical composers.

One final aspect of neoclassicism evident in the American piano sonata is the particular use of tonality, often referred to as neo-tonality. In contrast to the chromatic harmonies and atonalism evident in Austro-Germanic music written in the early part of the twentieth century, American neoclassical composers sought out a style that redefined parameters of tonality by using conventional elements of tonal practice in unconventional ways. For instance, the use of tertian harmonies is evident within the American piano sonatas; however, these tertian harmonies are often used in bitonal layers creating non-complementary tonal structures.

These different features of neoclassicism are united by a general concern for clarity: the treatment of form, motivic unity, linear texture, and tonal procedures specifically promote directness and transparency. As a genre, the piano sonata is a perfect vehicle for the neoclassical style and its emphasis on clarity. Thus, in addition to being one of the quintessential genres of the classical era, the piano sonata

becomes one of the quintessential genres of twentieth-century American neoclassicism.

Roger Sessions, Vincent Persichetti, and Ross Lee Finney were among the composers who helped to establish the American piano sonata tradition. These composers each wrote multiple piano sonatas during mid-century, and neoclassical characteristics prevail throughout their early piano sonatas. Although each composer exploits different facets of neoclassicism, in general their sonatas feature clear formal structures, attention to motivic coherence, linear simplicity, and a basically tonal harmonic framework. The consistency of these features within the different sonatas of each composer helped to define the American neoclassical piano sonata in the first half of the twentieth century.

Chapter 2

NEOCLASSICAL FEATURES OF PIANO SONATAS BY ROGER SESSIONS, VINCENT PERSICHETTI, AND ROSS LEE FINNEY

The stylistic analyses of piano sonatas composed by Roger Sessions, Vincent Persichetti, and Ross Lee Finney between 1928 and 1950 reveal predominant features of the neoclassical style, including traditional elements of form, motivic unity, linear texture, and neo-tonality. These features demonstrate an attention to clarity that is indicative of the American neoclassical style at mid-century. While characteristics of clarity and directness are the mainstay of American neoclassicism, these same features remain prominent even after post-war changes in the dominant compositional style. After mid-century, the combination of neoclassic characteristics with other disparate stylistic phenomena further defines an American style. This chapter identifies the elements of the neoclassical style within the early piano sonatas of Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney to define a compositional foundation that remains solid even after their later shift toward a twelve-tone idiom.

Neoclassical Style Features in Sessions's Early Piano Sonatas

While Roger Sessions was an innovative and progressive composer, specific attributes of his style place him squarely within the neoclassical tradition. He believed that J.S. Bach, Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven were the paramount

composers, and although he did not directly imitate the styles of these masters, he sought to emulate stylistic features of their music and apply certain characteristics to his own works. In his piano sonatas, Sessions adopted elements of classical form, a long-line approach to melody and phrasing, as well as a concentration of motivic unity throughout movements. The following stylistic analysis demonstrates the predominant neoclassical tendencies within Sessions's Piano Sonatas Nos. 1 and 2, composed respectively in 1928 and 1945.

In his Piano Sonata No. 1 (1928), Sessions uses features of traditional sonata form in both the first and final movements. Figure 1 outlines the traditional sonata-allegro form of the first movement.

Figure 1

Sessions Piano Sonata No. 1
(First Movement Sonata Form)

Exposition mm. 27-88			Development mm. 88-177			Recapitulation mm. 177-244		
1 st theme m.27	2 nd theme m.55	Closing theme m.73				1 st theme m.177	2 nd theme m.199	Closing theme m.215

Sessions not only uses the standard model of sonata form for the structural outline of the first movement but also adheres to a tonal scheme indicative of the classical sonata form. The first theme is stated in C minor. After a transitory section, the

contrasting second theme is stated in B-flat major, the dominant of the relative major key. In the recapitulation, the first theme returns in the tonic key of C minor, and with a slight adaptation from the classical norm, the second theme returns in the parallel major key of C. These traditional characteristics of the formal and tonal schema establish the neoclassical character of this sonata.

While Sessions establishes distinct neoclassical intentions by using clear and classically influenced formal structures, he also demonstrates innovation and flexibility within these standard forms. While both the first and third movements of the Piano Sonata No. 1 have elements of traditional sonata-allegro form, the overall structure of the three-movement sonata demonstrates innovation on a more expansive level. Sessions combines traditional formal structures at the level of individual movements, as in the sonata-allegro first and third movements, with a more customized cyclic form at the level of the composition as a whole.

As shown in the following figure, all three movements of the first sonata begin with an introduction, the material of which manifests an identical texture and character at each occurrence.

Figure 2

Sessions Piano Sonata No. 1
(Overall Three-Movement Form)

Introductory-----	Movement 1 -----	Introductory-----	Movement 2 -----	Introductory-----	Movement 3
Material	(sonata form)	Material		Material	(sonata form)
mm. 1-26	mm. 27-243	mm. 244-251	mm. 252-272	mm. 273-294	mm. 295-566

Although each return of the introductory material veers off in a different direction, all iterations nevertheless retain much of the same melodic and harmonic material, thus establishing important points of cyclic reference at distinct structural signposts throughout the entire piece. The introductions serve multiple functions by announcing each of the three movements and tying the entire sonata together in a way that is both cyclic and developmental. Thus, classical forms appear within a more flexible, experimental structure. This act of combining traditional characteristics with innovative procedures is a key feature of the twentieth-century American piano sonata in general and of Sessions's neoclassical style in particular.

Another example of Sessions's creative adoption of classical form is found in his Piano Sonata No. 2 (1945). The first and third movements of the second sonata are in a clearly established sonata-allegro form, yet the standard classical form is expanded into an innovative double-exposition sonata form. The first and second themes of the exposition are repeated one after another (though not verbatim) in the order of first theme – varied repetition – second theme – varied repetition. In the varied repetitions, the basic melodic contour of the thematic material remains identical to the original statement, but the texture, accompaniment, and phrase development varies. Nevertheless, the repetition of the phrase is discernible and structurally relevant. During the recapitulation, these themes occur without the varied repetition, resulting in notably more concise reprises. As the following figure

demonstrates, Sessions uses the traditional sonata-allegro form while adapting the form to incorporate additional characteristics of thematic clarity and cohesion.

Figure 3

Sessions Piano Sonata No. 2
(First Movement Sonata Form)

Exposition (double) mm. 1-68		Development mm. 69-115	Recapitulation mm. 116-168	
1 st theme m. 1 & m. 12	2 nd theme m. 34 & m. 54		1 st theme m. 116	2 nd theme m. 131

Sessions Piano Sonata No. 2
(Third Movement Sonata Form)

Exposition (double) mm. 231-305		Development mm. 306-362	Recapitulation mm. 363-404	
1 st theme m. 231 & m. 249	2 nd theme m. 268 & m. 288		1 st theme m. 363	2 nd theme m. 376

The expansion of sonata-allegro form in the Piano Sonata No. 2 appears to be greatly influenced by the harmonic practice within the sonata. Generally, the Sonata No. 2 is far more chromatic and tonally unstable than Sessions's first piano sonata. In contrast to the tertian harmonies prevalent in the first sonata, the second sonata incorporates quartal harmonies as well as stacked major and minor second clusters to produce an overall more dissonant tonal environment. The ambiguity of the

harmonic direction and tonal scheme is complemented by the expanded sonata form, which creates an element of clarity and structure within the complex dissonant style. While the themes are harmonically complex, their repetition within the form establishes cohesion and stability. Sessions thereby combines dissonant harmonic instability with the enhanced clarity of the double exposition sonata form to reconcile contemporary harmony and traditional form.

Another aspect of American neoclassicism as seen in the piano sonatas of Sessions is the use of the long line. This characteristic derives from French neoclassicism and the teachings of Nadia Boulanger. In *Musical Nationalism: American Composers' Search for Identity*, Alan Howard Levy describes Boulanger's predilection for the long line:

An important facet of Boulanger's thorough historical knowledge was her concept of *grande ligne*. Essentially, *le grande ligne* is a horizontal approach to a score, emphasizing melody and rhythm rather than harmony and instrumentation, the vertical elements. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Boulanger felt, conductors, musicians, and composers had been victimized 'by exaggerated importance given to the bar line,' and forgotten that it is essentially a guide for rehearsal but not for grouping musical ideas. By 1920 many composers were instinctively grouping musical ideas within measures. Using one of her favorite composers, the early seventeenth-century Italian Claudio Monteverdi, Boulanger traced the beginnings of monodic, horizontal writing and demonstrated that this approach had never died out but, with new possibilities emerging in instrumentation, texture, and harmony, had been obscured in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Reassertion of *grande*

ligne opened new vistas of interpretation, provided creative avenues long neglected, and made explicable musical idioms of esoteric origins not tyrannized over by the barline.¹

Boulanger, influenced by the characteristics of the long line in Italian Renaissance music, taught this approach to her American students. While Sessions did not study exclusively with Boulanger, he often brought scores to her for perusal and advice and was undoubtedly influenced by her insistence of the long line in contemporary music.²

The idea of the long line has become practically synonymous with Sessions's music. The long line of his melodies and phrasing exudes an expressive singing quality and an urging sense of continuity heard through all of his sonatas. In keeping with his neoclassical orientation, this approach to the long line seems to owe to historical models, to composers Sessions chose to emulate. In the case of the introduction to the Piano Sonata No. 1, Sessions explained:

The introductory melody has often been likened to Chopin. I conceive it as something rather different – the nearest thing in the music of the past would be a Bach “aria”(Italian Concerto) or perhaps still better, such a Mozart slow movement as that of the little C major Sonata (K. 545) – in other words the long phrases and not the detail are the real key to the expression.³

¹ Alan Howard Levy, *Musical Nationalism: American Composers' Search for Identity* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 54.

² Andrea Olmstead, ed., *The Correspondence of Roger Sessions* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1992). Numerous letters to, from, and about Nadia Boulanger are a testament to their professional and personal friendship.

³ Andrea Olmstead, *Roger Sessions and His Music* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), 55.

The opening of Sessions's Piano Sonata No. 1 shows an early example of the melodic *grande ligne* (see example 2.1).

Example 2.1. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 1, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-10. Copyright 1931 by B. Schott's Söhne, Mainz.

Andante (♩ = 92)

cantabile ma semplice e senza qualsiasi "rubato" piena voce

p molto tranquillo

5

10

The first phrase of the introduction lasts nine measures, with the tail eliding into a new phrase. The second, eight measure phrase is immediately followed by another ten-measure phrase that finishes the introductory section. These three phrases, which

compose the entire introduction, are delineated by long slurs as well as the return of the tonic harmony at the onset of new phrases. Yet these phrases are never entirely distinct, as each elides with or directly follows another without rest. The joined phrases create a sense of continuity that lends the introduction a breathless quality. These three long phrases of the introduction tend to sound more like one uninterrupted twenty-six measure phrase.

The Piano Sonata No. 2 also demonstrates Sessions's urge towards continuity with the long-line approach. Here though, continuity is seen almost exclusively in the overall phrase structure, rather than in the continuity of line within individual phrases. In composing phrases next to each other without a breath, Sessions creates the effect of an endless line and an overall sense of continuity. This is demonstrated on several structural levels throughout the basic sonata-allegro form. For instance, in the exposition of the first movement, the first melodic theme lasts six measures and leads directly into the next phrase at measure 7. After a brief, quasi-transitional ostinato, the first theme returns at measure 12 in a more lyrical guise. This theme in the left hand then is interrupted by the same theme in the right hand, creating a contrapuntal interplay that establishes a more linear quality to the sonata. The phrases are made up of abruptly fragmented and repetitious motives, which immediately run into each other (see example 2.2).

Example 2.2. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 2, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-19. Copyright 1948 by Edward B. Marks Music Company.

Allegro con fuoco ($\text{♩} = 120$)

The musical score is written for piano and consists of six systems of music. Each system is a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The time signature is 3/4. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked 'Allegro con fuoco' with a quarter note equal to 120 beats per minute. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings like 'meno f', 'cresc.', 'p', and 'mp'. The measures are numbered 1 through 19. The first system contains measures 1-4, the second system contains measures 5-8, the third system contains measures 9-12, the fourth system contains measures 13-16, the fifth system contains measures 17-18, and the sixth system contains measure 19.

These phrases continue to interrupt each other throughout the exposition. With these continuous phrase elisions, the entire movement retains the same long-line quality evident in the Piano Sonata No. 1.

Moreover, while the individual phrases of the first theme group interrupt and overlap with each other, so too do the larger formal units of the first movement sonata-allegro form. The second theme area begins abruptly in measure 34, virtually without transition, rests, or expansion of rhythm. Although the second theme enters without warning, the contrasting, more lyrical quality of the phrase announces its arrival. As with the first theme area, the second theme area also comprises phrases that lead directly into one another without breath; seldom is there any sort of transition to mark new motivic or melodic ideas. The first real transition into a new section occurs just before the development in measure 69. This transition is short but obvious, featuring an ostinato that leads into a tremolo presaging the development material. This rather frantic transition punctuates the arrival of the development while retrospectively drawing attention to the distinct lack of transitions between the previous themes. It seems like the first time in the movement that the listener and performer actually have a chance to breathe. Hence, the entire exposition ends up feeling like one large unit that lasts sixty-seven measures.

Phrases and formal units tend to elide within the entire three-movement sonata to create a strong sense of momentum. This is true particularly in both the first and third movements of the Piano Sonata No. 2. The first theme areas run into the second

theme areas, the development leads directly into the recapitulation without a sense of transition or preparation, and the closing material arrives without preparation. Finally, on the broadest level, the three movements follow one another without break. This attacca structure adds to the sense of long line and continuity that is such a trademark of Roger Sessions's style.

Motivic unity and cohesion in Sessions's piano sonatas further represent an example of neoclassical characteristics in his piano sonatas. In a way that is similar to Haydn and Beethoven, Sessions presents motivic material, generally at the beginning of a piece, that is then used throughout the movement in various guises. Usually there are core intervallic, rhythmic, and textural ideas that permeate the movement, promoting both motivic continuity and structural clarity.

The first sonata shows a particularly interesting example of Sessions's approach toward motivic cohesion. The core idea of the piece, which Sessions initially conceived, actually appears at the end of the first movement. Sessions writes of this in his own description of the piece in his book *The Musical Experience of Composer, Performer, Listener*.

The first idea that came to me for my first piano sonata, begun in 1927, was in the form of a complex chord preceded by a sharp but heavy upbeat. This chord rang through my ear almost obsessively one day as I was walking in Pisa, Italy. The next day, or, in other words, when I sat down to work on the piece, I wrote the first phrase of the Allegro (measures 27-32); ... the chord

had become simpler—a C minor triad, in fact, and its complex sonority had given way to a motif of very syncopated rhythmic character.⁴

The complex chord (see example 2.3) comprises a C minor triad juxtaposed with an F[#]-A dyad on an upbeat followed by an F[#]-E dyad on the downbeat. The chord contains basic ideas that constitute the movement's thematic material. The intervals that outline the minor triad are motivic, as are the whole-tones and semi-tones created in the overlapping of the triad and the dyad: [C-(F[#]-A)-G-E^b + F[#]-E].

Example 2.3. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 1, Mvmt. I, mm. 234-235.



Consequently, much of the material in the movement that is made up of triads, whole-tones, and semi-tones can be interpreted as having a direct relationship to this complex chord. For instance, the first three notes of the introductory theme (F[#]-G-A) are taken precisely from the juxtaposed chord that constitutes Sessions's seminal idea. Additionally, the introduction presents the linear step-wise intervals in the melody of

⁴ Roger Sessions, *The Musical Experience of Composer, Performer, Listener* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 52ff.

the right hand above the broken, arpeggiated dyads in the left-hand accompaniment (see example 2.4).

Example 2.4. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 1, Mvmt. I, introduction, mm. 1-3.



Likewise, the first theme area of the exposition presents both the broken triad motive, now in contrapuntal octaves between both hands, and the step-wise motive (see example 2.5). In measure 34 the F^\sharp -G-A is transposed up a semitone to G-A B^\flat , a consequence of the semitone key shift from the B minor introduction to the C minor exposition.

Example 2.5. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 1, Mvmt. I, first theme area, mm. 27-35.



The second theme area, which begins in measure 55, also presents these motives.

The melody in the right hand alternates step-wise motion with the arpeggiated chords, while the left hand features broken triads in clear triplets (see example 2.6).

Example 2.6. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 1, Mvmt. I, second theme, mm. 52-58.



These basic intervallic motives, derived from Sessions's complex chord, recur throughout the entire movement to generate a sense of clarity, cohesion, and unity while avoiding direct repetition and redundancy. The overall impression is thus improvisatory and free despite the rather systematic techniques of motivic generation, reiteration, and manipulation.

This kind of motivic unity can also be found in Sessions's Piano Sonata No. 2, though here the motivic development is more classically influenced. Motives are

presented at the beginning of the movements rather than as a culmination of the movement, as in the first piano sonata. The first movement of the second sonata is extraordinarily tightly knit insofar as the first few measures basically present all of the motivic material for the entire movement.

Example 2.7. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 2, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-2.



The first motive presented is a four-note figure with the right-hand melody comprising a rising leap of a fourth, a semitone up, and a whole tone down (see example 2.7). The left-hand accompaniment is likewise composed of semitone and whole-tone clusters along with a leap of a fourth. These basic intervals permeate the entire movement. Virtually each measure demonstrates the use of these same intervallic motives as derived from the opening material. Example 2.8 presents an analyzed section prior to and including the opening of the second theme area. This analysis demonstrates that almost all material presented is either directly related to or derived from the intervallic composition of the opening motive. A definition of the labeled motives in the example is presented in figure 4.

Figure 4

	Intervals from Opening Motive	Inverted Intervals	Derived Intervals
X	Perfect 4 th	Perfect 5 th	Aug. 4 th Dim. 5 th
Y	Semi-tone	Major 7 th	Minor 9 th
Z	Whole-tone	Minor 7 th	Major 9 th

Example 2.8. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 2, Mvmt. I, mm. 31-39.

The musical score for Example 2.8 consists of three systems of music. The first system (measures 31-35) features a right hand with a melodic line and a left hand with octaved accompaniment. Interval labels X, Y, and Z are placed above and below notes. The second system (measures 36-39) continues the melodic and rhythmic patterns, with a final measure ending in a double bar line. Performance markings include 'p sub.', 'p', and 'p poco cresc.'. Measure numbers 6, 11, 16, and 35 are indicated throughout the score.

Throughout his first and second piano sonatas, Sessions demonstrates his allegiance to the neoclassical style and aesthetic by focusing on formal clarity and motivic unity. Through the traditional and expanded use of sonata form, the long line approach to phrasing and structure, and the attention to motivic unity, Sessions incorporates aspects of historical compositional practice with modern innovations, thereby reflecting the characteristics of neoclassicism while developing a distinctive style. For Sessions, the piano sonata serves as one of the most pliable mediums in which to integrate past traditions and an innovative compositional voice.

Neoclassical Style Features in Persichetti's Early Piano Sonatas

Neoclassical features also prevail within the works of Vincent Persichetti, although these features are different than those evident in the piano sonatas of Roger Sessions. Persichetti's sonatas are rather eclectic in terms of their compositional aesthetic. He uses a variety of common twentieth-century compositional techniques to craft a style that does not easily lend itself to standard categorization. Of Persichetti's approach, American composer William Schuman wrote:

While his music has its own unmistakable personal stamp, he uses consistently and creatively the vocabulary or musical procedures and sounds developed by the composers of this century. He has a conscious mastery of the twentieth century materials as well as an intuitive feeling for them.⁵

⁵ William Schuman, "The Compleat Musician: Vincent Persichetti and Twentieth Century Harmony," *Musical Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (1961): 379.

While Persichetti uses a multitude of different compositional techniques throughout his works, a prominent neoclassical style is consistently featured, particularly within his early piano sonatas.⁶ Persichetti incorporates neoclassicism into his piano sonatas by using compositional techniques reminiscent of the classical style. These techniques include a traditional approach to form, tonality and neo-tonality, and the use of simple linear and homophonic textures. While Persichetti's piano sonatas are generally unpredictable and spontaneous, classical elements are frequently and consistently adopted, though Persichetti also demonstrates innovation in his early piano sonatas through the unconventional integration of disparate aspects of classical techniques and style.

Persichetti's use of structure and form is a revealing feature of the neoclassical style within his piano sonatas. Although Persichetti's sonatas tend to be rather sectional and often disjointed, attention to clarity of formal structure is generally apparent. This clarity, while not always derived from traditional classical formal structures, nevertheless promotes the sense of structure and directness inherent to the neoclassical style. An example in which Persichetti uses traditional classical form while still incorporating personal innovation is evident in the Piano Sonata No. 5. In

⁶ Although Persichetti began writing piano sonatas in 1939, the first two sonatas were withdrawn from publication at an early date and then revised and republished in 1982. Due to the late revision of these first two sonatas, this discussion of Persichetti's early style and approach will focus primarily on elements of the Piano Sonatas No. 3 through 9, written between 1943 and 1952.

the first movement, Persichetti uses and modifies standard sonata-allegro form. The traditional overall form is seen in the following figure.

Figure 5

Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 5
(First Movement Sonata Form)

Exposition mm. 1-35	Development mm. 36-76	Recapitulation mm. 77-124
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While all of the common markers of sonata-allegro form are present, a few unconventional elements enliven the movement. In the exposition, the first theme area is made up of two distinct subjects that return in the recapitulation. The second theme area consists of only one theme, and a closing theme is not apparent. The thematic structure produces an unbalanced form that remains an unusual aspect of the otherwise traditional scheme. As expected, the development manipulates aspects of all three subjects presented in the exposition. The recapitulation, however, is not quite as conventional. All of the themes return in the recapitulation, but their tonal relationships are far from traditional. While the first subject returns in its original tonic position of D, the second subject unexpectedly returns a minor third higher than first presented. Likewise, the second theme unexpectedly returns an augmented second higher than in the exposition (see examples 2.9 a-c).

Example 2.9a. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 5, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-4 and mm. 77-81.
Copyright 1951 by Elkan Vogel Co., Philadelphia, Pa.

mm. 1-4



mm. 77-81



Example 2.9b. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 5, Mvmt. I, mm. 9-16 and mm. 85-92.

mm. 9-16



mm. 85-92



Example 2.9c. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 5, Mvmt. I, mm. 21-24 and mm. 97-100.

mm. 21-24

mm. 97-100

Although these tonal relationships are quite unconventional, they appear to be derived from intervals presented in the first measure of the piece. The first three-note figure in the melody of the right hand outlines an augmented second, which can be interpreted enharmonically as a minor third (see example 2.9a). This outlined interval forecasts and prepares the unusual tonal relationships that occur between the identical themes in the exposition and the recapitulation. While the tonal relationships are unusual between the otherwise identical themes in the exposition and recapitulation, the prevalence of the augmented second in the first measure of the piece seems to influence and justify the choice of keys for the return of the themes.

Another unexpected twist on traditional sonata form in Persichetti's Piano Sonata No. 5 occurs in the end of the movement. Persichetti brings back the first theme subject as a codetta in measure 119 to finish the movement. This melody occurs at the same tonal center as first presented at the beginning, yet it is now

Example 2.10. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 5, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-6, mm. 119-124.

⁷ In her treatise on *The Piano Sonatas of Vincent Persichetti*, Linda Johnston poses that the final return of the first subject occurs at m. 120, a half step lower than the original presentation. Although disguised rhythmically and enharmonically, the return of this subject in fact occurs at m. 119 at its original tonal center. Linda Carol Johnston, "The Piano Sonatas of Vincent Persichetti" (Masters thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1970), 64.

By returning to the first subject in the codetta of the movement, Persichetti incorporates a cyclic element to the movement that reinforces characteristics of balance and clarity key to the neoclassical style. Adhering to a basic neoclassic aesthetic, Persichetti showcases his contemporary ingenuity, offering a fresh take on a traditional form.

The final movement of the Piano Sonata No. 7 offers another example of traditional elements of form combined with contemporary inventiveness. Here, Persichetti uses a relatively standard rondo form reminiscent of the finale movements in piano sonatas of the classical era. The basic form is shown in the following figure.

Figure 6

Persichetti Piano Sonata #7
(Third Movement Rondo Form)

A	B	A	C	A	C	B	A	C	coda
m.1	m.29	m.55	m.70	m.97	m.106	m.130	m.155	m.191	m.199

While the reiteration of formal units demonstrates balance and clarity in a traditional way, the details within the form of this movement show Persichetti's ability to deviate from prescribed conventions. For instance, when the A section returns in measure 55, the theme is quoted exactly for only six measures before it begins to move in a different direction. The second return of A at measure 97 also varies the original theme considerably. Nevertheless, essential aspects of tonality, texture, and character

of the A theme identify its return. Likewise, the subsequent returns of the C section, while maintaining original thematic and tonal implications, are varied in rhythm, texture, and character. Through varying the returns of formal units, Persichetti demonstrates elements of spontaneity within the tightly structured rondo form.

Similar to the way in which Persichetti unites both traditional and innovative aspects of form, he also adapts classical elements of tonality to a more modern language. Persichetti typically uses traditional tonal materials associated with the classical style, including tertian harmonies and diatonic scale passages. However, these materials are often combined in unconventional ways, resulting in non-traditional, non-classical harmonic and tonal functions. Such traditional elements of tonality as diatonicism, chromaticism, and modality are combined with bi-tonality and non-traditional chord progressions to create a contemporary and progressive idiom. While aspects of tonality are almost always present, tonal centers often shift in rapid motion, creating instability and uncertainty. Thus, Persichetti uses classical elements of tonality in a non-traditional way to create a neo-tonal idiom.

Examples of this neo-tonalism are apparent throughout Persichetti's early sonatas. For instance, the third movement of the Piano Sonata No. 3 employs major and minor triads and consonant intervals of thirds and fifths. The chordal constructions by themselves are fairly standard and traditional; however, the successive progressions of the chords are spontaneous and unconventional. For instance, as shown in example 2.11, the opening chord progression, F major—G major—E minor—A major, has no functional properties, and a tonal center is never established or supported.

Example 2.11. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. III, mm. 1-13. Copyright 1945 by Elkan-Vogel Co., Philadelphia, Pa.



Additionally, traditional major and minor chords are used in measures 13-22; however, here they are stacked on top of a bass note that produces a non-traditional succession of major and minor seventh chords (see example 2.12). These seventh chords lack a functional relationship to each other.

Example 2.12. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. I, mm. 13- 21.



The use of traditional materials in non-traditional contexts can be seen in similar examples from Persichetti's other piano sonatas. For instance, in the second movement of Piano Sonata No. 4, no particular key is firmly established in the movement. The opening melody instead tonicizes several keys in the first eight measures (see example 2.13).

Example 2.13. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 4, Mvmt. II, mm. 1-13. Copyright 1951 by Elkan-Vogel Co., Philadelphia, Pa.



In the melody, the first two measures resemble B-flat major; the next two measures tonicize C minor, and the following two measures add another flat (D-flat). The final two measures of the phrase subtract all the flats, tonicizing C major. The phrase is

then repeated in measure 9 with development and extension. All the while, a drone occurs throughout the left-hand accompaniment. An E-flat—B-flat dyad is repeated on the downbeat of the first four measures of the theme. This occurrence tries to establish a stable key, albeit one that is non-complementary to the right-hand melody. Although neoclassical tonal inflections and procedures are used, a real sense of tonality is never established.

Another example of traditional tonal materials and their non-traditional functions is seen in the first movement of Persichetti's Piano Sonata No. 7. The first eight measures of the opening melody incorporate traditional melodic inflection with multi-tonal shifts and non-functional harmonies (see example 2.14).

Example 2.14. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 7, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-12. Copyright 1963 by Elkan-Vogel Co., Philadelphia, Pa.



The opening melody is clearly stated in G major until the final note of the phrase, which ends deceptively on E instead of G. This tonal melody, however, is joined to an unrelated harmonic accompaniment that seems to throw off the sense of G major

inherent to the melody. Likewise, the melody in measures 5-8 of the left hand, almost identical to the right-hand melody in measures 1-4, resounds firmly for the first two measures in G-sharp major, followed by two measures in F major. This melody is also accompanied by non-complementary harmonic chords (in the right hand) that undermine either sense of G-sharp or F major.

In the Piano Sonata No. 9, Persichetti combines bi-tonality with more traditional characteristics of texture and style. This can be seen in the opening of the *Allegro agilitate* second movement. Here the texture is very classical in style: a singing allegro melody on top of an Alberti-bass accompaniment. Yet the traditional texture is counterbalanced by bi-tonal harmony that is non-functional and non-traditional (see example 2.15).

Example 2.15. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 9, Mvmt. II, *Allegro agilitate* mm. 1-4.
Copyright 1963 by Elkan-Vogel Co., Philadelphia, Pa.

Allegro agilitate (♩ = ca. 144)

mp cristallino

tre corde

coh ped. (light pedal with changes of harmony)

Additionally, in the Piano Sonata No. 9, Persichetti layers white and black key passages to produce a very dissonant bi-tonality. An example of this is particularly evident at the end of the entire sonata (see example 2.16).

Example 2.16. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 9, Mvmt. IV, mm. 97-106.



In measures 98 through 101, Persichetti layers F major on top of F-sharp major, producing a clashing bi-tonalism. This chromatic layering of harmonies is similar to the clusters technique seen in the works of other twentieth-century American experimental composers, including Charles Ives and Henry Cowell. However, Persichetti's "clusters" are separated by octaves and therefore do not maintain the same closeness of range as they do of harmony. Persichetti combines both features of traditional harmonic composition with a clustering concept to produce a complex harmonic sound that situates aspects of classical harmony in a more modern tonal context.

Finally, one of the most distinctive features of neoclassicism evident in Persichetti's piano sonatas is the clarity and simplicity of the textural writing. Persichetti consistently uses straightforward, uncomplicated textures to create a simple, direct character. In particular, Persichetti alternates between linear counterpoint and homophonic chordal textures. Simple two- or three-part linear counterpoint appears throughout the sonatas. Although the melodic lines are not often treated with developmental sophistication, such contrapuntal techniques as imitation, augmentation, diminution, inversion, retrograde, canon, and fugato do occur. In addition to linear counterpoint, Persichetti also uses homophonic chordal writing. Thick chordal textures tend to be rhythmically homogenous. This homogeneity counterbalances the more opaque sonorities. Generally speaking, Persichetti uses these simple textures within the piano sonatas to promote a sense of clarity as typical to the neoclassical style.

While Persichetti alternates a variety of textures in his sonatas to avoid monotony, the different textures remain straightforward and clear. For example, in the Piano Sonata No. 4, different sections within each of the three movements use different textures. The opening of the sonata features large octaves and chords in a broad bombastic character. Although the sonorities are thick—spanning the entire register of the piano—the rhythm between the hands is identical, thereby producing a clear texture amidst the opaque colors of the chords (see example 2.17)

Example 2.17. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 4, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-4. Copyright 1951 by Elkan-Vogel, Philadelphia, Pa.



Following this introduction, a new contrasting section features a transformation of the opening theme. Here the opening theme is presented in a linear and contrapuntal manner, yielding a more intimate character. While simple two-part counterpoint is the primary texture of this section, Persichetti incorporates elements of imitation (see example 2.18, measures 19 and 20) and mirroring (measures 21 and 23) into the writing.

Example 2.18. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 4, Mvmt. I, mm. 19-28.



Later, Persichetti transforms this same theme into a statement that initiates a fugal section. The fugue lasts sixty-five measures and concludes the movement. While this section is a three-voice fugue, Persichetti generally concentrates on two voices at a time. When all three voices are presented, usually two of the voices move homophonically, thus reducing their independence from one another. This creates a simpler treatment of the traditionally more complex contrapuntal style. Example 2.19 shows the opening fifteen measures of the fugue.

Example 2.19. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 4, Mvmt. I, mm. 49-63.

The musical score for Example 2.19 is presented in four systems. The first system shows the beginning of the fugue with a tempo marking of 'Broad' and a metronome marking of 120. The first voice (treble clef) is marked 'detached' and 'f marc.'. The second voice (bass clef) is marked 'mf legato'. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings like 'cresc.'.

Clarity of texture is also a distinct feature within the second movement of the Piano Sonata No. 4. Here, Persichetti begins the movement with a simple melody plus accompaniment (see example 2.20).

Example 2.20. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 4, Mvmt. II, mm. 1-9.



The third movement of this sonata also incorporates textural transparency. This is observed in the opening of the movement; Persichetti presents the theme in octaves, accompanied by sparse homophonic chords (see example 2.21).

Example 2.21. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 4, Mvmt. III, mm. 1-6.

The second theme area of the third movement also features a clear texture, although through different means. Thin textures now alternate with brilliant chordal effects. These sonorities are created by repetitive chords that alternate between the two hands. While the effect is virtuosic, it is not complex or thick, and the texture remains transparent (see example 2.22).

Example 2.22. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 4, Mvmt. III, 2nd theme, mm. 17-28.

The musical score for Example 2.22 is for the second theme of the third movement of Persichetti's Piano Sonata No. 4. It is in 3/4 time, marked 'Briskly' with a tempo of 138. The score is written for piano and consists of three systems of music. The first system shows the beginning of the theme with a treble staff marked 'detached' and '3 2', and a bass staff marked 'f marc.' and 'tre corde'. The second system continues the theme with more complex chordal structures. The third system shows the end of the theme with a final chordal effect. The texture is transparent, with thin textures alternating with brilliant chordal effects.

Throughout the early sonatas, Persichetti displays neoclassical features by concurrently exploiting elements of traditional and modern compositional technique. Through the use of classical forms, experimental melding together of conservative

and innovative harmonic procedures, and attentiveness to clear and direct textures, Persichetti combines features of classicism with features of contemporary practice, as is customary of the neoclassical style. Persichetti specifically uses the piano sonata to achieve this balance between convention and innovation.

Neoclassical Style Features in Finney's Early Piano Sonatas

The early piano sonatas of Ross Lee Finney also show predominant features of neoclassicism. Aspects of clarity and directness associated with the neoclassic style are evident in traditional formal structures, conservative neo-tonality, and transparency of texture and sonority. While these features are similar to the neoclassical characteristics evident in the early piano sonatas of Sessions and Persichetti, Finney's neoclassical intent seems more overt. On the surface, Finney's usage of form, tonality, and texture are particularly conventional, although a closer look reveals moments of compositional innovation that complements tradition.⁸ Ultimately, Finney pays homage to the tradition of the piano sonata genre while developing an individual voice within the neoclassical style.

As with Sessions and Persichetti, treatment of form plays a major role in the

⁸ General observations throughout the following analysis owe certain credit to the comprehensive dissertations on Ross Lee Finney's piano works by Linda Apple-Monson and Reginald Rodgers. See Linda Apple-Monson, "The Solo Piano Music of Ross Lee Finney" (D.M.A. diss., Peabody Conservatory of Music, 1986) and Reginald G. Rodgers, "With a North Dakota Rubato: The Solo Piano Works of Ross Lee Finney" (D.M.A. diss., University of Maryland, 1991).

establishment of Finney's neoclassical style within the piano sonatas. Traditionally classical forms are persistently used throughout the piano sonatas of these American composers. Yet these standard forms are often treated as points of departure. Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney all utilize the basic formal signposts within standard classical forms and then proceed with innovation. Throughout Finney's early piano sonatas, Piano Sonata No. 1 (1933), *Fantasy* (1939), Piano Sonata No. 3 (1942), and Piano Sonata No. 4 "Christmastime" (1945), such classical forms as sonata form, ABA form, and rondo form are used as standards from which to deviate.

For instance, the first movement of Finney's Piano Sonata No. 1 demonstrates typical elements of sonata form. As shown in figure 7 below, the exposition, development and recapitulation are readily apparent. Finney alters the recapitulation, however, by switching the appearance of the first and second themes. In the reprise, Finney first presents the second theme in the tonic key; the first theme follows (fig.7). Although the switching of themes in the recapitulation demonstrates deviation from standard formal practice, it is not without precedent: similar exchanges of thematic materials are also found throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Figure 7

Finney Piano Sonata No. 1
(First Movement Sonata Form)

Exposition mm. 1-85		Development mm. 86-118	Recapitulation mm. 119-210	
1 st Theme m. 1	2 nd Theme m. 24		2 nd Theme m. 119	1 st Theme m. 154

By swapping the places of basic thematic material, Finney purposefully moves away from standard sonata form while incorporating elements of nineteenth-century formal innovation.

Although this movement can be interpreted as sonata form, a different reading is also possible. The form of the opening movement can be construed as an arch. This formal plan is innovative and unexpected, yet the result is a rather tightly constructed and settled structure. This alternate reading of the first movement form is presented in the following figure.

Figure 8

Finney Piano Sonata No. 1
(First Movement Arch Form)

Adagio	Allegro	Adagio	Allegro	Adagio
Adagio Theme and Ostinato (mm. 1-22)	Transition (m. 23)	Adagio Theme and Ostinato (mm. 86-95)	Transition (mm. 96-118)	Adagio Theme and Ostinato (mm. 154-69)
	Allegro Theme (mm. 24-55)		Allegro Theme (mm. 199-53)	Coda (mm. 192-210)
	Ostinato (mm. 56-77)			
	Coda (mm. 78-85)			

In this analysis, Finney's form is distinctive, alternating Adagio material (Theme 1) with Allegro material (Theme 2). While relatively original, the form also seems to bear resemblance to the overall form executed by Sessions in his Piano Sonata No. 1.

In Sessions's sonata, a slow theme introduction begins the piece and returns throughout the entire piece to announce new movements. Finney also applies this cyclic concept to the first movement of his first sonata to much the same effect, producing a fairly free sounding yet tightly structured form. The first movement of Finney's Piano Sonata No. 1 offers a clear example of how classical sonata-allegro form may be combined with a broader cyclical formation to produce an overall eclectic and innovative structure.

While Finney's overall forms are imaginative and out of the ordinary, they still incorporate typical elements of neoclassicism: clarity and unity. The same assimilation of an arch form within a broader sonata-allegro framework can be seen in his Piano Sonatas No. 3 and 4. For example, while the first movement of the Piano Sonata No. 3 is composed in a relatively standard sonata-allegro form, Finney also imposes an arch form onto the movement. The first theme of the first movement unconventionally returns in the codetta of the exposition and later in the coda of the entire movement (see figure 9). The form combines aspects of sonata form with rondo and arch-form characteristics.

Figure 9

Finney Piano Sonata No. 3
(First Movement Sonata-Arch Form)

Exposition (mm. 1-76)			Development (mm. 77-107)		Recapitulation (mm. 108-180)	
1 st Theme mm.1-43	2 nd Theme mm. 44-65	Codetta (1 st Theme) mm. 66-76	1 st Theme mm.108-42	2 nd Theme mm. 143-68	Coda (1 st theme) mm. 169-180	
A	B	A	C	A	B	A

By using the first theme material at these key structural points of the movement, Finney creates additional unity and clarity of thematic structure. This combined form unites the classical contrast of sonata form with the cyclical unity of arch form. This also occurs in the finale movement of the Piano Sonata No. 3, where the A theme returns in the final coda, likewise creating an arch.

Furthermore, in the Sonata No. 4 the arch form is executed on a broader level. While the individual movements incorporate traditional classical forms, Finney imposes a cyclic aspect on the entire four-movement work by bringing back the first phrase of the first movement in the coda of the finale. The outer movements thus frame the entire work, and the piece ends almost exactly as it began.⁹ The cyclic arch form presented here creates clarity and cohesion within the work as a whole, while classical formal concepts are also incorporated within the individual movements.

Finney also combines disparate but traditional elements of tonality to create a contemporary tonal approach. His first four piano sonatas are predominantly tonal, yet the way in which Finney uses tonality is quite distinctive. While tonal centers are generally evident throughout the early sonatas, Finney incorporates a wide range of tonal devices to promote a more modern variety of harmony and color. These devices include combinations of diatonicism, pandiatonicism, chromaticism, modal mixture, and synthetic scale structures. By incorporating modality into his piano sonatas, for example, Finney maintains tonal centers that correspond to the traditional classicism of the genre, while creating an eclectic language that is contemporary and innovative.

The Piano Sonata No. 1 reveals Finney's ability to combine traditional elements of tonality with unconventional procedures. While the piece includes a key

⁹ Apple-Monson, "The Solo Piano Music of Ross Lee Finney," 84.

signature of D minor, Finney had originally conceived the sonata with more experimental tonalities. Initially, Finney did not include a key signature at all in the Piano Sonata No. 1; however, later he explained “I reexamined my notation when publication became a possibility and found that it was more tonal than I had realized.”¹⁰ By omitting a key signature in the original conception of the piece, Finney demonstrates that he was clearly interested in tonal and harmonic experimentation. Nevertheless, his neoclassical tonal sense prevailed, resulting in a piano sonata that is firmly grounded in the key of D minor.

Throughout the Piano Sonata No. 1 there are many examples of a modal altering of D minor. This is commonly seen when the second scale degree of the minor scale is lowered, resulting in the Phrygian mode. By altering the modality of the scales, Finney is able to create an unconventional tonal aesthetic, while still maintaining a traditional tonal center. This can be seen in the opening of the Piano Sonata No. 1 (see example 2.23). In the first theme, Finney hints at the use of D-Phrygian by introducing the lowered second scale tone (E-flat) in the opening motive of the left hand. Although the right hand melody does not make use of the lowered second scale degree at first, the E-flat later infiltrates the melody in measure 4. While the Phrygian mode is exploited throughout this first phrase, D minor still remains the tonal center.

¹⁰ This quote comes from an interview with Ross Lee Finney by Linda Apple-Monson on January 5, 1983. Apple-Monson, “The Solo Piano Music of Ross Lee Finney,” 18.

Example 2.23. Finney Piano Sonata No. 1, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-6. Copyright 1937 by New Music Press.



The use of D-Phrygian also clearly appears in measures 24-25 of the first movement where Finney begins a new Allegro theme (see example 2.24). Here Finney uses two D-Phrygian scales presented simultaneously in contrary motion. The alto and bass voices start the ascending scale (D-E^b-F-G); subsequently, the soprano and tenor voices take over and conclude the scale (A-B^b-C-D). The soprano and tenor voices begin a descent of the same modal scale (D-C-B^b-A) with the alto and bass voices taking over and continuing the descent (G-F-E^b-D).

Example 2.24. Finney Piano Sonata No. 1, Mvmt. I, mm. 24-31.



The Toccata finale movement also presents multiple occurrences of the Phrygian mode. The opening theme employs the lowered second scale degree first in the left hand and later in the right hand, coloring the entire phrase with an overall D-Phrygian modality (see example 2.25).

Example 2.25. Finney Piano Sonata No. 1, Mvmt. III, mm. 1-8.



In the contrasting phrase that follows, Finney incorporates the A-Phrygian mode. Here the lowered second scale degree (B^b) comes directly from the D minor key signature (see example 2.26).

Example 2.26. Finney Piano Sonata No. 1, Mvmt. III, mm. 25-28.



In the recapitulation of the movement, the first theme in the Finale is presented a fourth higher than the original, now in G-Phrygian. The piece ends with a D-Phrygian cadence and open fifths that leave the tonality of the piece ambiguous (see example 2.27).

Example 2.27. Finney's Piano Sonata No. 1, Mvmt. III, mm. 123-133.



Modality is found not only in the Piano Sonata No. 1 but also in each of Finney's early piano sonatas. By using unconventional scale structures, Finney combines aspects of classical tonality with a contemporary push for harmonic innovation. The use of modality within the sonatas also becomes a characteristic of tonal cohesion. By using recurring modal scales—for instance the distinctive Phrygian modality throughout the Piano Sonata No. 1—Finney creates idiosyncratic tonal schemes that unify each piece. This cohesion of sound brings tonal and harmonic unity to the sonatas, further promoting a neoclassical sense of clarity and cohesion.

Additional examples of modality, within a major-minor idiom, appear throughout the early piano sonatas. For instance, the Piano Sonata No. 2 exploits the Lydian mode. This is seen in the main theme of the first movement, beginning in measure 27, which occurs in A-flat Lydian (see example 2.28).

Example 2.28. Finney Piano Sonata No. 2, Mvmt. I, mm. 25-33. Copyright 1942 by Arrow Music Press.



The third sonata makes repetitive use of the Mixolydian mode as seen in the cadential structures in measures 75-76 at the end of the exposition of the first movement (see example 2.29).

Example 2.29. Finney Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. I, mm. 73-78. Copyright 1945 by Ross Lee Finney.



In the Toccata movement of the fourth sonata, the first theme uses C-sharp Phrygian (see example 2.30a). The following theme also has elements of modality with the use of a raised fourth scale degree and lowered seventh scale degree resulting in a half-Lydian, half-Dorian modal scale (see example 2.30b).

Example 2.30a. Finney Piano Sonata No. 4, Mvmt. IV, mm. 1-8. Copyright 1947 by Music Press, Inc.



Example 2.30b. Finney Piano Sonata No. 4, Mvmt. IV, mm. 9-18.

Another element of Finney's piano sonatas indicative of the neoclassical style is his use of clear textures. Simplicity was a key stylistic feature of neoclassicism and corresponded to the new simplicity of the American style. Clarity and transparency of texture are demonstrated throughout all of Finney's early piano sonatas. For instance, the opening of the Piano Sonata No. 1 presents a simple long line melody set against an ostinato figure in the left hand. This melody versus linear accompaniment produces a simple and translucent texture characteristic of the neoclassical style (see example 2.31).

Example 2.31. Finney Piano Sonata No. 1, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-6.



In the second theme area of the first movement, in measure 24, the right hand and left hand are identical but separated by two octaves (see example 2.32). These octave doublings, which are prevalent throughout the sonatas, also produce a clear texture that is simple yet communicative.

Example 2.32. Finney Piano Sonata No. 1, Mvmt. I, mm. 24-31.



Likewise, octave doublings between the right hand and left hand are also the primary texture in the second movement of the first sonata (see example 2.33).

Example 2.33. Finney Piano Sonata No. 1, Mvmt. II, mm. 1-6.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The key signature is three flats (E-flat major or C minor) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system features a melody in the right hand with eighth-note runs and a bass line with a similar rhythmic pattern. The second system continues the piece, showing a more complex texture with multiple voices in both hands, including some octave doublings as mentioned in the text.

The finale also has a simple texture, primarily note against note. The counterpoint, comprising contrary motion, is straightforward and clear. The effect, while having a tremendous amount of rhythmic vitality and vigor, is simple, pure, and transparent (see example 2.34).

Example 2.34. Finney Piano Sonata No. 1, Mvmt. III, mm. 1-8.



Finney's other early piano sonatas are likewise characterized by their clear textures. For example, the Piano Sonata No. 2 opens with doubled octave writing between the hands and uses other transparent textures throughout, such as melody plus homophonic support, melody plus unobtrusive accompaniment, and clear interaction and alternation between the hands. The Piano Sonata No. 3 also opens with octave doublings between the hands. This octave doubling is additionally seen in the second and fourth movements. Generally, parallel writing dominates much of this sonata, as well as the others, exemplifying the simple textures of Finney's neoclassical style.

The Piano Sonata No. 4 also demonstrates characteristics of clear and simple texture. The first movement contains many octave doublings, and although the texture throughout is often multi-layered, the effect is still remarkably transparent. The layers do not generally compete with each other but are separated by rests and register. In keeping with the neoclassical appropriation of historical forms, Finney sets his second movement as an invention. The “Invention” exploits two-part counterpoint throughout, and again, while being contrapuntal, the result is still simple and transparent because Finney creates space between the voices. A voice is either primary and melodic or secondary and supportive. Because these roles are seldom ambiguous the resultant texture is uncluttered. The third movement “Nocturne” is purely homophonic and chordal. The finale “Toccata” movement alternates parallel writing with contrary motion. The texture, while exuding a tremendous amount of rhythmic energy, is straightforward and clean.

The use of openly spaced chords is another element of texture that represents the neoclassical, simplified style of Finney’s piano sonatas. Often Finney uses chords that span wide reaches and use large intervals, resulting in an open and expanded quality. This use of widely spaced chords is seen throughout the music of such eminent American composers as Roy Harris and Aaron Copland and is often considered a distinctive characteristic of American music.¹¹ Examples of these distinctively voiced chords are seen throughout Finney’s early piano sonatas. The

¹¹ For a further discussion on distinctive American neoclassical traits, see Irving Jean King, “Neoclassical Tendencies in Seven American Piano Sonatas (1925-1945)” (Ph.D. diss., Washington University, 1971). Additionally, Levy writes of the “greater presence of open chords [fourths and fifths]” and how such chords reflect the “austere openness of the plains.” Alan Howard Levy, *Musical Nationalism: American Composers’ Search for Identity*, 100.

first sonata features selected chords that are widely spaced, but as a general rule, Finney uses this unique sonority more and more in the subsequent sonatas. For instance, the Piano Sonata No. 2 uses these widely spaced chords extensively beginning in measure 27 in the third theme area of the first movement (see example 2.35).

Example 2.35. Finney Piano Sonata No. 2, Mvmt. I, mm. 25-33.



This transparent chord spacing is also seen throughout the Piano Sonata No. 3, especially in the development and closing sections of the first movement (see examples 2.36a and 2.36b).

Example 2.36a. Finney Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. I, development, mm. 79-89.

The musical score for Example 2.36a consists of two systems of music. The first system shows measures 79-84, with the right hand playing a melodic line and the left hand playing a rhythmic pattern. The tempo is marked 'mp cantando'. The second system shows measures 85-89, with the right hand playing a melodic line and the left hand playing a rhythmic pattern. The dynamics include 'dim.'.

Example 2.36b. Finney Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. I, coda, mm. 168-175.

The musical score for Example 2.36b consists of two systems of music. The first system shows measures 168-172, with the right hand playing a melodic line and the left hand playing a rhythmic pattern. The tempo is marked 'f'. The second system shows measures 173-175, with the right hand playing a melodic line and the left hand playing a rhythmic pattern. The dynamics include 'f'.

Widely-spaced chords, sonorities, and intervals are perhaps most notable and characteristic of the Piano Sonata No. 4, which opens with a succession of these chords supported by a widely-spaced figure in the left hand (see example 2.37).

Example 2.37. Finney Piano Sonata No. 4, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-9.

The musical score for Example 2.37, showing the first nine measures of the first movement of the Piano Sonata No. 4. The score is written for piano and features widely-spaced chords and intervals, particularly in the left hand. The notation includes dynamic markings such as *pp*, *ppp*, *p*, and *sf*, and a tempo marking of *Andante*. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system covering measures 1-5 and the second system covering measures 6-9. The left hand plays a widely-spaced figure, while the right hand plays chords and intervals.

This distinctive texture serves as an important motive throughout the rest of piece.

The pure and transparent textures produce a simplicity reminiscent of traditional American folk music and hymnody, while the wide chords produce a sonority that is open and spacious, giving Finney's music an expansive style. In an interview Finney stated, "Many of the folk-songs that I grew up with in North Dakota had this open, wide-leap quality that I particularly admire. I think this is perhaps

reflected (in my music).”¹² The combination of simple textures with widely-spaced chords gives Finney’s piano sonatas a characteristically transparent and direct sound indicative of the neoclassic American style.

Throughout his early sonatas, Finney exhibits a neoclassical style by combining elements of traditional classicism with innovative procedures. Through the resourceful execution of form and structure, neo-tonality, and clarity of texture and sonority, Finney uses the piano sonata genre to develop a signature style within a neoclassical aesthetic. Finney used the piano sonata, the iconic genre of the classical era, as a vehicle to exploit elements of neoclassicism and to develop his American style.

While Roger Sessions, Vincent Persichetti, and Ross Lee Finney all have distinctly personal musical styles, many attributes of their piano sonatas remain constant in comparison. All three composers use the piano sonata as a genre in which to experiment with traditional and modern aspects of form, tonality, motivic unity, and texture. These combined elements resulted in individual styles that were nonetheless beholden to the neoclassical aesthetic. Neoclassicism was the dominant style in the U.S. throughout the first half of the twentieth century, but after 1950 a more experimental twelve-tone style became the predominant aesthetic. Nevertheless, Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney maintained many similar characteristics of the neoclassical style even as they adopted the prevailing twelve-

¹² Linda Apple-Monson, “The Solo Piano Music of Ross Lee Finney,” 3.

tone language. The following chapters document the American compositional stylistic shift from neoclassicism to serialism in the second half of the twentieth century and reveal how Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney used the piano sonata as a vehicle to reconcile these disparate aesthetics.

Chapter 3

TWELVE-TONE SERIALISM AND ITS ASSIMILATION INTO THE AMERICAN PIANO SONATA GENRE

While neoclassicism was one of the most prevalent musical trends during the first half of the twentieth century, a dramatic international shift in compositional style occurred after the Second World War as composers began to experiment with more esoteric styles. Twelve-tone serialism became one of the most predominant styles during the 1950s. Although such composers as Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, and Anton Webern, known collectively as The Second Viennese School, had already begun using twelve-tone serialism in the 1920s, existing political and social factors prevented the international dissemination of this technique and style.¹ In the 1950s, however, adoption of the twelve-tone technique became more internationally widespread, and dodecaphony had a tremendous effect on compositional output. The American piano sonata was particularly affected by the shift from neoclassicism to serialism. This shift in compositional style and aesthetic is illustrated in the late piano sonatas of Roger Sessions, Vincent Persichetti and Ross Lee Finney.

Twelve-tone serialism first originated in Austria and Germany in the early part of the twentieth century.² Composers such as Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg,

¹ See Elliott Antokoletz, *Twentieth Century Music* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992), 242.

² For a more comprehensive discussion of the early development of twelve-tone composition see Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey, eds., *Constructive Dissonance: Arnold Schoenberg and the Transformation of Twentieth Century*

and Anton Webern used dodecaphony as a step toward the complete “emancipation of dissonance.”³ Initially, these composers sought to equalize all twelve tones of the chromatic scale to produce a type of atonality that was free from traditional functional restrictions. Twelve-tone serialism was considered an extension of the increasing chromaticism and free atonality that had developed in the late nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries. Serialization of the twelve tones was initially developed by Schoenberg to produce a more systemized approach to using and ordering the twelve pitches in an octave. Although this style became internationally widespread in the latter half of the century, twelve-tone serialism was basically confined within Vienna and Germany during the first half of the twentieth century.⁴ A general international aversion to extreme romanticism and expressionism in the '20s and socio-political oppression inflicted by the Nazi regime in the '30s and '40s resulted in an isolation of the twelve-tone serial style: the only real proponents of the early twelve-tone technique were Schoenberg and his students.⁵

Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) and Ethan Haimo, *Schoenberg's Serial Odyssey: The Evolution of His Twelve-Tone Method, 1914-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

³ See Walter B. Bailey, “Changing Views of Schoenberg,” *The Arnold Schoenberg Companion* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998), 5.

⁴ Bailey writes, “Schoenberg’s romantic self-view was formed before World War I, and it had much in common with many nineteenth century composers’ artistic orientation; but this aesthetic attitude was ‘out of fashion’ in the interwar years, when invention was restrained by classicism.” *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵ A few important composers outside the Second Viennese School wrote serial music in the '30s and '40s, among them Ernst Krenek, Luigi Dallapiccola, and Frank Martin. These composers were influenced by The Second Viennese School, presumably, partially through the International Society of Contemporary Music. As

The piano sonata was not generally considered a genre of choice for most composers during the initial development of twelve-tone serialism in Vienna and Germany. Certain stylistic idiosyncrasies of twelve-tone serialism were not particularly suitable to the piano sonata. Berg wrote one piano sonata—the one movement Piano Sonata Op. 1—although it was composed early in his compositional development and incorporated extended chromaticism rather than twelve-tone procedures. In general, however, serial composers favored genres that appeared to be more applicable to twelve-tone technique. For instance, Schoenberg wrote groups or suites of short pieces for the piano (Op. 25, Op. 33), and Webern composed short symphonic and chamber works as well as his miniature set of Variations for the piano. Tremendous emotional intensity was one of the attributes that generally characterized expressionistic, serial works; therefore, composers generally preferred short, concise forms that might offset the excess of emotion evident in the music, by virtue of their brevity.⁶ Additionally, the use of serial technique led to a homogeneity of sound and color determined by the particular characteristics of the primary row.

Antokoletz explains, “Certain early attempts were made to remove the barriers that kept international composers isolated from one another. The first major step was taken in 1922, when Viennese musicians initiated the idea of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM)...Although these yearly international concerts did not lead to significant dissemination of the twelve-tone idiom, they did provide opportunities for first performances of works like Berg’s *Violin Concerto* (Barcelona, 1936) and Webern’s *Das Augenlicht*, Op. 26 (London, 1938), as well as Schoenberg’s music. It was only at the international summer course established in 1946 at Darmstadt, Germany, that serial music was to be adopted extensively.” Antokoletz, *Twentieth Century Music*, 351-52.

⁶ In Antokoletz, *Twentieth Century Music*, 38, he states, “The ‘extreme emotionality’ of such pieces had to be ‘counterbalanced with extraordinary brevity.’”

These two general stylistic aspects of twelve-tone serialism—brevity of form and homogeneity of sound—were not especially well suited to the piano sonata, which is characterized more by structural development of form and contrast of theme and character. For these reasons, presumably, composers of the Second Viennese School did not regard the piano sonata as a genre that complemented the serial style; thus, the piano sonata was not extensively developed as a genre by the serial composers of the first half of the century.

It was not until the late 1940s that twelve-tone serialism began to broadly influence composers outside of Schoenberg's immediate circle. In Germany and Austria, the end of World War II saw a general release from oppression that was to have a profound effect on contemporary music. This liberation initiated greater international exchange and opened up the German contemporary music scene, which had been repressed for close to thirty years. In 1946, for instance, the *Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik* (International Summer Course for New Music) was founded in Darmstadt, Germany where the twelve-tone serial style of the Second Viennese School was prominently featured.⁷ Among the most important composers who studied and/or taught at the *Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik* were Olivier Messiaen and Pierre Boulez from France, Wolfgang Fortner and Karlheinz

⁷ For additional insights on the “History and Roots” of the post-1950 adoption of the serial technique, see Rocco Di Pietro, *Dialogues with Boulez* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 16-27.

Stockhausen from Germany, and Luigi Nono and Luciano Berio from Italy.⁸ Studies at the Darmstadt summer course enabled the dissemination and development of the twelve-tone serial technique, resulting in a widespread international movement towards this esoteric style.⁹ American composers were also influenced by this international shift in aesthetics. Roger Sessions, Vincent Persichetti, and Ross Lee Finney were among the many important American composers who adopted twelve-tone serialism at this time.¹⁰

In the U.S., the post-war era brought forth a new aesthetic that moved away from the conservatism of neoclassicism into more experimental, avant-garde procedures such as twelve-tone serialism. This change in compositional aesthetics in American music was brought on by several factors. Political, social, and economic oppression abroad had pushed several influential composers—including Arnold Schoenberg, Ernst Krenek, Igor Stravinsky, and Paul Hindemith—to immigrate to the U.S. during the early and late 1930s.¹¹ All of these composers were, at one time or

⁸ See also Bryan Simms, “Serialism in Europe,” in Bryan Simms, *Music of the Twentieth Century: Style and Structure* (New York: Schirmer, 1986), 344-53, and Peter F. Stacey, *Boulez and the Modern Concept* (Aldershot, England: Scholar Press, 1987), vii.

⁹ See Brigitte Schiffer, “Darmstadt, Citadel of the Avantgarde,” *The World of Music* 2 no. 3 (1969), 32-44; also Antokoletz, *Twentieth Century Music*, 369-370.

¹⁰ In an email correspondence from pianist, composer, and author David Burge on Nov. 26, 2001, he mentioned, “[for American composers in the post 50s era] the fascination with serialism intrigued anyone with a creative mind and they wanted to give it a try, and with the best composers it gave them a new outlet, a new way to find sounds they hadn't dealt with before.”

¹¹ See Alan Lessen, “Teaching Americans Music: Some Emigré Composer Viewpoints, ca. 1930-1955,” *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute* 11/1 (1988).

another, advocates of the twelve-tone method, and their presence in the U.S. brought serialism to the foreground, thus creating a direct influence on American composers.

Additionally, a greater freedom in compositional approach was encouraged by academic positions held by American composers in the post-war era. While neoclassical aesthetics had in part been fostered in the early twentieth century by political, social and economic factors that seemed to limit the creation and dissemination of complex and more difficult styles, composers of the post-war era tended to be supported by academic positions and so could compose music for a more exclusive audience made up of other academic composers, performers and scholars.¹² Similar to the “Society for Private Concerts” instituted by Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern in the 1920s to support and nurture sophisticated and difficult contemporary music, academia in the U.S. became a forum in which composers could write and present complex music to each other without having to rely on the financial support of the general public. Young American composers increasingly sought out academic positions that granted them intellectual freedom and financial support to compose

4-22; Alan Lessen, “The Emigré Experience: Schoenberg in America” in Brand and Hailey, *Constructive Dissonance*, 58-67.

¹² After 1950, composers such as Elliott Carter eschewed the neoclassical style as superficial and naïve. Allen Edwards, in *Flawed Words and Stubborn Sounds: A Conversation with Elliott Carter* (New York: Norton, 1971), quotes Carter as saying, “Before the end of the Second World War it became clear to me... that we were living in a world where this physical and intellectual violence would always be a problem and that the whole conception of human nature underlying the neoclassical aesthetic amounted to a sweeping under the rug of things, it seemed to me, we had to deal with in a less oblique way.”

complicated and esoteric music.¹³ Twelve-tone serialism was one of the major styles that stemmed from academia and Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney each adopted the technique while maintaining high-profile academic positions at such schools as Princeton, Juilliard, and the University of Michigan.

Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney did not simply adopt the twelve-tone technique wholesale but rather assimilated the twelve-tone language into their prominent neoclassical style. In particular, these three composers used the piano sonata as a genre to resolve the stylistic discrepancies between neoclassicism and serialism, namely the simplicity and objectivity associated with neoclassicism and the expressionism of the serial style. These discrepancies also include differences in the incorporation of traditional genres, formal structures, tonal procedures, and motivic development and cohesion. The piano sonata, while already demonstrating responsiveness to contemporary compositional trends in American music, was one of the primary genres in which Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney could reconcile potentially contradictory aspects of serialism and neoclassicism.

¹³ Richard Crawford, "United States of America 20th Century Art Music," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed 20 August 2002), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

Chapter 4

THE RECONCILIATION OF TECHNIQUE AND STYLE IN THE PIANO SONATAS OF SESSIONS, PERSICHETTI, AND FINNEY

While Roger Sessions, Vincent Persichetti, and Ross Lee Finney all composed in a neoclassical style during the decades before World War II, they were among the first Americans to incorporate the twelve-tone method into the piano sonata genre after the war. Shortly after 1950, as if on cue, these composers almost simultaneously changed from a tonally based language—be it chromatic, polytonal, or modal—to a twelve-tone language. However, Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney did not merely assume the technique but also assimilated features of twelve-tone serialism into their distinct musical approaches to develop an emerging new style that combined aspects of neoclassicism with a twelve-tone language. Each composer developed and applied this new style into their piano sonatas to further develop the American genre. Despite inherent differences between neo-tonality and the atonal twelve-tone language, aspects common to both the twelve-tone and neoclassical styles, such as the concern for structure and form, motivic cohesion, and a predilection for traditional genres, were concurrently incorporated. Characteristics of clarity and structure were the foundation of mid-century American neoclassicism, and these same features remain prominent within the subsequent assimilation of the twelve-tone language in the post-war American piano sonata. Specifically the late sonatas of Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney demonstrate how these composers merge elements of the twelve-tone method

with aspects of neoclassicism to produce a new aesthetic based on the melding of separate styles and techniques to further establish the essence and spirit of the emerging eclectic American style.

Development and Assimilation of the Twelve-Tone Language in Sessions's Piano Sonata No. 3

Although Roger Sessions first began incorporating twelve-tone serialism into his compositions around 1951 with the String Quartet No. 2 and the Sonata for Solo Violin, he did not assimilate twelve-tone serialism into the piano sonata genre until 1963. His adoption of serialism seems entirely consistent with his compositional development. For Sessions, the assimilation of the twelve-tone method was a natural progression from early diatonicism to an increasingly chromatic and dissonant language. This progression is demonstrated through the piano sonatas, which become increasingly more chromatic, contrapuntal, and dense until they reach a peak of complexity in the Piano Sonata No. 3, his first fully serial sonata.

This move toward a completely twelve-tone sonata was presaged by the Piano Sonata No. 2, composed in 1946, which demonstrated elements that verged on dodecaphony. Milton Babbitt, a student of Sessions, had once suggested that the second movement of the Piano Sonata No. 2 was very close to twelve-tone writing.¹

¹ Andrea Olmstead, *Roger Sessions and His Music* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), 82.

While Sessions was not entirely cognizant of his twelve-tone adoption, his subconscious movement towards the technique gives a notion of his natural and organic development of the language. Prior to fully adopting the twelve-tone method, Sessions commented,

The Sonata itself (Piano Sonata No. 2) is not based on the twelve-tone system, though adepts of the system (Babbitt, for example) have remarked, and pointed out to me, that it is really very close to it. I have now arrived at the point where I feel that in all likelihood I shall sometime go the whole way; but I am glad that this evolution has been gradual and genuinely subconscious and absolutely undogmatic.²

Although elements of the neoclassical style permeate the Piano Sonata No. 2, including a classical predilection for the long line, incorporation of traditional forms and structures, and attention to motivic cohesion, Sessions had already begun to demonstrate his ability to incorporate a new tonal language into a more traditional stylistic approach.

Prior to Sessions's full adoption of the twelve-tone technique, he had studied the serial works of Arnold Schoenberg during the '20s and '30s and had discussed the method at length with Schoenberg himself. Although Sessions was exposed to and understood the serial approach at an early date, he did not feel compelled to incorporate the technique into his style at that time; he stated, "I just felt that I wasn't ready to cope with it at all."³ Nevertheless, the twelve-tone technique undoubtedly

² Olmstead, *Roger Sessions and His Music*, 82.

³ For further comments, see Andrea Olmstead, *Conversations with Roger Sessions* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 197-8.

percolated in Sessions's mind before he intuitively integrated it into his personal idiom and subsequently into the piano sonata genre. Influenced by Schoenberg, Sessions's use of the twelve-tone method is not rigid but pliable and adaptive to complement his personal style, so that the music is born out of creativity and originality, rather than the strict nature of the system.

It is with this flexibility that Sessions approaches the Piano Sonata No. 3 and merges aspects of his prior neoclassical style with a twelve-tone serial language. By merging aspects of serial technique with traditional stylistic tendencies, Sessions simultaneously develops a personal approach to the twelve-tone language and updates his neoclassical approach. In the Piano Sonata No. 3 the twelve-tone technique and neoclassical style are not simply juxtaposed but rather infiltrate each other to produce a newly integrated style. Sessions's traditional point of view towards serial technique and the influence of the twelve-tone language on formal and motivic procedures throughout the Piano Sonata No. 3 demonstrate the materialization of an eclectic style through the merging of twelve-tone technique and neoclassical aesthetic.

Sessions's choice of primary row materials seems to draw upon historical models reveal his sense of classicism. In an interview with his biographer, Andrea Olmstead, he expounded on the origin of his twelve-tone rows:

I think of the row as a succession of intervals, naturally. Certainly, the row has an original form, and you get it by creative methods, so to speak... You get it because of an original idea. Then you work on that idea. If it's not quite right, you find out what is right, and that makes

the row. Eliminate awkward intervals both large and small. If you don't like the first note, its relation to the fourth note, because of the notes that come in between, you find out something that does work. It's a process that Beethoven used certainly, and Bach used in a different way, because we know something about their sketches, not in relation to the twelve-tone row at all. Then you find out what you want. You have harmonies, and if the notes in the harmonies include certain notes in the row, then you make the harmony so you get the effect that you want. If you have to borrow a note that comes later on, you borrow that. And there are little adjustments, and the row evolves in that way.⁴

By comparing the creation of a twelve-tone row to the composition of themes and motives used by Beethoven and Bach, Sessions demonstrates his continuing appreciation for the compositional procedures of the classical style. Sessions uses the twelve-tone row (or theme, in classical terms) to present intervals that become motivic material throughout the sonata. In a classical sense, he uses the row as a center for specific thematic reference, and in a modern sense, he uses serialism as an innovative technique of pitch organization. While incorporating serialism, he is able to venture away from the rigidity of the system when the character and nature of the music calls for it. Thus, Sessions unobtrusively incorporates the twelve-tone system into his own music without compromising his personal neoclassical style.

To merge the twelve-tone serial language into traditional principles reminiscent of the neoclassical style, Sessions redefines aspects of twelve-tone serialism in traditional terms. For instance, Sessions stated that

⁴ Olmstead, *Conversations with Roger Sessions*, 200-201.

Freedom can really only exist in a specific framework. What the row does is establish a region. And in my music you can move around in the region fairly freely, if it is really definitely established.⁵

Sessions establishes the row securely in the beginning of movements, as a classical composer might establish a certain tonality, and then moves around freely by incorporating unordered segments, altering the row order, and using repeated notes.⁶ His rows are often symmetrical or have symmetrical elements, thereby establishing the prominence of repeated interval classes within the row. Sessions often derives melodic and harmonic material from tri-chords and hexachords that are then exploited as motivic material throughout the movements. By establishing a region through the appearance of the row, Sessions presents material that then generates and influences traditional aspects of form, motivic cohesion, and line.⁷

Throughout the Piano Sonata No. 3, Sessions incorporates neoclassical characteristics within the twelve-tone serial framework. As discussed in the second chapter, prominent features of Sessions's neoclassical style within the first two piano

⁵ Olmstead, *Roger Sessions and His Music*, 143.

⁶ As Judy Lochhead explains, "The analyst looking for a straightforward or systematic use of a row or rows will surely be frustrated with Sessions's twelve-tone music. Sessions used the technique as a means of 'giving configuration to otherwise undifferentiated material' and then allowed his imagination to mold music from this configuration." Judy Lochhead, "A Question of Technique: The Second and Third Piano Sonatas of Roger Sessions," *The Journal of Musicology* 14 no. 4 (1996): 578.

⁷ While the purpose of the following analysis of Sessions's Piano Sonata No. 3 is to demonstrate and establish the integration and influence of serial techniques and neoclassicism, a detailed and interesting analysis of serial procedures can be seen in Judy Lochhead's article: "Temporal Processes of Form" *Contemporary Music Review* 7 (1993, Harwood Academic Publishers): 163-183.

sonatas include the incorporation of traditional forms, attention to motivic cohesion, and a concentration on long-line attributes. In the Piano Sonata No. 3, Sessions assimilates these neoclassical stylistic characteristics within a twelve-tone serial language. However, the twelve-tone language is not treated as an independent characteristic of the piece, but rather influences attributes of the neoclassical style. Sessions firmly establishes a twelve-tone row at the beginning of each movement and then uses the material of the row to generate different facets of form, motivic cohesion, and line throughout. Thus, the incorporation of a twelve-tone language infiltrates and transforms Sessions's neoclassical style in a way that strengthens these formal and motivic characteristics while still promoting the clarity of the twelve-tone method. Basically, while changing his language and general compositional predilection in the Piano Sonata No. 3, Sessions maintains his personal style while reinventing neoclassical approaches to formal, motivic, and melodic design.

While Sessions incorporates aspects of traditional form in each movement of the Piano Sonata No. 3, characteristics of the twelve-tone row presented at the opening of each movement influence the overall execution of these forms. For instance, the following example presents the opening of the second movement, which establishes the twelve-tone row in the melodic line (see example 4.1 and figure 10).

Example 4.1. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. II, mm. 1-3. Copyright 1969 by Edward B. Marks Music Corporation.

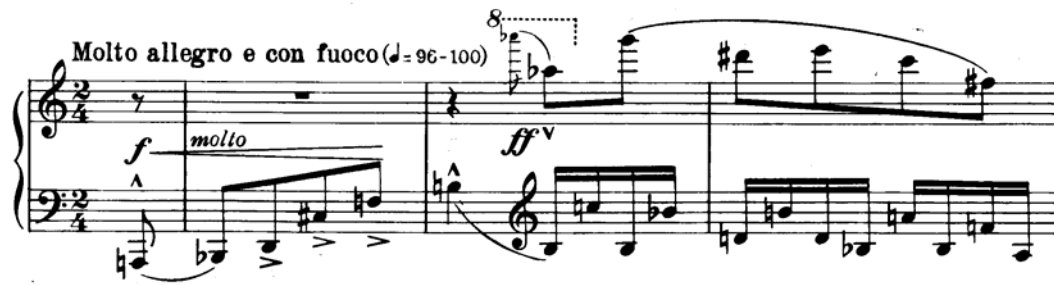


Figure 10

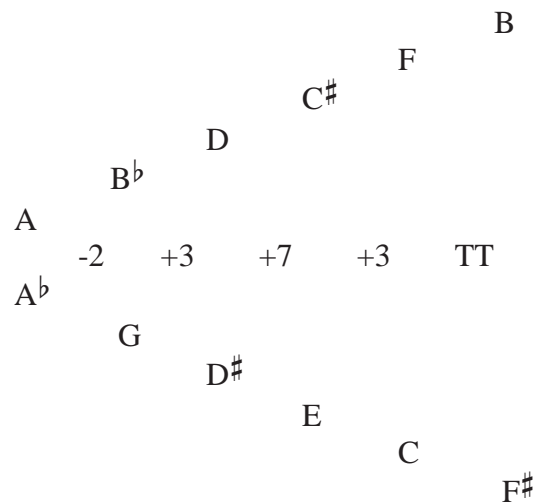
Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. II
Twelve-Tone Row

A B^b D C[#] F B || A^b G D[#] E C F[#]

When divided into two hexachords, the row demonstrates a symmetrical relationship as the intervals within each hexachord complement each other (see figure 11).

Figure 11

Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. II
Symmetrical Hexachordal Properties of Tone Row



Sessions uses the symmetry established by the opening twelve-tone row to manipulate the otherwise traditional sonata-allegro form within the second movement. The form is illustrated in figure 12.

Figure 12

Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3
(Second Movement Sonata Form)

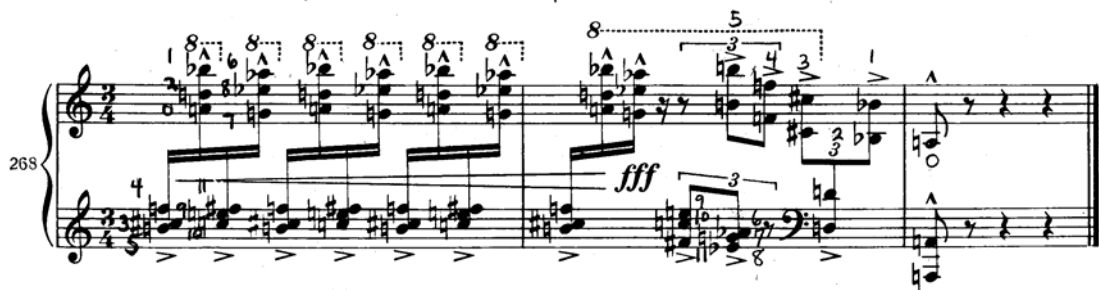
Exposition mm. 1-103		Development mm. 104-192	Recapitulation mm. 192-270	
1 st theme m. 1	2 nd theme m. 62		2 nd theme m. 193	1 st theme m. 218

Sessions creates a retrograde recapitulation by switching the first and second themes of the exposition in the reprise. This reversal of the thematic elements of sonata form creates a strong sense of symmetry that is directly influenced by the symmetry established in the initial row. Thus, Sessions uses the symmetrical characteristics of the row and applies it to traditional sonata form by incorporating the symmetry of a retrograde recapitulation. Elements of the primary row are incorporated into a basic neoclassical formal approach to create a synthesis of technique and style.

While the symmetry of the row affects the execution of sonata form in the second movement, the synthesis of twelve-tone technique and traditional form is seen on an additional level in this movement. Sessions applies the symmetry evident in the opening row to the overall frame of the second movement. In opening the movement with a symmetrical row, he applies the principal of symmetry inherent to the row to the entire movement by ending with a retrograde of the same primary row. In doing so, Sessions ends the movement just as he began and establishes an aural

sense of symmetry that is influenced by the structure of the primary row (see example 4.2).

Example 4.2. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. II, ending, mm. 268-270.



This same procedure is demonstrated in the first movement of the third sonata, where Sessions likewise uses the inherent symmetry of the initial row to generate a symmetrical frame for the entire movement. In example 4.3, the opening of the first movement is presented with an accompanying figure illustrating the row order.

Example 4.3. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-3.



Twelve-Tone Row of First Movement

Although the row of the first movement is not completely symmetrical, it has symmetrical qualities to it, in that the first and last intervals of the hexachords are intervallically related (identical or part of the same interval class). As in the second movement, the symmetry inherent to the row is applied to the overall frame of the movement with the appearance of the retrograde form of the primary row at the movement's close (see example 4.4).

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The third system of the musical score, spanning measures 93 to 95. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody in the treble staff features a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a dynamic marking of *pp* (pianissimo) at measure 94. The bass staff continues the melodic line with similar rhythmic values. A double bar line with repeat dots appears at the end of measure 94. The system concludes with a treble clef, a key signature change to two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a final measure marked *attacca!* (attaca).

91

the second movement, Sessions uses the intervallic values within the twelve-tone row to influence the broader tonal scope of the entire movement. The notes that frame the original row, A---F \sharp (see figure 10), are used to generate a tonal plan within the form of the movement. The movement begins with a low A in the bass that establishes an asserted tonal center (see example 4.5a). In measure 132, almost exactly halfway through the movement, Sessions punctuates this midpoint with a low F-sharp in the bass that is held at length and then repeated multiple times throughout the following four measures (see example 4.5b). Again, a tonal emphasis is asserted by the statement and repetition of the low F-sharp. Finally, the movement ends symmetrically with a return to the same low A as in the beginning, now supported by *fff* registral octaves (see example 4.5c).

Example 4.5a. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. II, opening, mm. 1-3.



Example 4.5b. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. II, midpoint, mm. 131-137.

Example 4.5c. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. II, closing, mm. 93-96.

Just as the twelve-tone row influences the form of the Piano Sonata No. 3, so too characteristics of row organization generate motivic material within each movement of the sonata. This motivic material, through repetition and development, constitutes the very fabric of each movement. Using elements of intervallic association from within the row, Sessions constructs whole movements with

reference to opening gestures. As in Sessions's early sonatas, a nuclear idea, generally presented in the opening statement, affects and generates the motivic material throughout the movement.

The third movement of the Piano Sonata No. 3 serves as a prime example of motivic unity that is derived from the intervallic construction of the row. The fabric of the third movement is permeated by a three-note whole-tone segment presented in the first three notes of the row: B-C[#]-D[#] (see example 4.6).

Example 4.6. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. III, mm. 1-2.

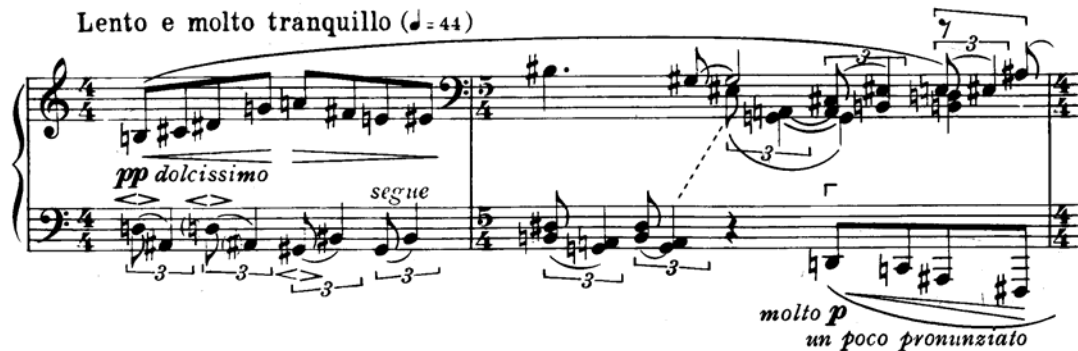


Figure 14

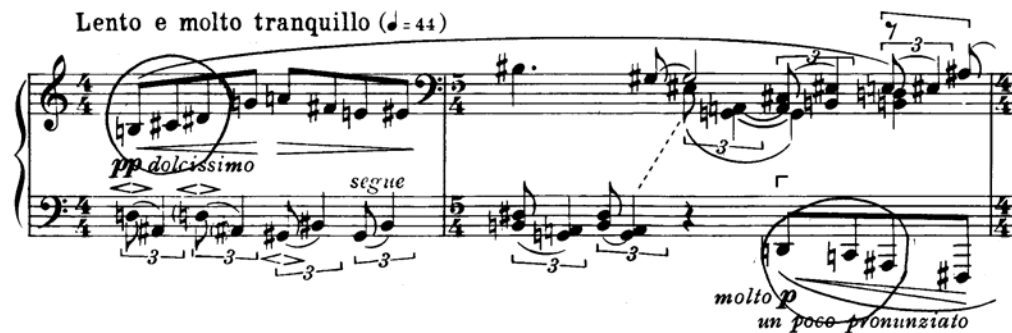
Twelve-Tone Row of Third Movement

B C[#] D[#] G A F[#] || E E[#] B[#] G[#] D C

The first three notes of the row present an ascending whole-tone segment that appears regularly throughout the movement, although at times it is altered through retrograde, augmentation and diminution. Nevertheless, the association with the opening row is

always retained, resulting in a motivically cohesive structure. Initially the motive is reiterated sparingly (see examples 4.7a, 4.7b, 4.7c, and 4.7d).

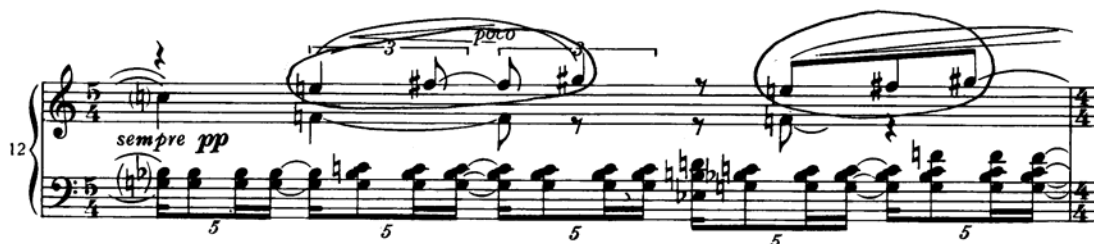
Example 4.7a. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. III, mm. 1-2.



Example 4.7b. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. III, mm. 8-9.



Example 4.7c. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. III, m. 12.



Example 4.7d. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. III, mm. 13-16.

This musical score excerpt shows measures 13 through 16 of the third movement of Sessions' Piano Sonata No. 3. The music is written in 4/4 time and is characterized by a dense texture of triplets and a recurring three-note whole-tone segment. The dynamics range from *pp* (pianissimo) to *mf* (mezzo-forte), with a *cresc. poco a poco* (crescendo poco a poco) marking. The score includes measure numbers 13, 15, and 16.

While the three-note whole-tone segment recurs throughout the entire movement, the characteristic motive completely saturates the texture during the climax in measure 25 (see example 4.8).

Example 4.8. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. III, mm. 23-26.

This musical score excerpt shows measures 23 through 26 of the third movement of Sessions' Piano Sonata No. 3. The music is written in 4/4 time and is characterized by a dense texture of triplets and a recurring three-note whole-tone segment. The dynamics range from *ff* (fortissimo) to *p* (piano), with markings for *molto animando*, *un poco meno f*, and *p*. The score includes measure numbers 23, 25, and 26.

After the motive has been retrograded, elongated, and compressed, Sessions piles the three-note motives on top of each other: forwards, backwards, diminished, augmented, syncopated and straight. This somewhat manic accumulation results in an exaggerated emotional climax and demonstrates Sessions's union of expressionistic tendencies with an almost obsessive compulsion toward traditional motivic unity and cohesion.

On another level, the whole-tone segment that opens the row of the third movement and makes up the core of motivic motion throughout the movement relates directly back to the first movement. The melody in the top line of measure 2 of the first movement presents a descending whole tone segment that undoubtedly influences and helps to generate the choice of the row for the third movement (see example 4.9).

Example 4.9. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-3.



The relationship between primary rows and motivic material exists throughout each movement of Sessions's Piano Sonata No. 3 and demonstrates the innate value that

Sessions places on motivic unity and cohesion. In the first movement of the sonata, this relationship is observed on yet another level. The original row of the first movement is organized primarily by tri-chords (see example 4.9). The tri-chordal presentation of the row permeates the entire movement, which features not only an organizational partitioning of the row, but also a device for motivic repetition and cohesion. Thus, the tri-chord characteristic of the row influences the broader motivic concept of the movement. Although tri-chords are pervasive in the first movement, they are most predominant at the onset of important structural moments. For instance, tri-chords dominate the openings of the A section at measure 1 (example 4.10a), the B section at measure 24 (example 4.10b), the return of the A section at measure 60 (example 4.10c), and the closing segment at measure 93 (example 4.10d). This motivic repetition at structurally strategic points demonstrates the cohesion of otherwise dissimilar pitch material and thereby holds the movement together in a fundamental way.

Example 4.10a. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. I, opening A section, mm.1-3.



Example 4.10b. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. I, opening of B, mm. 24-26.

un poco più corrente (♩ = 58)

p subito

Example 4.10c. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. I, reprise A, mm. 60-61.

a tempo (♩ = 54)

p subito cresc. molto ff

Example 4.10d. Sessions Piano Sonata No. 3, Mvmt. I, closing, mm. 93-96.

pp

attacca!

Sessions uses his basic original material, as presented in the twelve-tone row, to generate the very fabric of the entire Piano Sonata No. 3. These motivic associations are seen throughout all of Sessions's piano sonatas, whether they are tonal, chromatically dissonant, or dodecaphonic.

While incorporating the twelve-tone language in the Piano Sonata No. 3, Sessions demonstrates attention to structure and unity by including relevant characteristics of a more traditional neoclassical style. Through his approach to classical form and motivic unity and cohesion, Sessions is able to incorporate aspects of neoclassicism within a twelve-tone serial technique. In doing so, Sessions fuses together disparate elements of technique and style to create a new eclectic aesthetic indicative of the ever-developing American style. For Sessions, the piano sonata continued to serve as one of the most flexible mediums in which to exploit past traditions while assimilating a modern language.

Development and Assimilation of Twelve-Tone Language in Persichetti's Piano Sonata No. 11

Vincent Persichetti likewise moved towards twelve-tone compositional techniques in a way that was indicative of his individual style. Persichetti wrote three piano sonatas during the post-war era: the Piano Sonata No. 9, Op. 58 (1952), Piano

Sonata No. 10, Op. 67 (1955), and the Piano Sonata No. 11, Op. 101 (1965).⁸ While Persichetti continued to compose in a distinct style that intermixes modern eclecticism with traditional procedures, each sonata is diverse in style and effect. As in his pre-1950 piano sonatas, Persichetti uses a variety of twentieth-century techniques while continuing to work within an overall neoclassical aesthetic. In the post-1950 era, however, the use of these contemporary techniques, particularly the use of bi-tonality, seems to facilitate Persichetti's urge towards dodecaphony. Although there are noticeable changes in Persichetti's style after 1950, the most dramatic do not occur until 1965; with the Piano Sonata No.11, Op. 101 of that year, Persichetti begins to explore the twelve-tone technique. This was not necessarily an abrupt conversion, but, as with Sessions, a more gradual shift in Persichetti's compositional technique. A distinct route towards the ultimate destination of twelve-tone composition can be traced through Persichetti's preceding piano sonatas.

⁸ It should also be noted, that while relatively unrelated to the intent of this dissertation, Persichetti wrote a final piano sonata in 1980, the Piano Sonata No. 12 Op. 145. This sonata, entitled the "Mirror Sonata," does not develop Persichetti's twelve-tone style, but rather exploits yet another compositional technique seen in short sections of Persichetti's earlier sonatas. As the title indicates, the sonata is constructed solely on the basis of mirroring and intervallic symmetry. Throughout the entire sonata, the left hand mirrors the right hand. This mirroring produces a new kind of harmonic system based on intervallic symmetry. While using this more controlled system of composition, Persichetti reverts back to clear and traditional neoclassical forms such as sonata, ternary, scherzo-trio, and sonata-rondo. This sonata is yet another example of Persichetti's eclecticism so predominant throughout his oeuvre.

While Persichetti's Piano Sonatas Nos. 9 and 10 are by no means dodecaphonic compositions, several features of these works foreshadow Persichetti's pending adoption of the twelve-tone style. In particular, the prominent use of bi-tonal structures in both piano sonatas demonstrates spontaneous twelve-tone properties. This can be seen throughout the Piano Sonata No. 9 where Persichetti produces dissonant bi-tonal structures by frequently layering white-key structures on top of black-key structures, or vice versa. For instance, in measures 17-18 of the first movement, consonant tertian harmonies are juxtaposed with semi-tone and whole-tone relationships, producing dissonant and clashing chromatic harmonies: e.g. F-sharp major vs. F major, F-sharp major vs. E minor, and C minor vs. D minor. Later in measures 20-21 a similar progression is reiterated, although the relationship between the juxtaposed chords exploits mostly the tri-tone in addition to the semi-tone: C major vs. F-sharp major, C major vs. C minor, C major vs. F-sharp minor, and D major vs. D-sharp minor (see example 4.11).

Example 4.11. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 9, Mvmt. I, mm. 15-22.

Example 4.11 shows a musical score for Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 9, Movement I, measures 15-22. The score is in F major and F# major. It features a complex chromatic bi-tonality. The top system shows a right-hand melody with a left-hand accompaniment. The bottom system continues the melody and accompaniment. Dynamics include *mp*, *cresc.*, *poco accel.*, *mf cresc.*, *marc.*, *f insistendo cresc.*, and *ff*. A tempo marking of 112 is present.

This type of chromatic bi-tonality recurs throughout the final movement of the Sonata No. 9; here, mostly F major vs. F-sharp major tonalities combine (see example 4.12a,b).

Example 4.12a. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 9, Mvmt. IV, mm. 1-5.

Example 4.12a shows a musical score for Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 9, Movement IV, measures 1-5. The score is in F major and F# major. It features a complex chromatic bi-tonality. The top system shows a right-hand melody with a left-hand accompaniment. The bottom system continues the melody and accompaniment. Dynamics include *f sempre*. A tempo marking of 132 is present.

Example 4.12b. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 9, Mvmt. IV, mm. 63-67.



Finally, the bi-tonal collisions reach a climax in measures 94-101 of the final coda as Persichetti successively juxtaposes opposing harmonies: A major vs. F-sharp major, C major vs. F-sharp major, B-flat major vs. F-sharp major, D-flat major vs. F-sharp major, F major vs. F-sharp major, and F-sharp major vs. F major (see example 4.13).

Example 4.13. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 9, Mvmt. IV, mm. 93-101.

These dissonant harmonies are particularly idiomatic to the piano given that the clusters generally juxtapose white and black keys; consequently the piano sonata becomes the ideal genre for Persichetti to incorporate and experiment with these structures. Through exploiting bi-tonal structural procedures, Persichetti gradually moves towards a more experimental harmonic language. By combining chromatically opposing harmonies, Persichetti demonstrates something of a twelve-tone spontaneity. Tri-chords are combined with other tri-chords to produce chromatic hexachords, thereby anticipating an ultimate move towards dodecaphony. Thus, Persichetti forecasts his own approach towards twelve-tone composition by chromatically layering consonant materials to produce dissonant hexachords.

Similarly, Persichetti's Piano Sonata No. 10 exploits chromatic bi-tonality and incorporates certain ideas of twelve-tone composition. Consonant dyads and triads are combined with each other to create dissonant clusters from traditional harmonic materials. This is particularly evident in measures 65-66 of the first movement with the clashing progression A major vs. A-flat major, to G-sharp minor vs. G minor, to C major vs. C minor, to G-sharp major vs. G minor, to D major vs. D-flat major, to E-flat major vs. D minor. Following this progression, consonant tri-chords continue in the left hand but now combine with dissonant tri-chords in the right hand that condense chromatically: E major vs. $b^b/e^b/f$, to F major vs. $b/e/f$ (see example 4.14).

Example 4.14. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 10, Mvmt. I, mm. 65-66. Copyright 1965 by Elkan Vogel Co., Philadelphia, Pa.

The progression is dissonant and non-functional, thereby encouraging the independence of each note. The use of chromatic-dissonant clusters (tri-chords and hexachords) seems to propel Persichetti towards the equalization of all twelve tones.

While chromatic bi-tonalism was an effective way for Persichetti to gradually approach the twelve-tone language, the opening measures of the first movement of the Piano Sonata No. 10 present a different way in which Persichetti demonstrates aspects of twelve-tonalism while holding on to traditional harmonic features. Here Persichetti alternates dissonant clusters with consonant harmonies to produce somewhat of an erratic harmonic language. For example, in the opening measures of the piece, Persichetti presents chromatic cluster effects within a roaming atonality that verges on dodecaphony. All twelve-tones of the chromatic scale are presented at least twice in the first phrase, although the pitches do not adhere to any prescribed or

consistent order. Following the meandering harmonic statement, in measure 4, the music unexpectedly resolves to a clear B major chord shared by both hands (see example 4.15).

Example 4.15. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 10, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-4.



This use of tonality is in itself unconventional, and the resolution at the consonant chord is in effect much more surprising than it is settling. By combining non-functional dodecaphonic tendencies with tonal resolutions, Persichetti merges disparate harmonic languages and creates an original one. Additional examples of distinct tonal resolutions that consequently follow atonal material occur throughout the opening of the first movement at measures 4, 11, 13, 15, and 17. Through the application of bi-tonality and chromatic chord clustering, Persichetti uses the Piano

Sonata No. 10 to anticipate a twelve-tone language eventually established in his Piano Sonata No. 11.

The Piano Sonata No. 11, Op. 101 is the first sonata in which Persichetti uses a twelve-tone compositional approach. Although Persichetti specifically employs dodecaphonic procedures, the sonata does not adhere to any strict serial properties. While Persichetti dutifully presents all twelve tones before moving on to new twelve-tone sets, he does not employ a prescribed, ordered set to preside over an entire movement or even over an entire section. In this way, Persichetti uses a twelve-tone language that is free from the constrictions of serialism yet generally adheres to an overall sense of non-repetition. While sporadic fragmented repetitions occasionally appear between rows, each line is composed of independent intervallic relationships. Throughout, melodic lines and harmonic structures incorporate a steady, although erratic, succession of the twelve tones of the chromatic scale; Persichetti generally uses all twelve tones before moving on to a newly ordered set. Yet the intervallic relationships of these twelve tones constantly change, resulting in a language that is basically devoid of any large-scale tonal or serial organization. Instead, Persichetti uses the twelve-tone idiom to exploit properties of tonal freedom and equality without conforming to the pre-ordained rules of serialism. While incorporating an undetermined and inconsistent order of the twelve tones, Persichetti develops a highly experimental dodecaphonic language that is seemingly non-structured and free.

The liberated sense of atonality gives the Piano Sonata No. 11 a rather improvisational quality. Throughout, long lines are accompanied by gestural punctuations, and the overall character is far more spontaneous and fluid than his earlier piano sonatas. Likewise, on the surface, the formal structure of each movement is very free and open. There are no obvious repetitions of thematic materials within the movements or within the piece as a whole.

While an initial perception of the piece shows the form to be free and improvisatory, a closer analysis reveals a direct correlation between the twelve-tone organization and formal unity of the piece. Throughout the first movement of the sonata, Persichetti aligns occurrences of complete twelve-tone rows with the occurrences of structural phrases to produce a sense of clarity and cohesion to the overall harmonic and formal organization. In this way Persichetti brings together aspects of twelve-tone composition with neoclassical predilection for formal clarity.

The alignment of twelve-tone rows with structural phrases is the primary organizing feature of the first movement of the Piano Sonata No. 11. Here, Persichetti uses the twelve-tone rows to establish the structural elements of the movement. For instance, the first phrase of the movement, measures 1-2, consists of a seven-note fragment of a twelve-tone row that is repeated (in order) and then completed. Before moving on to each new structural phrase, Persichetti consistently presents one or more twelve-tone rows (often overlapping) in their entirety. The first

four phrases demonstrate this organizing feature (see example 4.16). Figure 15 illustrates how the twelve-tone rows line up with the phrase structure.

Example 4.16. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 11, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-10. Copyright 1966 by Elkan Vogel Co., Philadelphia, Pa.

The musical score is for Persichetti's Piano Sonata No. 11, Movement I, measures 1-10. It is written for piano and consists of four systems of staves. The first system is marked 'Risoluto (♩ = 54)' and includes dynamics like 'f con forza sfz' and 'dolce'. The second system includes 'cresc.' and 'f'. The third system includes 'cresc.' and 'f'. The fourth system includes 'mp espr.', 'p cresc. molto', 'sonoro', 'mp', 'ppp', 'ff', 'p', and 'pp'. Numbers in parentheses indicate specific performance techniques within the score.

* Numbers in parenthesis indicate specific performance techniques within the score

Figure 15

Phrase Structure and Twelve-Tone Organization of
Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 11
Movement I (opening group)

Phrase one: Measures 1-2

E F D C[#] G E^b F[#] G[#] B C B^b A

Phrase two: Measures 3-5

E^b F[#] D D^b G A^b C A B A[#] F E
F[#] G F E G[#] E^b A B^b C B C[#] D

Phrase three: Measures 5-8

F G E G[#] A D[#] A[#] C[#] B C D F[#]
B D C[#] B^b A E D[#] A^b F F[#] A C[#]
G[#] B D E^b D^b C E B^b A G G^b F
A^b B D G C E^b B^b E F F[#] A C[#]
D^b G E^b F D F[#] C G[#] B B^b E A

Phrase four: Measures 8-10

F G[#] F[#] B D E^b A[#] C[#] A C B E
F A C D[#] F[#] G[#] B D G A[#] C[#] E

Throughout the movement, Persichetti aligns complete tone rows directly with phrase structure. Thus the twelve-tone technique is incorporated into a neoclassical

aesthetic that demands structural clarity. The following figure illustrates this organizing feature as found in the first movement of Persichetti's Piano Sonata No. 11.

Figure 16

Phrase Structure and Row Organization of
Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 11
 (First Movement)

mm. 1-2	Phrase 1 E F D D ^b G E ^b F [#] E F D C [#] G E ^b F [#] G [#] A B ^b B C	row fragment plus 1 complete row
mm. 3-5	Phrase 2 E ^b F [#] D D ^b G A ^b C A B A [#] F E F [#] G F E G [#] E ^b A B ^b C B C [#] D	2 complete rows sharing E and F
mm. 5-8	Phrase 3 F G E G [#] A D [#] A [#] C [#] B C D F [#] B D C [#] B ^b A E D [#] A ^b F F [#] A C [#] G [#] B D E ^b D ^b C E B ^b A G G ^b F A ^b B D G C E ^b B ^b E F F [#] A C [#] D ^b G E ^b F D F [#] C G [#] B B ^b E A	5 complete rows rows 1 - 2 share F [#]
mm. 8-10	Phrase 4 F G [#] F [#] B D E ^b A [#] C [#] A C B E F A C D [#] F [#] G [#] B D G A [#] C [#] E	Additive chords form 2 complete rows
mm. 11-19	Phrase 5 C F D ^b G A D [#] F [#] B ^b A ^b B D E F C [#] A B F [#] C E ^b G A ^b A [#] D E D ^b F B C E ^b B ^b G [#] A E F [#] D G D F D ^b E C G ^b B B ^b A G [#] G D [#]	9 complete rows rows 3-4 share D rows 4-5 share D [#] rows 7,8,9 share E

mm. 11-19 cont.

C[#] B C E A[#] D[#] G[#] A F F[#] D G
C[#] E D F C A D[#] F[#] B G[#] G A[#]
F[#] F G E^b D A A^b C[#] C B B^b E
E F[#] G B B^b A^b A C D C[#] E^b F
F G F[#] C[#] D E^b A G[#] E B^b B C

mm. 20-22

Phrase 6

E C F[#] G B A^b B^b D C[#] A E^b F
D C[#] C G[#] B E D[#] B^b F G F[#] A
E^b E F F[#] G G[#] B^b A D C[#] B[#] B
A^b C G A[#] C[#] D[#] F[#] A B D E F
F[#] A C[#] G[#] G B^b D C E^b F B G[#]
F[#] G D A B B^b D[#] C[#] E C F G[#]

6 complete rows
rows 1,3 share E^b, F
rows 2,3 share G[#]

mm. 22-24

Phrase 7

G[#] G B F A F[#] A[#] D[#] D E C[#] C
F[#] A F B G A[#]
F A[#] D[#] F[#] G[#] B D A E G C C[#]
F[#] B B^b E^b F C G[#] D A E G C[#]
D[#] F[#] B B^b C F G[#] D A E G C[#]
F C D[#] F[#] G[#] B D A E G B^b C[#]
D[#] A E G C F G[#] D F[#] C[#] B B^b

6 complete rows
plus row fragment

mm. 24-26

Phrase 8

A^b C F G E A B^b D B D[#] F[#] C[#]
D[#] F[#] C A E G A[#] B D F C[#] G[#]

2 complete rows

mm. 26-27

Phrase 9

D C D[#] B A[#] E F A F[#] G[#] G D^b
G^b F A^b A B^b F^b E^b B D C D^b G
B A^b F E F[#] E^b G A B^b C C[#] D
F B G[#] C[#] E E^b A D F[#] C B^b G

4 complete rows
rows 1-2 share D^b

mm. 28-30

Phrase 10

E^b D G^b F D^b A^b C G A B B^b E
C[#] F G^b C G B D A B^b E E^b G[#]
G F[#] A[#] D[#] B F A E C C[#] G[#] D

3 complete rows
rows 2-3 share G[#]

mm. 31-33

Phrase 11

C E^b C[#] E G[#] D F G A[#] B F[#] A
G[#] C A F D B^b E F[#] B D[#] G C[#]
F[#] D F B E^b E C C[#] A G G[#] A[#]
F B A D[#] D G[#] E C C[#] G A[#] A

4 complete rows
rows 3-4 share G[#]

mm. 34-35

Phrase 12

E^b G D E[#] G[#] A[#] C[#] E B F[#] A C
F A C D[#] F[#] G[#] B D B^b D^b E G
C D^b B D B^b E G[#] D[#] A F G F[#]
G[#] A C E B C[#] D

3 complete rows

plus row fragment

Persichetti incorporates a method of organization that unites phrase structure with his generally non-repetitive twelve-tone language. Through this consistent means of organization, Persichetti creates a sense of stability and structure within a highly arbitrary and experimental tonal language. By aligning complete (albeit irregular) twelve-tone rows with a predominantly clear phrase structure, Persichetti merges aspects of twelve-tone composition with a traditional sense of form.

On a broader level, Persichetti applies aspects of sonata form to twelve-tone composition in the first movement of the Piano Sonata No. 11. The following figure illustrates the form of the first movement (figure 17).

Figure 17

Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 11
(First Movement Sonata Form)

Exposition mm. 1-10		Development mm. 11-22	Recapitulation mm. 22-35	
1 st theme m. 1-2	2 nd theme m. 5-8		1 st theme m. 22-24	2 nd theme m. 26-28

Formal divisions are not necessarily based on thematic repetition but instead on characteristics of the twelve-tone organization within phrase structures. For instance, the opening phrase of the movement consists of a seven-note fragment of the twelve-tone row, followed by the reiteration of these notes and then the completion of the row (see example 4.17).

Example 4.17. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 11, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-3.



This same feature occurs in the second half of measure 22 where phrase seven begins with a seven-note fragment that is then repeated (in retrograde order minus the G[#] and ending with A[#]) and followed by the completion of the twelve-tone row (see example 4.18).

Example 4.18. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 11, Mvmt. I, recap., mm. 22-24.

Although the phrases are dissimilar in terms of pitch content and melodic repetition, the unique structural organization of the twelve-tones (seven-note fragment—repetition—completion) unites these two phrases and defines phrase seven as the recapitulation of the movement.

The second theme of the sonata form structure is more clearly identified in the recapitulation by a direct return of thematic material. The thematic material of phrase three in measures 5-8 of the exposition returns in phrase nine, measures 26-28 of the recapitulation (see example 4.19a and 4.19b). This is seen and heard through the direct reiteration of rhythmic and gestural motives; however, in the recapitulation, the actual melodic and harmonic material is obscured.

Example 4.19a. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 11, Mvmt. I, 2nd theme, mm. 5-7.



Example 4.19b. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 11, recap. 2nd theme, mm. 26-27.



Associations exist not only in pitch order but also in the rhythmic, textural and gestural material. In the exposition, each row that was used in treble melody,

accompanied by bass punctuations, is switched in the recapitulation so that the melody is in the bass accompanied by tri-chordal punctuations in the treble. Also, the intervals that constituted the melody and harmony in the exposition become inverted in the recapitulation. Therefore the second theme area in the recapitulation of this movement is a texturally symmetrical inversion of the second theme area in the exposition. Despite the inverted disguise, the material is still gesturally and rhythmically identical to the material in the exposition and secures the structural distinction of the second theme within sonata form.

The first movement of the Piano Sonata No. 11 demonstrates how Persichetti merges a free twelve-tone language with a more controlled approach to form and structure. Persichetti incorporates traditional ideas of sonata form while transforming and disguising it, thereby assimilating an experimental twelve-tone language into a neoclassical approach. While the initial conception of form and tonality seems arbitrary and completely free, upon careful scrutiny the movement reveals that it is thoughtfully constructed through new and experimental means. Persichetti ultimately combines the two disparate aesthetics of an atonal twelve-tone language and neoclassicism then liberates both to produce a completely new aesthetic.

Throughout the Piano Sonata No. 11, Persichetti combines neoclassical characteristics with his modern dodecaphonic language. As discussed in Chapter Two, distinct neoclassical characteristics seen throughout his early sonatas include the use of traditional form and simple linear textures. In the Piano Sonata No. 11,

Persichetti assimilates a new atonal language into the prevailing neoclassical style and aesthetic while also exploring simple textures and neo-baroque contrapuntal techniques that allude to a traditional compositional style. Opting for a more contemporary compositional language in the Piano Sonata No. 11, Persichetti nonetheless maintains certain neoclassical approaches to formal and textural design.

One of the most obvious features of neoclassicism seen in Persichetti's Piano Sonata No. 11 is the prominent use of simple textures, often enlivened by contrapuntal techniques. For instance, throughout the second movement of the sonata, the texture is thin and very clear. Generally no more than two voices at one time are incorporated. Some form of imitative counterpoint occurs throughout most of the movement, although the imitation tends to be more on a gestural level and often based on contour and character rather than literal pitch reiteration. The aural effect is nevertheless clearly imitative in style and quality. For example, the opening of the invention-style movement demonstrates a perceived imitation while maintaining adherence to a generally non-repetitive twelve-tone language (see example 4.20).

Example 4.20. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 10, Mvmt. II, mm. 1-9.



Additionally, other traditionally baroque techniques of literal imitation, mirroring, inversion, and retrograde are seen in several sections throughout the second movement. For instance, direct imitation of material alternating with contrary mirroring and parallel inversion is seen throughout measures 56-66. While the technique of imitation and inversion is sophisticated, the texture still remains simple and accessible (see example 4.21).

Example 4.21. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 10, Mvmt. II, mm. 56-66.

This same alternation of contrapuntal techniques is seen in measures 83-94, which present contrapuntal material in parallel and contrary motion (see example 4.22).

Example 4.22. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 10, Mvmt. II, mm. 82-95.

The musical score for Example 4.22, Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 10, Mvmt. II, mm. 82-95, is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 82-85) shows a right-hand melody with a fermata and a left-hand accompaniment. Dynamics include *ff*, *p*, *ff*, and *f*. The second system (measures 86-89) continues the right-hand melody and left-hand accompaniment. Dynamics include *mf* and *f*. The third system (measures 90-95) features a right-hand melody and left-hand accompaniment. Dynamics include *caloso*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, beams, and dynamic markings.

A complex retrograde technique is used in measures 34-44. Here, the clear three-part counterpoint in measures 40-44 is a literal retrograde of the previous four measures at measures 34-38 (see example 4.23).

Example 4.23. Persichetti Piano Sonata No. 10, Mvmt. II, mm. 34-45.

The musical score for Persichetti's Piano Sonata No. 10, Movement II, measures 34-45, is presented in three systems. The first system shows a complex texture with many beamed sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The second system includes a 'retrograde' section where the melody is played backwards, marked with 'p' (piano) and 'cresc. poco a poco' (crescendo poco a poco). The third system ends with a fortissimo (f) dynamic marking.

Although the textures and contrapuntal techniques used in this movement are distinctly clear and understandable, the form of the movement is less comprehensible. The overall form is multi-sectional and free with little to no structural repetition or large-scale cohesion. Instead of large-scale cohesion, however, Persichetti presents unity on a more microscopic level through imitation, inversion, mirroring, and retrograde. By doing so, Persichetti merges together experimental aspects of free form with traditional aspects of contrapuntal technique and discipline.

Persichetti uses the piano sonata genre to create a unique and innovative style that boldly combines an atonal, twelve-tone language with traditional compositional

features of form and technique. Throughout the Piano Sonata No. 11, he uses long-established aspects of the piano sonata genre while employing traditional means towards this innovation. Persichetti uses the piano sonata to create a twelve-tone language that is derived from the idiomatic relationship of the black and white keys of the piano keyboard. Also, he incorporates sonata form in a completely disguised fashion that exploits a modern, free, and improvised style while adhering to traditional formal principals. Finally, while experimenting with an innovative dodecaphonic language, Persichetti employs contrapuntal techniques and textures that harken back to more traditional styles. In this merging of disparate materials, techniques and aesthetics, Persichetti helps to transform the American piano sonata genre into a form defined by its flexibility, diversity, and eclecticism.

Development and Assimilation of Twelve-Tone Language in Finney's *Sonata Quasi Una Fantasia*

Unlike Vincent Persichetti and Roger Sessions, Ross Lee Finney adopted the twelve-tone language abruptly and immediately following the events of World War II. Whereas Persichetti and Sessions gradually assimilated dodecaphonic procedures into their piano sonatas, the line between Finney's pre- and post-serial piano sonatas is distinct. Nevertheless, while directly assuming a twelve-tone language in the 1950s, Finney maintained prevalent aspects of his prior neoclassical style to forge an idiosyncratically organic integration of traditional style and contemporary technique.

In the post-war era, Finney faced a sudden realization that he could no longer write music in the same way that he had before the war. With this awareness, Finney immediately switched from the overt American, neoclassical aesthetic of the pre-war era to a more abstract and expressionistic twelve-tone language.⁹ Finney stated:

It is true that, in my earlier music, I was seeking for clarity of function— that is, tonal clarity, with the result of stability of form. The break in my style really was due to my service in the Second World War. When I came back from that experience, it was very difficult to go on doing things just as I had in the past. After the war, I was restless and I could not feel comfortable with the statement and materials I was using. That is probably what led me to the twelve-tone technique¹⁰... I have such memories of the utter hopelessness of trying to express the feelings I had in the same way that I had before the war. In other words, when I got back from this, I felt that I had to have more expressive stuff in my vocabulary. Then, I suddenly found myself writing 12-tone technique.¹¹

Finney first began to incorporate the twelve-tone method in 1950 with his String Quartet No. 6, and subsequently, each work after 1950 was composed with the twelve-tone technique. Like Sessions, Finney had been exposed to twelve-tone serialism in the early 1930s when he studied the technique with Alban Berg in Vienna.¹² Indicative of the American compositional norm in the decades before

⁹ Apple-Monson writes, “Finney’s interest in nationalistic music waned after the war, and he turned from his early Midwestern influences (which were basically tonal) to a more chromatic style.” Linda Apple-Monson, “The Solo Piano Music of Ross Lee Finney” (D.M.A. diss., Peabody Conservatory of Music, 1986), 5-6.

¹⁰ Ibid., 219.

¹¹ Cole Gagne and Tracey Caras, *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1982), 184.

¹² Finney states, “When I was in Vienna (studying with Berg), Hauer’s music was played a lot. His concept was a little different from Schoenberg’s in that he was concerned with hexachords, which he called ‘tropes.’ I disliked his music, I must

World War II, Finney's music adhered to neoclassical aesthetics. And while Finney's compositional technique quickly shifted in 1950, he assimilated distinct elements of neoclassicism into the twelve-tone aesthetic, thereby achieving an eclectic fusion of styles.

This blending of the neoclassical aesthetic and twelve-tone idiom was particularly influenced by Finney's fondness for traditional genres.¹³ For Finney, the genre of the piano sonata had innate, classical qualities that he could vary and expand.¹⁴ While Finney's compositional language significantly changed in the post-war era, his approach to twelve-tone music nevertheless was deeply influenced by the neoclassical aesthetics found in his previous sonatas. While adhering to neoclassical traits developed within his Piano Sonatas Nos. 1-4, in 1961, Finney adopted and assimilated twelve-tone serialism into the genre with his fifth piano sonata, the *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia*.

In the *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia*, Finney does not merely juxtapose aspects of neoclassicism within a twelve-tone idiom but rather uses neoclassical

admit, but I think that, nevertheless, this concept of a symmetrical row that divides into two groups of six—into hexachords—has had an effect on me.” Gagne and Caras, *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers*, 184.

¹³ In addition to Finney's five piano sonatas, he also wrote in other traditional genres such as the string quartet, of which he composed eight, the symphony, of which he wrote four, and numerous chamber music works for piano and strings.

¹⁴ Demonstrating his classical influences, Finney said that his *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia* “wasn't really a sonata, and it wasn't, strictly speaking, a fantasy. So I borrowed from Beethoven.” (The allusion is to Beethoven's Piano Sonatas Op. 27, nos. 1 and 2.) Reginald G. Rodgers, “With a North Dakota Rubato: The Solo Piano Works of Ross Lee Finney” (D.M.A. diss., University of Maryland, 1991), 51.

characteristics to create a distinctive twelve-tone language. Like Sessions and Persichetti, Finney's style actually assimilates aspects of neoclassicism into the twelve-tone serial language and vice versa. Therefore, instead of juxtaposing the diverse aesthetics of neoclassicism and twelve-tone serialism, Finney creates an innovative twelve-tone language that is primarily based on neoclassical premises. This is demonstrated in the *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia* through Finney's choice of twelve-tone row materials, his appropriation of tonal procedures, and the way in which Finney uses the twelve-tone row to influence form.

Finney achieves a significant integration in the *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia* through the symmetrical construction of the row and intervallic relationships within the row. The primary row used in all three movements comprises two symmetrical hexachords.¹⁵ By basing the row on symmetrical hexachords, Finney establishes a language that promotes the repetition of like intervals. For instance, the opening row of the first movement presents the repetition of major and minor seconds, establishing a distinctly diatonic language. The comparison of the first theme area at measure 1 and the second theme area at measure 78 demonstrates the reiteration of like intervals

¹⁵ Apple-Monson suggests there are two sets used for all three movements; however, the sets are so closely related (intervallic material for both is limited to semi-tones and whole-tones), that it seems that the second set is merely a permutation of the first. Apple-Monson qualifies this by stating that the row has "numerous permutations and transformations" through the entire sonata. Apple-Monson, "The Solo Piano Music of Ross Lee Finney," 132.

within melodically and characteristically diverse themes (see examples 4.24a and 4.24b).

Example 4.24a. Finney *Sonata Quasi Una Fantasia*, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-8. Copyright 1966 by Henmar Press Inc.

Example 4.24a shows the first eight measures of the first movement. The right hand (R.H.) begins with a fortissimo (ff) chord, followed by a melody marked mezzo-forte (mf) with a crescendo. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment. Dynamics range from ff to ff marcato. Fingering is indicated for the right hand: 2 3 1 2 3, 4 1 3 2 3 4, and 5 3 5 3.

Example 4.24b. Finney *Sonata Quasi Una Fantasia*, Mvmt. I, mm. 75-85.

Example 4.24b shows measures 75-85. The tempo is marked 'd. = J = 100 teneramente'. The right hand features a melody with dynamics ranging from pianissimo (pp) to mezzo-piano (mp). The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with dynamics from pp to p. Pedal markings are present in the left hand.

The consistent repetition of intervals within the row, and consequently throughout the piece, results in a cohesion of harmonic sound fundamental to traditional tonality.

Furthermore, Finney's use of intervals, which he limits to half-tones and whole-tones, relates directly to the intervallic structure of traditional tonal scales.

The primary row is announced in the first two measures of the piece (see example 4.25) and has a symmetrical design that is apparent on multiple levels.

Example 4.25. Finney *Sonata Quasi Una Fantasia*, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-4.



Figure 18

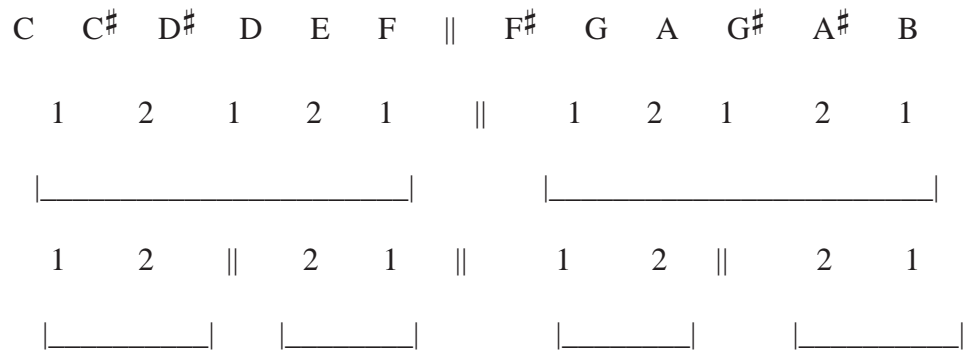
Primary Row in Finney's *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia*

C	C#	D#	D	E	F		F#	G	A	G#	A#	B
_____						_____						
_____		_____				_____		_____				

This twelve-tone row features the symmetrical relationship of the hexachords, and the tri-chords within the hexachords are also symmetrically related. The symmetrical relationship of half-tones to whole-tones (the only intervals demonstrated in the row) is shown in figure 19.

Figure 19

Intervallic Relationships in the Primary Row
of Finney's *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia*



A relationship can be discerned between the intervallic construction of this row and that of the traditional major scale (see figure 20).

Figure 20

Intervallic Relationships Between Notes of a
Major Scale



The major scale above comprises two tetrachords that share identical half-tone and whole-tone intervallic relationships.

Both Finney's twelve-tone row for the *Sonata Quasi Una Fantasia* and the major scale can be divided into equal divisions of half-tone and whole-tone subcollections: Finney's row has two symmetrical hexachords (half-whole-half-whole-half) and four symmetrical trichords (half-whole, whole-half); the major scale uses two parallel tetrachords (whole-whole-half)(see figures 19 and 20). While the structures are by no means identical, the influence of traditional diatonicism on Finney's choice of row construction is unmistakable. In addition to diatonic suggestions, the consistency of half-tones and whole-tones also give the row chromatic and octatonic scale implications. The clear relationship between Finney's row in the *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia* and the traditional major scale demonstrates the organic assimilation of a tonal practice—generally associated with a neoclassical style—into the twelve-tone method. Of course, inherent differences also exist between tonality and a twelve-tone language, most notably the innate characteristic of function in tonality versus equal weight in the twelve-tone system. The comparison of half-tone and whole-tone subcollections merely presents Finney's incorporation of traditional diatonic step-wise motion into his twelve-tone row. By combining semi-tone and whole-tone intervals within a hexachordal and trichordal symmetry, Finney produces a multifaceted language that evenhandedly merges aspects of tonality and twelve-tone serialism.

According to Finney, his incorporation of hexachordal symmetry also stems from distinctly American roots. Finney explained that

My serial music is always made on the basis of symmetrical hexachords. There are so many (American) folk songs as well as simple hymns that are based on the pentatonic scale. So suddenly, in the hexachordal theory that has dominated my music, I find all kinds of roots that delve back into my memory.¹⁶

By using symmetrical hexachords as the basis for his twelve-tone row in the *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia*, Finney not only develops a twelve-tone language that extends and develops the intervallic relationships characteristic to traditionally tonal structures but also draws on traditionally American influences.¹⁷ Finney thus merges and unites several diverse aesthetics, including twelve-tone serialism, expressionism, neo-tonality, neoclassicism, and even an American folk procedure to create a uniquely integrated language. Yet while Finney's post-1950 style incorporates many aesthetic and compositional attributes, the eclectic mix of stable and unstable tonal influences results in a basic twelve-tone language that remains aurally abstract, experimental, and seemingly free.

In addition to using a twelve-tone row that, by its intervallic construction, incorporates traditional diatonic structures, Finney incorporates more overt references to elements of the neoclassical style throughout the *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia*. For instance, in each movement of the sonata, Finney superimposes an asserted tonality,

¹⁶ Apple-Monson, "The Solo Piano Music of Ross Lee Finney," 15.

¹⁷ While Finney alludes to the commonality between the use of pentachords in American folk songs, and hexachords in his twelve-tone language, the connection between the two is not inherent but rather contextual.

or “pitch polarity,” on the atonal twelve-tone language.¹⁸ In discussing Finney’s tonal system, Henry Onderdonk writes: “To develop a style, an artist must be strongly committed in at least one of three directions: to himself, to his time, or to his tradition. Finney’s commitment is to all three. When he adopted twelve-tone practice, he maintained his belief in the tonality that had dominated his early scores.”¹⁹ This merging of tonal elements with serial elements—so fundamental to Finney’s twelve-tone approach—is evident on several levels. For instance, while Finney incorporates the twelve-tone technique throughout the *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia*, he nevertheless imposes a prominent sense of tonality by creating tonal centers for each movement.²⁰ The tonal centers are established by assertion; in the beginnings of movements pitch polarity is presented generally by repetition within bass or treble figures and then is reiterated throughout the movement. For instance, the pitch polarity for the first movement of the *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia* is G-sharp, presented first in the opening as a grounding bass and then reiterated throughout the movement in measures 4, 7, 9, 16, 20, 27, 28, 48, 63, 68, 82, 149, 214, 217, 222, 252,

¹⁸ From personal interviews with Finney, Reginald Rogers states that “he [Finney] dislikes the word ‘tonal’ and prefers ‘pitch polarity’ for referring to orientation around a central pitch, a property he believes can be maintained in serial music.” Rogers, “With a North Dakota Rubato,” 5.

¹⁹ Henry Onderdonk, “Aspects of Tonality in the Music of Ross Lee Finney,” in *Perspectives on American Composers*, ed. Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone (New York: Norton, 1971), 248.

²⁰ Apple-Monson writes: “Incorporating aspects of tonality within a twelve-tone framework is an important feature throughout all of his [Finney’s] serial works. For example, a single note of the set is selected as the tonal center and remains an important ‘pitch focus’ for the entire movement or section of the piece.” Apple-Monson, “The Solo Piano Music of Ross Lee Finney,” 225.

259, 261, and 262. This assertion of pitch polarity results in a pervasive sense of tonal cohesion. The establishment of pitch polarity within each movement of the sonata allows Finney to develop a language that applies the stability of tonality on a superficial level while incorporating an abstract twelve-tone language on an intricate level.

Finney also presents an element of pitch polarity by incorporating recurring harmonic sonorities throughout the entire sonata. The opening sonority of the first movement, an implied dominant-ninth chord comprised of a G-sharp in the bass and a seventh chord in the treble, is reiterated consistently throughout the first movement and is alluded to either directly or indirectly throughout the entire piece.²¹ The opening tertian-based sonority thus becomes a defining element that holds the movement as well as the entire piece together. Example 4.26 shows the reiteration of the opening ninth chord sonority (implied or otherwise) in the first fourteen measures of the piece.

²¹ The combination of the seventh chord layered on top of the G-sharp pitch polarity is seen throughout the movement in many different guises, including incomplete seventh chords, implied seventh chords, and inverted seventh chords.

Example 4.26. Finney *Sonata Quasi Una Fantasia*, Mvmt. I, mm. 1-14.

The opening G-sharp establishes the pitch polarity for the entire movement while the ninth chord becomes a unifying sonority heard throughout the entire piece. This opening chord thus influences and establishes a tonal basis for the piece. In an interview with Maurice Hinson, Finney acknowledged that

The tonal implication of the dominant ninth, so obvious at the start (of the work), is not solved until the last note of the sonata. All the arrival points in pitch are related to that implication in the gestalt of the opening measures.²²

²² Maurice Hinson, "The Solo Keyboard Works of Ross Lee Finney," *American Music Teacher* 20, no. 6 (1971): 16.

By asserting tonally and harmonically grounded elements within an organized twelve-tone serial language, Finney unites conflicting features of tonality and twelve-tone serialism.

The ninth-chord sonority presented at the opening of the movement, however, is not a separate harmonic entity independent from the overall twelve-tone language of the piece but is derived directly from the movement's twelve-tone row and used throughout as a device of motivic cohesion that represents the primary row. A rotational procedure that organizes the row leads to the formation of the opening ninth chord, which then relates to the row on several levels (see figure 21).

Figure 21

Intervallic Relationships in the Primary Row
of Finney's *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia*

C	C#	D#	D	E	F		F#	G	A	G#	A#	B
_____			_____				_____			_____		
1	2		2	1			1	2		2	1	

Construction of Opening Ninth Sonority

F# A (C) E G#

Interval sets within the ninth sonority include identical interval sets in the tri-chord constructions of the row. For instance, emulating the 2-1 interval sets characteristic to the second and fourth tri-chords of the row, the 2-1 interval set is displayed by the use of F#, G#, and A in the opening ninth sonority. The E in the sonority derives from the left hand figure in measure 3: the G-F figure is completed by the E in the opening sonority to establish a 1-2 interval set (E-F-G) that reflects the first and third tri-chords of the twelve-tone row. Additionally, the generation of the ninth chord is influenced by the first note of the first, third and fourth tri-chords: C (as an implied note within the ninth chord sonority), F#, and G#. Therefore, the ninth chord, a traditional tertian harmony, is derived directly from the opening twelve-tone row. Finney thus establishes a basis for the interaction between traditional tertian structures and a contemporary twelve-tone language throughout the piece.

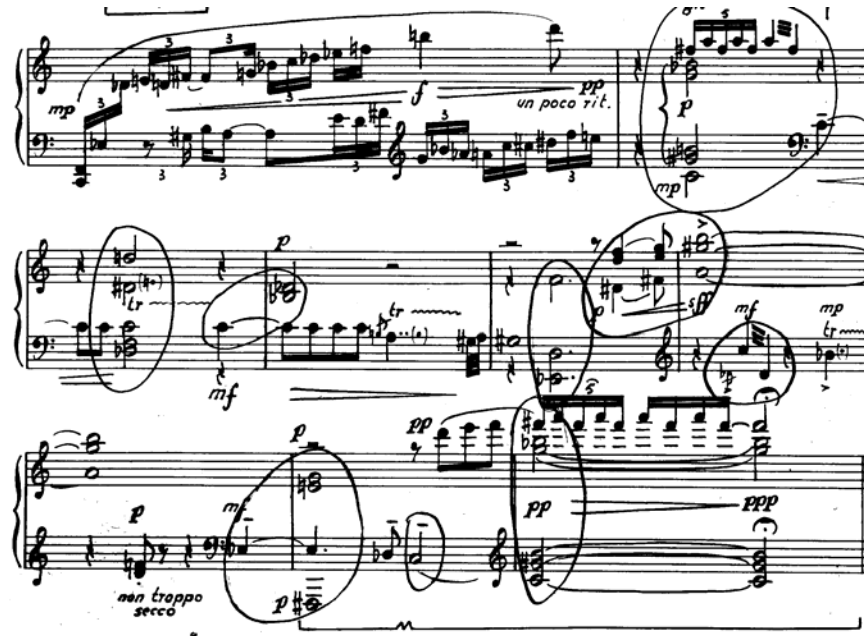
The establishment of pitch polarity and reiteration of the ninth sonority is also evident throughout the second and third movements of Finney's *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia*. In the second movement, the opening ninth chord built on middle C establishes a pitch polarity that is subsequently supported by the reiteration of C throughout. The opening twelve measures of the second movement show the predominance of seventh and ninth chords; the pitch polarity of C is demonstrated through assertion (see example 4.27).

Example 4.27. Finney *Sonata Quasi Una Fantasia*, Mvmt. II, mm. 1-14.

The musical score for Example 4.27 consists of four systems of music. The first system begins with the tempo marking 'Largo sostenuto' and a tempo of quarter note = 60. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score is written for piano and includes a C-clef in the bass line. Circled annotations highlight specific harmonic structures, particularly ninth chords and sonorities centered on the C pitch polarity. The score includes various articulations such as trills (tr) and slurs, and dynamic markings like piano (p) and mezzo-forte (mf).

While much of the fundamental harmonic material of this movement is made up of the ninth sonority centered on the C pitch polarity, the final eight measures demonstrate a saturation of the ninth chord motive. In this codetta (measures 32-39), an implied dominant ninth permeates chordal sonorities throughout the end of the movement, while the C pitch polarity is supported through constant repetition. The final resolved chord, which is similar to the opening chord, is another ninth sonority built upon a C in the bass (see example 4.28).

Example 4.28. Finney *Sonata Quasi Una Fantasia*, Mvmt. II, mm. 31-39.



The consistent incorporation of the ninth sonorities and an establishment of pitch polarity throughout each movement of Finney's *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia* results in an abstract harmonic language that nonetheless retains elements of tonal cohesion. By reiterating chosen sonorities and pitch centers, Finney juxtaposes a sense of tonal and harmonic stability within a twelve-tone serial language to reconcile opposing tonal and atonal characteristics.

In much the same way that tonality is incorporated and assimilated into twelve-tone serialism, Finney modifies traditional forms within the movements of the *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia* to accommodate and integrate characteristics of his twelve-tone language. While Finney retains prominent features of traditional forms, as evident in the sonata form of the first movement, ternary form of the second

movement, and rondo form of the third movement, he nevertheless is influenced by certain elements of his serial language that are then applied to traditional formal structures. The most prominent and influential feature of Finney's twelve-tone language, which is consequently assimilated into the traditional forms, is his use of hexachordal symmetry.

Finney synthesizes neoclassical form and twelve-tone hexachordal symmetry in the first movement of the *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia*. While the overall formal structure of the movement adheres to a basic outline of traditional sonata form, Finney applies symmetrical characteristics found in the hexachordal and tri-chordal relationships within the primary row of the piece. This application of symmetry to the formal structure is evident in the relationship between large sections as well as within important structural phrases.

The broad formal plan for the first movement (see figure 22) demonstrates a clear implementation of sonata form elements.

Figure 22

Finney Sonata Quasi una Fantasia
(First Movement Sonata Form)

Exposition mm. 1-106		Development mm. 107-182	Recapitulation mm. 183-262	
1 st theme area mm. 1-77	2 nd theme area mm. 78- 106		2 nd theme area mm. 183-209	1 st theme area mm. 210-262

While Finney incorporates distinct elements of sonata form, symmetry is initially apparent in the return of the second theme in the recapitulation. As in the retrograde recapitulation observed in the second movement of Sessions's Piano Sonata No. 3, Finney applies the symmetry inherent in the primary row to the overall sonata form structure by reversing the appearance of the first and second themes in the recapitulation. While the symmetry here is evident, it is not especially remarkable, considering the precedents for broad-scale retrograde reprises. Upon closer examinations, however, symmetry is apparent on several, more significant levels (see figure 23).

Figure 23

Finney Sonata Quasi una Fantasia
(First Movement Sonata Form)

Exposition mm. 1-106		Development mm. 107-182	Recapitulation mm. 183-262
1 st Theme Area	2 nd Theme Area	2 nd Theme Area	1 st Theme Area
theme A (1-33)	theme D (78-106)	theme D (183-209)	theme A (210-17)
theme B (34-57)			theme C (218-27)
theme C (58-67)			theme B (228-51)
theme A (68-77)			theme A (252-62)

Symmetry is evident in the appearance of the multiple themes of the first theme area between the exposition and the recapitulation. The symmetrical presentation of the themes is diagrammed as follows:

Figure 24

Thematic Appearance in First Movement of
Finney's *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia*

A B C A D || development || D A C B A

This symmetrical appearance of themes demonstrates Finney's application of the row's symmetry to traditional sonata form.

Yet upon even closer examination, symmetry is even more thoroughly incorporated into the overall form. While the appearance of the thematic material in the recapitulation is clearly recognized through the recurrence of each theme's distinct character, tempo, rhythm, and texture, the melodic and harmonic relationships within each theme are not identical between the exposition and the recapitulation. Instead of presenting the themes with their original pitch classes and intervallic relationships, Finney distinguishes them by character and style only. While disguising the melodic and harmonic characteristics of the principle themes, Finney incorporates yet another level of symmetry into the overall form. In the recapitulation, instead of presenting thematic material by adhering to the themes' melodic and tonal characteristics, Finney uses an exact retrograde of the entire melodic, harmonic, and tonal structure of the exposition as the primary musical material throughout the recapitulation. In other words, the melodic and harmonic material used in measures 183 through 252 is a direct and symmetrical retrograde of the melodic and harmonic material used in the exposition in measures 34-106. To

demonstrate this symmetrical relationship, example 4.29a and 4.29b present measures 99-106 next to the symmetrical retrograde at measures 183-188, and likewise pairs measures 34-48 to its retrograde return in measures 239- 252 (examples 4.30a and 4.30b).

Example 4.29a. Finney *Sonata Quasi Una Fantasia*, Mvmt. I, mm. 99-106.

Example 4.29b. Finney *Sonata Quasi Una Fantasia*, Mvmt. I, mm. 182-188.

Example 4.30a. Finney *Sonata Quasi Una Fantasia*, Mvmt. I, mm. 33-48.

Example 4.30a shows the musical score for measures 33-48 of the first movement of Finney's *Sonata Quasi Una Fantasia*. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a piano introduction with a 'p' dynamic and 'capriccioso' marking. The right hand plays a melodic line with a fermata over measure 33. The left hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment. The score includes fingerings (4 5 3, 2 1 5 2 1, 2 1 4, 5 2, 1) and a 'Ped' (pedal) marking at the end.

Example 4.30b. Finney *Sonata Quasi Una Fantasia*, Mvmt. II, mm. 31-39.

Example 4.30b shows the musical score for measures 31-39 of the second movement of Finney's *Sonata Quasi Una Fantasia*. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a piano introduction with a 'mf' dynamic and 'f' marking. The right hand plays a melodic line with a fermata over measure 31. The left hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment. The score includes fingerings (4 5 3, 2 1 5 2 1, 2 1 4, 5 2, 1) and a 'cresc.' (crescendo) marking at the end.

The first movement of the *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia* is a prime example of how Finney assimilates symmetrical qualities of his twelve-tone language into traditional sonata-allegro form. While preserving conventional formal structures, Finney nevertheless expands and develops traditional form by mapping properties of his twelve-tone row onto the formal structures. On multiple levels, Finney incorporates symmetrical characteristics of his primary row to create and manipulate formal relationships derived from the basic language of the piece.

Finney's *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia* represents an integrated synthesis of the neoclassical style and the twelve-tone idiom. By creating a twelve-tone language that is fundamentally derived from the intervallic relationships of diatonic scales, imposing pitch polarity onto an otherwise abstract atonal language, and applying symmetrical values characteristic of the primary row to traditional formal structures, Finney merges and assimilates traditional and modern aspects of tonality, harmonic structure, and form. In so doing, Finney reconciles and unites neoclassical characteristics with twelve-tone serialism in the most organic way, giving balance to both aesthetic and technique, while establishing a new style that is based on the equal merging of these ideas.

CONCLUSION

Commenting on the significance of the sonata form, Charles Rosen has suggested that the “sonata was a vehicle of the sublime, a form in which the highest musical ambitions could be realized.”¹ From its beginning in the early classical period through the romantic and modern eras, the piano sonata has held a fundamental position in the oeuvres of major composers. Building on the traditions of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, and Liszt, American composers presumably viewed the genre as somewhat of a rite of passage. Almost every important American composer of the twentieth century wrote one or more piano sonatas—a remarkable fact, given the sharp decline in the number of piano sonatas composed in Europe during the twentieth century.² As composers in the U.S. began to develop an independent voice in the twentieth century, it seems significant that the piano sonata was a genre of choice for so many American composers. These composers used the piano sonata as a vehicle to present both conventional and innovative stylistic procedures under the auspices of its historical importance as a genre.

¹ In John Rink, “Sonata: Compositional Practice,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), 677.

² Of course, multiple piano sonatas by Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Hindemith, and Krenek are not overlooked, yet these composers seem to be unique for composing piano sonatas in their countries. It is notable that the piano sonata genre proliferated among American composers during the twentieth century when the genre was largely out of fashion.

As demonstrated in the piano sonatas of Roger Sessions, Vincent Persichetti, and Ross Lee Finney, one of the primary trends in post-World War II American composition was the assimilation of neoclassical stylistic elements with a twelve-tone serial language. While Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney all worked within a neoclassical aesthetic during the decades preceding 1950, post-war cultural and musical shifts urged the three composers to incorporate a more contemporary twelve-tone language. All three composers did not abandon the neoclassical tendencies, indicative of their earlier approaches, but assimilated the new twelve-tone language. They created a new style that combined these two different styles and techniques. In so doing, Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney reconciled the diverse functions of form, tonality, and motivic cohesion within the disparate styles of neoclassicism and twelve-tone serialism. Elements of both neoclassicism and serialism were consolidated to produce an integrated style. Neoclassical elements of clarity, tonality, and cohesion fused with twelve-tone elements of atonal complexity and contrapuntal sophistication to produce a new American style.

While the piano sonatas of Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney demonstrate the combination of neoclassicism and twelve-tone technique, this assimilation points to a broader, post-war aesthetic tendency in American compositional style. The contemporary “American” style seems to constitute the simultaneous incorporation and assimilation of multiple diverse stylistic, aesthetic, and compositional trends to

create a style based on integrated diversity.³ The initial blend of the twelve-tone technique within a prevailingly neoclassical stylistic framework was 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.

While this treatise has primarily focused on eclecticism in the American piano sonata as demonstrated by the assimilation of neoclassicism and twelve-tone technique in the sonatas of Sessions, Persichetti, and Finney, the trend of eclecticism took hold of the American genre in the post-war era and continued to develop through subsequent decades. Not only does the assimilation of twelve-tone serialism and neoclassicism continue with piano sonatas by George Rochberg, Charles Wourinen, and Donald Martino, but other diverse styles have also merged within the genre. Additional combinations that occur in the post-war era include the integration of avant-garde techniques with traditional stylistic features, as seen in John Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano* and Ben Johnson's *Sonata for Microtonal Piano*; in George Walker's Piano Sonata Nos. 1, 2, and 3, neoclassical forms and structures are combined with twelve-tone serialism as well as traditional black folk idioms; piano sonatas by Lowell Lieberman and John Harbison reveal an integration

³ On the idea of "inclusivity" and the American style, see David Nicholls, "Defining American Music," *Institute for Studies in American Music Newsletter* 28, no. 2 ed., Ellie Hisama and Ray Allen (Accessed 24 February 2002), <<http://depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/isam>>

of romanticism with traditional elements within a contemporary language. Jazz elements are combined with traditional style concepts in the piano sonatas of Elie Siegmeister and David Baker (most notably his Piano Sonata No. 4: *Prelude, Blues and Toccata*); elements of world music are combined with western classical influences in the sixteen piano sonatas by Alan Hovhaness; additionally, the infusion of popular music into traditional classical genre aesthetics is observed in William Albright's *Grande Sonata in Rag*, Frederic Rzewski's *Piano Sonata and Fantasy on "Give Peace a Chance,"* and Earl Wild's *Piano Sonata 2000*, with its (in)famous *Toccata á la Ricky Martin*. Roger Sessions, Vincent Persichetti, and Ross Lee Finney's assimilation of separate styles and techniques shows an early point of contact in the development of a widespread American eclecticism. Their infusion of neoclassical stylistic elements into a twelve-tone language gives a mere glimpse of the broader prevalence of eclecticism within the American piano sonata genre and within American contemporary music as a whole.

The emergence of the American eclectic musical style stems from several factors that seem to reflect the development of American cultural independence. With neoclassicism, the adoption and assimilation of European styles alludes to the history of America's colonization. America's pioneering spirit is reflected in the development of experimental procedures and the avant-garde style. And finally, by incorporating the old and new, the traditional and innovative, America—the great

melting pot—brings forth the integration of all styles and ideas. As Ross Lee Finney has commented,

The artist lives today in a vastly different world than he did a hundred years ago, and almost certainly a different world than he will live in a hundred years hence. He lives in a world in transition, a world in which change is the most certain quality of culture. Each artist must adapt himself in his own way to this changing culture, holding those traditions valid that actually aid expression.⁴

With this final comment, we see the justification for American eclecticism: the idea of integrating and assimilating styles within culture—near and far, past and present—that ultimately “aid expression.” The piano sonata, one of the quintessential classical genres of personal expression, serves as a vehicle for American composers to reflect on the past while moving toward the future.

⁴ Ross Lee Finney, “Analysis and the Creative Process,” *Scripps College Bulletin* 33, no. 2 (1959): 17.

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VITA

Michelle Vera Schumann was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada on July 16, 1974, the daughter of Rolf and Irmgard Schumann. She began piano lessons at age five and participated in many recitals, festivals, and local piano competitions until she began serious studies in 1987 at the Cleveland Institute of Music. There she studied with Olga Radosavlejevich as a member of the Young Artists Program. Following graduation from CIM and Avon Lake High School in 1992, she studied with Marilyn Engle at The University of Calgary where she received her Bachelor of Music *with distinction* in April of 1996. During her undergraduate years, she participated in numerous summer festivals including the Victoria International Festival and the Banff Festival of Music and Sound. Her final year at the University of Calgary was spent in the Artist Residency program at the Banff Centre. In August of 1996 she entered the Master of Music program at The University of Texas at Austin where she studied with Gregory Allen. During this time she was a teaching assistant and won several awards including the UT Concerto Competition, the Sidney Wright Accompanying Competition (3rd), and a David Bruton Fellowship. After graduation in 1998 she participated in the Young Artists Program at the Austin Lyric Opera where she apprenticed as a vocal coach and rehearsal pianist for the company's mainstage productions. In 1999 she entered the Doctor of Musical Arts program at The University of Texas where she has studied with both Gregory Allen and Anton

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This treatise was typed by the author.