A Performance Guide to “Four Piano Pieces, Opus 1” By Evgeny Kissin

Andrew Choi

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd

Part of the Music Performance Commons

Recommended Citation

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.
A PERFORMANCE GUIDE TO “FOUR PIANO PIECES, OPUS 1”  
BY EVGENY KISSIN

by

Andrew Choi

Bachelor of Music  
Manhattan School of Music, 2009

Master of Music  
Manhattan School of Music, 2011

Professional Studies Certificate  
Manhattan School of Music, 2012

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in

Piano Performance

School of Music

University of South Carolina

2022

Accepted by:

Charles Fugo, Committee Member

Phillip Bush, Committee Member

Scott Price, Committee Member

David Garner, Committee Member

Tracy L. Weldon, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School
DEDICATION

I dedicate this document to Evgeny Kissin, whom I admire.
ABSTRACT

This document provides a performance guide to Evgeny Kissin’s *Four Piano Pieces*, Opus 1. Although more musicians are becoming familiar with his compositions, there are no comprehensive scholarly resources available about this work. This document aims to provide that needed resource.

Evgeny Igorevich Kissin (b.1971) is a Russian-born internationally acclaimed pianist. He achieved stardom with a performance featuring the two piano concerti by Frederic Chopin in 1984. The event was recorded live and released as an album by RCA Victor. Since then, he has been in constant demand all over the world. Although he mainly performs, he occasionally composes as his secondary career. At present, four of his works – *Four Piano Pieces*, Sonata for Piano and Cello, String Quartet, and *Thatatopsis* for female voice and piano – are published by G. Henle Verlag.

Kissin’s *Four Piano Pieces* shows a variety of 20th century compositional styles such that each piece presents its own traits. “Meditation” uses chromaticism extensively and is atonal. “Dodecaphonic Tango” shows influence of the Second Viennese School, and dodecaphonic aggregations develop the piece. “Intermezzo,” only sixteen measures long, features Phrygian dominant scales. “Toccata” is a jazz-inspired virtuosic showpiece. In contrast to the other three pieces, “Toccata” has a clear sense of tonality.

Each piece presents different challenges. “Meditation” requires a good singing tone and ability to distinguish multiple layers. “Dodecaphonic Tango” is well suited for pianists with large hands. A quality performance of this piece depends on arm relaxation.
“Intermezzo” features very simple writing that intermediate level pianists can play well without difficulties. However, it necessitates an expressive approach that draws interest from listeners. “Toccata” is, without a doubt, the most difficult piece among the four. Performers need to have great command of this piece, which is played at rapid speed and requires rhythmic discipline, hand coordination, and accuracy.
PREFACE

Evgeny Kissin is my favorite pianist, and I attended almost all of his concerts while studying in New York City. In 2019, I learned from his social media that G. Henle Verlag had published his *Four Piano Pieces* and became interested in playing this composition. I performed this work in one of my degree recitals and developed an interest in pursuing scholarly research related to this work. During study of the *Four Piano Pieces*, I realized that there were evidently no video performances of some of the pieces and that the composer’s insights about the work and other scholarly sources did not exist, which served as a strong motivation to pursue this project.

I express my gratitude to my document advisor, Dr. Charles Fugo, for his dedication and patience in working through this project, and to major professor, Dr. Joseph Rackers, who guided my musical maturity. My former teachers, Dr. Marc Silverman, Dr. Donn-Alexandre Feder, Dr. Hyun-oak Moon, and Mrs. Kyung-suk Hwang also helped my musical study. Prof. Phillip Bush, Dr. Scott Price, and Dr. David Garner have my gratitude for serving as a member of a doctoral document committee. Dr. Garner have a special acknowledgement for guiding me a right direction for this project. My dear colleague, Catherine Black, deserves credit for her emotional support and helping me organize writing. I love my parents for their encouragement and financial support. In addition, I express my cordial thanks to G. Henle Verlag for granting me permission to use musical examples and
Evgeny Kissin for composing great music, including *Four Piano Pieces*. The devotion of everyone mentioned above made it possible to do this project.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication .................................................................................................................. iii
Abstract ....................................................................................................................... iv
Preface ....................................................................................................................... v
List of Tables ........................................................................................................... vii
List of Figures .......................................................................................................... xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction ............................................................................................ 1
Chapter 2: Biography of Evgeny Kissin ................................................................. 11
Chapter 3: Performance Guide ............................................................................... 17
Chapter 4: Conclusion ............................................................................................. 49
Bibliography ............................................................................................................. 52
Appendix A: Degree Recital Programs ................................................................. 55
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Structure of “Meditation” ................................................................. 17
Table 3.2 Structure of “Dodecaphonic Tango” .................................................. 26
Table 3.3 Structure of “Intermezzo” .................................................................. 33
Table 3.4 Structure of “Toccata” ...................................................................... 38
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 KISSIN “Meditation” ................................................................. 18
Figure 3.2 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 17-26)................................................. 18
Figure 3.3 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 9-16).................................................... 19
Figure 3.4 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 27-32).................................................... 19
Figure 3.5 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 33-36).................................................... 20
Figure 3.6 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 1-12)....................................................... 22
Figure 3.7 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 1-12)....................................................... 22
Figure 3.8 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 9-16)....................................................... 23
Figure 3.9 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 13-20)....................................................... 23
Figure 3.10 KISSIN “Meditation” ................................................................. 24
Figure 3.11 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 17-23)....................................................... 24
Figure 3.12 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 17-20, mm. 42-44)............................... 25
Figure 3.13 KISSIN “Dodecaphonic Tango” (mm. 17-22)................................. 27
Figure 3.14 KISSIN “Dodecaphonic Tango” .................................................... 27
Figure 3.15 KISSIN “Dodecaphonic Tango” (mm. 1-8)....................................... 28
Figure 3.16 KISSIN “Dodecaphonic Tango” (mm. 9-16)....................................... 29
Figure 3.17 KISSIN “Dodecaphonic Tango” (mm. 5-8)....................................... 29
Figure 3.18 KISSIN “Dodecaphonic Tango” (mm. 25-32)................................. 30
Figure 3.19 KISSIN “Dodecaphonic Tango” (mm. 36-40)................................. 30
Figure 3.20 KISSIN “Dodecaphonic Tango” (mm. 9-12)................................. 31
Figure 3.21 KISSIN “Dodecaphonic Tango” (mm. 25-32) .................................................. 32
Figure 3.22 KISSIN “Intermezzo” (mm. 1-7, 11-16) ......................................................... 34
Figure 3.23 KISSIN “Intermezzo” (mm. 1-10) ................................................................. 34
Figure 3.24 KISSIN “Intermezzo” (mm. 1-12) ................................................................. 35
Figure 3.25 KISSIN “Intermezzo” (mm. 6-16) ................................................................. 35
Figure 3.26 KISSIN “Intermezzo” (mm. 1-10) ................................................................. 36
Figure 3.27 KISSIN “Intermezzo” (mm. 1-5) ................................................................. 37
Figure 3.28 KISSIN “Toccata” ................................................................................. 39
Figure 3.29 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 50-54) ................................................................. 39
Figure 3.30 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 42-44) ................................................................. 40
Figure 3.31 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 19-21) ................................................................. 40
Figure 3.32 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 31-34) ................................................................. 41
Figure 3.33 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 86-88) ................................................................. 41
Figure 3.34 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 5-10) ................................................................. 42
Figure 3.35 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 37-44) ................................................................. 42
Figure 3.36 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 80-86) ................................................................. 43
Figure 3.37 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 74-79) ................................................................. 43
Figure 3.38 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 37-39) ................................................................. 44
Figure 3.39 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 8-11) ................................................................. 45
Figure 3.40 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 8-10) ................................................................. 45
Figure 3.41 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 19-21) ................................................................. 45
Figure 3.42 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 22-24) ................................................................. 46
Figure 3.43 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 31-33) ................................................................. 46
Figure 3.44 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 42-49) .................................................................47
Figure 3.45 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 86-91) .................................................................48
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This document is a performance guide to *Four Piano Pieces*, Op. 1 by Evgeny Kissin, which consists of four independent works for piano solo: “Meditation,” “Dodecaphonic Tango,” “Intermezzo,” and “Toccata.” All four pieces were written between 2012 and 2015, although the origin of “Toccata” dates from 1986. In addition, “Toccata” is distinct from the rest as it is the only piece with clear tonality. *Four Piano Pieces* demonstrates an unusually wide range of early 20th century compositional techniques.

As a performer, Evgeny Kissin possesses phenomenal virtuosity, poetic interpretation, and an ability to bring orchestral sonority to his playing. David Dubal made a personal observation of Kissin’s stature as a pianist in his book, *The Art of the Piano*: “Kissin’s personal appearance shows an elevated seriousness, and his total control and command of every note display an unswerving attention span” and adds, “His concerts are amazing in their cleanliness…are sonorous marvels.”¹ This Russian-Jewish born pianist achieved stardom with a performance featuring the two piano concerti by Frederic Chopin when he was twelve. Since then, he has been in constant demand all over the world.

Although Kissin is mainly known as a concert pianist, he is also active as a composer. His cadenza for the Mozart Piano Concerto No. 24 in C minor, K. 491 is

recorded on EMI Classics. In a documentary film, Evgeny Kissin – The Gift of Music, he discusses excerpts from three of his earliest compositions titled Morning Song, New Year’s March, and Petrushka. In describing his compositional process, he states that he usually generates musical ideas while lying in bed. Also, his book, Memoirs and Reflections, describes the same compositional process while composing Four Piano Pieces. During an interview with Rudolf Firkusny, he shares his thoughts regarding a career as a pianist-composer:

Whether or not I’ll write something of a larger scale, I don’t know, for me it’s a matter of inspiration. I love composing, but my main work is playing piano, and it’s really difficult to combine the two things, because each of them requires time and concentration. Even Sergei Rachmaninov admitted that he could not do both at the same time, he had to devote his time either to playing piano or to composing during particular periods of time.

He showed sketches of Four Piano Pieces to the Russian composer Arvo Pärt, who would give compositional advice. After the encouragement from Pärt, Kissin seriously considered a career as a pianist-composer. However, his busy concert schedule made it difficult to find time for composition. At present, four of his works, Four Piano Pieces,
Sonata for Cello and Piano, String Quartet, and Thatatopsis for female voice and piano are published by G. Henle Verlag.⁷

Although there is no written documentation about his earliest compositions, written when he was seven, including Morning Song or New Year’s March, these pieces feature simple harmony and texture in keeping with a child’s musical capabilities. His Petrushka shows more chromaticism and virtuosity although it maintains a simple texture. Kissin’s writing becomes professional in Four Piano Pieces. The first piece, “Meditation,” presents an extreme chromaticism and avoids a clear tonal center, a prominent trait in post-Romantic music such as Scriabin’s late period. The Second Viennese School’s dodecaphonic compositional style, of which Schoenberg was a leading composer, is employed in “Dodecaphonic Tango.” This piece, based on a dance originating in Argentina, alternates between a chordal texture and a single melodic line. “Intermezzo” shows a two-voice quasi-polyphonic texture written in a recitative style, and a jazz-inspired tour de force is shown in “Toccata.”

Although more musicians are currently performing Kissin’s works, they have, in general, been rarely performed. There are no known recordings or performances of Four Piano Pieces as a complete set, although Kissin has played “Dodecaphonic Tango” and “Toccata” as encores in his recitals.⁸ Pianist Yuja Wang and cellist Gautier Capucon performed Kissin’s Sonata for Cello and Piano at the Verbier Festival in 2016.⁹

---


⁹ “Yuja Wang & Gautier Capucon play Kissin – Sonata for Piano and Cello”
following year, the Kopelman Quartet recorded Kissin’s *String Quartet* on Nimbus Records to be released a year later.\(^{10}\) In addition, a conversation between Kissin and musicians from the Kopelman Quartet regarding a recording project is available on YouTube.\(^ {11}\)

1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research is to provide a performance guide to Evgeny Kissin’s *Four Piano Pieces*, Op. 1. It is my hope that readers will understand the structure of the music and gain ideas of musical interpretation and pedagogical strategy to help achieve a professional quality performance.

1.2 Need for Study

Technologies such as YouTube and social media facilitate advertisement; thus more musicians are learning Kissin’s compositions. Yet, only a small number of videos featuring performances of his compositions are available, and no pianists have commercially released any recordings of the *Four Piano Pieces*. In addition, scholarly resources are non-existent.

---

\(^{10}\) Evgeny Kissin and Dimitri Shostakovich, Quartett (2016), Quartet No. 2, Elegy & Polka, performed by Kopelman Quartet. Nimbus Records. CD. 2018.

\(^{11}\) “Evgeny Kissin & The Kopelman Quartet in Conversation” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rvlcIEx02Io](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rvlcIEx02Io) (accessed June 26, 2021)
1.3 Methodology

The document is devoted to providing artistic interpretive and pedagogical suggestions for Kissin's *Four Piano Pieces*. In addition, some structural analysis, which mainly covers form and thematic development, and music examples are provided to facilitate the learning process.

1.4 Review of Literature

A book by Josef Lhevinne, *Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing*, published in 1972, describes a pedagogical approach to keyboard playing. Consisting of six chapters, Lhevinne explains how to hear rhythm, to play with fine touch and good tone, to acquire delicacy and accuracy, to memorize music, and to have an effective practice routine. Thus, this book contains valuable practicing and playing strategies.

A book by Evgeny Kissin, *Memoirs and Reflections*, published in 2017, covers the years of Kissin’s musical education, his early musical career, and his personal life. The book is divided into three chapters: childhood, youth, and varia. In the subsection, “Never say ‘Never’” from Chapter 3, Kissin talks about his inspirational sources and compositional procedure, which he also mentions in several of his interviews, including the interview for Henle and the documentary film. The book gives an idea of his composition procedure, including the way he garners musical inspiration.

Evgeny Kissin’s page on the Henle official website reproduces his four published works. This website also includes descriptions of the general character of the various pieces and further background information. Also, it provides a YouTube link of Kissin’s interview.

---

with Henle and a performance of “Dodecaphonic Tango.” The website provides evidence that Kissin is also pursuing a career not only as a pianist but also as a composer.

An article by Laura Melton, “Four Piano Pieces Opus 1” in *The American Music Teacher*, published in 2020, is a review of the Henle’s publication of Kissin’s *Four Piano Pieces*, Op. 1.\(^{13}\) The article describes the musical content, includes Melton’s personal characteristic interpretation of each piece, and suggests background and analytic research needed. It also briefly mentions Kissin’s interview with G. Henle Verlag.

A brief article, “Quick Look at Advanced Contemporary Works,” issued in 2020, in *Piano Magazine: Clavier Companion* is written by Ernest Kramer.\(^{14}\) He briefly describes three contemporary works which include Kissin’s *Four Piano Pieces*. As with Melton, he mentions the need for more background information.

An interview with the publishing house Henle took place when Kissin published *Four Piano Pieces* in 2019. Partially overlapping with his book, he talks about his compositional process, a meeting with Arvo Pärt, and reasons for choosing Henle as his publisher. He also briefly discussed his other compositions such as *Sonata for Piano and Cello*, Op. 2 and *String Quartet*, Op. 3. This interview outlines Kissin’s compositional career, which provides additional background information of his life and its relationship to his works.

The interview with Rudolf Firkusny in 2019 tells of Kissin’s personal life in Prague, where he currently resides, including performance experiences, inspirational sources for composition, limitations on time for composition, interest in reading, and

---


political perspectives. The interview offers a broader view of Kissin’s personal life, not only in music but also in other areas like literature, politics, and religion.

“Simply Genius: An interview with Evgeny Kissin” in Clavier Companion, published in 2013, is a conversation between Evgeny Kissin and Elyse Mach. This interview includes the following: experience with his only piano teacher Anna Kantor, choosing repertoire, recital preparation, overcoming obstacles, favorite composers/performers, and a fondness for poetry and other literature. Also, Kissin’s mother, Emilia Kissin, briefly describes her son’s process of composition.15 As in the other interviews, Mach’s work is a useful resource for learning Kissin’s musical perspective and compositional routine.

Frederic Gaussin interviewed Evgeny Kissin for a piano magazine on a website called iplaythepiano.com.16 In this interview, Gaussin covers five large topics: Kissin’s social life in a city and rural area, his teacher Anna Kantor’s free-style pedagogical method, Kissin’s personal favorite composers and their works, collaboration with other musicians, and his interest in poetry and literature. In addition, Kissin briefly mentions a motivation for composing his own cadenza for the Mozart C minor Concerto, which is also reflected in his process of selecting repertoire for his concerts—an eager affection for the music he is involved with.

A documentary film, Evgeny Kissin – The Gift of Music, released in 1998, is directed by Christopher Nupen. The film contains Kissin’s interviews, one of which he

shares compositions and compositional process, excerpts from a recital at BBC Proms, and a complete sequence of encores from a recital. From this film, one can learn Kissin’s initial process of writing music and a method for gathering ideas for composition.

Scott Noriega’s review of a documentary film, *Evgeny Kissin – The Gift of Music*, in *Fanfare – The Magazine for Serious Record Collectors*, was issued in 2015. It summarizes the content of the documentary film and adds personal observations.17

*The Art of the Piano*, written by David Dubal, published in 2004, consists of two parts. Part One includes background information on various pianists’ careers, notable concerts he/she has given, recordings, and a personal observation of his/her status as a pianist. The second part is a survey of piano literature and lists of recordings by various artists, a useful guide for piano students and professionals. Dubal’s book describes Kissin’s performance style and indicates his pianism to be of the highest order.

A music review “Evgeny Kissin” in *American Record Guide* by Alan Becker, published in 2017, is an evaluation of Kissin’s recordings for RCA and Sony Classical.18 Becker’s review includes personal observation and opinion on Kissin’s various recordings.


---


A book by Kenneth Hamilton, *Liszt: Sonata in B minor*, published in 1996, surveys historical, theoretical, and performance practice research. The first chapter is an introduction; the next two chapters present a theoretical analysis that examines form, texture, harmony, and compositional technique. It also makes a comparison of various theorists’ analysis of the sonata. A historical timeline of the sonata’s composition and performance practice covers the last two chapters. Although Hamilton’s book does not directly relate to Kissin’s composition, the analytical method followed by Hamilton is employed by the author in his analysis.

Submitted in 2015, a doctoral document “Bagatelles No. 6 and No. 8, Op. 59 by Nikolai Kapustin: Background, Analysis, and Performance Guideline” by Sekyeong Seong consists of seven chapters. The first chapter covers Kapustin’s biography, and a history of jazz constitutes the next two chapters. In Chapter 4, Seong shares several ‘bagatelles’ written by various composers preceding Kapustin. Chapter 5 features Kapustin’s compositional styles, and the next chapter presents an analysis of Kapustin’s two bagatelles. In the analysis chapter, she indicates five sub-categories. The final chapter provides guidelines for jazz performance practices. As with Hamilton’s book, her performance guides show a similarity to the author’s analytical method.

1.5 Limitations

This research is primarily restricted to Kissin’s *Four Piano Pieces*, Op. 1, aside from occasional references to other works. In addition, the analysis is presented exclusively

---

as a performance guide, although it will mention some pedagogical writings and include analysis of form and thematic materials.

1.6 Organization

The first chapter features an introduction, information about the artist, statement of purpose, justification for the study, review of literature, and limitations. The following chapter covers a biography of Evgeny Kissin. The next chapter is a performance guide to “Meditation,” “Dodecaphonic Tango,” “Intermezzo,” and “Toccata.” A concise summary of previous chapters and suggestions for possible further research constitute the final chapter.
CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY OF EVGENY KISSIN

Evgeny Igorevich Kissin was born in October 10, 1971 in Moscow to a Jewish family. Although none of Kissin’s family performed in professional settings, they had some connection to music. Kissin remarked in his book, “I think my musical genes come not only from my parents, but also from Grandma and Grandpa.”21 His maternal grandparents played mandolin and sang Russian and Jewish songs in their leisure time. His father played accordion, and his mother, who was able to observe her son’s growth as a pianist, taught music at school. Kissin was exposed to piano music by his older sister who was studying piano. Showing extraordinary hearing and learning ability, Kissin improvised popular tunes on a piano when he was only two years old. Additionally, he was able to recite Russian and Yiddish poetry. This literature would play a significant role in his later career.

Kissin entered Gnessin School of Music when he was six and met Anna Pavlovna Kantor, who was to be his only piano teacher. Kissin comments: “The main aim of Anna Pavlovna’s work was always to discover, preserve and develop the individuality of each particular pupil, and for that reason all her pupils, unlike those of some other teachers, always played differently… One of the methods by which she achieved this was that she never played during lessons.”22 Interested in his talent, she actively promoted him for

---

21 Evgeny Kissin, Memoirs and Reflection (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2018), 12.
22 Ibid., 54.
performances and developed a close relationship with him. She accompanied him in his concert tours, continuously guiding him. He also had a close relationship with Victor Y. Dashevsky, a history teacher, who frequently visited Kissin’s residence and discussed politics and social issues (Kissin would develop such a strong opposition to communism that he would refuse to play concerts in communist countries such as China). Literature was another significant interest in his school years.

Anna Kantor’s pedagogical method and interest in history, literature, and poetry strongly influenced Kissin as a person and a musician. She nurtured Kissin’s unique performance style. Kissin promoted Jewish composers’ music and recited Yiddish poetry in several of his concerts.

Kissin frequently performed at school concerts where he played his own compositions, which were largely based on Russian popular tunes. Although Kissin would not actively participate in major competitions in his career, he won a school concerto competition when he was ten with the J. S. Bach Piano Concerto in D minor. He made his orchestral debut with the Mozart Piano Concerto in D minor in Ulyanovsk and gave a debut recital a year later at his school.

By 1983, Kissin was performing more frequently, and his potential as a concert pianist became apparent. Music lovers all over the world first heard Kissin in a radio broadcast. He also performed recitals in Leningrad and Moscow. In 1984, Kissin gave a breakthrough performance of Chopin’s two piano concerti in the Great Hall of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory with the Moscow State Philharmonic under Dmitri Kitaenko. The event was recorded live and released as an album by RCA Victor.
Subsequently, Kissin’s career expanded internationally with appearances at major concert venues and music festivals. In 1985, he gave concerts in Eastern Europe and a year later, a Japanese tour followed. His recital debut in Japan earned him the Crystal Prize of the Osaka Symphony Hall for Best Performance of The Year in 1986. He played at the Berlin Festival a year later, making the first appearance in Western Europe. Kissin gave concerts in the United Kingdom where he collaborated with Valery Gergiev. Moscow Virtuosi and Vladimir Spivakov extensively toured with Kissin in Europe afterward. In 1988, he performed at the New Years’ Eve Concert with the Berliner Philharmoniker under the baton of Herbert von Karajan, playing the Tchaikovsky First Piano Concerto. This concert was broadcast internationally, and Deutsche Grammophon released an audio and video recording. Karajan collaborated with Kissin again at the Salzburg Easter Festival.

In 1990, Kissin made his North American debut with a performance of the two piano concerti by Chopin with New York Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta. In the same year, he gave a recital debut at Carnegie Hall, performing works by Schumann, Liszt, Chopin, and Prokofiev. RCA Victor recorded the recital and released a CD album. He played more concerts in other major cities in the United States and Canada. Viewed by more than a billion people, he appeared as a special guest at the 1992 Grammy Award Ceremony.

In that same year, he made his first appearance with two other major orchestras, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, performing the piano concerto by Robert Schumann under the baton of Carlo Maria Giulini. He was named Musical America’s Youngest Instrumentalist of the Year in 1995 and two years later received the Triumph Award, one of the country’s most prestigious cultural honors, for his
outstanding contribution to the Russian culture. Kissin presented a solo recital at the London BBC Proms in the summer of 1997, the first pianist to do so. A film director, Christopher Nupen, directed a documentary film about the pianist which largely focuses on the BBC Proms recital. Subsequently, Kissin gave the first piano concerto performance at the Proms opening concert in 2000.

From 2001 to 2010, Kissin received numerous musical awards and honorary titles. In 2001, the Manhattan School of Music gave Kissin an Honorary Doctorate of Music. The Royal Academy of Music bestowed an Honorary Membership on him in 2005. He has received multiple awards: the Shostakovich Award (the highest musical honor in Russia) in 2003, Herbert von Karajan Music Prize in 2005, and two Grammy Awards (one for Best Instrumental Soloist Performance for recording of Scriabin, Medtner, and Stravinsky in 2006, and the other for Best Instrumental Soloist Performance with Orchestra for his recording of the Prokofiev Second and Third Piano Concertos with the Philharmonia Orchestra, conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy, in 2010). Three more schools presented Kissin with honorary doctorates: University of Hong Kong, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and Ben Gurion University in Beer Sheba.23

He was a Perspectives Artist in the 2015 – 2016 Season at Carnegie Hall. During that season, Alan Gilbert and the New York Philharmonic performed with him in the Opening Night Gala. Kissin gave two solo recitals in which he repeated the same program, and Itzhak Perlman and Mischa Maisky joined him for a chamber recital. A few days later,

Kissin presented a recital featuring Jewish composers and recited Yiddish poetry. Lastly, he appeared as soloist with the MET Orchestra under the baton of James Levine.  

More recently, in 2021, Kissin gave his first recital in Bulgaria and was awarded another Honorary Doctorate from the National Academy of Music in Sofia. In August, the cellist Jean-Guihen Queyras collaborated with Kissin in a concert at the Mozarteum Villa Vicina in Salzburg where several of Kissin’s compositions, including his Sonata for Piano and Cello, were performed. In 2022, he made a public statement declaring the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a war crime and traveled to Germany to participate in a Ukraine Fundraising Concert where he collaborated with musicians from the Berliner Philharmoniker.

Kissin has performed with such musicians as Evgeny Svetlanov, Claudio Abbado, Sir Colin Davis, Sir Simon Rattle, Seiji Ozawa, Martha Argerich, Sir Andras Schiff, the Emerson String Quartet, and others. At present, Kissin regularly tours Europe, North America, Asia, and occasionally Latin America. The Verbier Festival, a prestigious music event in Switzerland, invites many well-known musicians for performances, and Kissin frequently plays there. One of the most active performers of the day, he annually plays forty to fifty recitals including collaboration with orchestras and chamber groups, usually to full capacity audiences.

24 “Perspectives: Evgeny Kissin”


Although composition is secondary in his career, Kissin has produced significant works. In 2015, with advice from the composer Arvo Pärt, Kissin composed four miniature pieces for piano, which would be published as Opus 1 four years later. He subsequently composed other works for various instruments and voice. At present, G. Henle Verlag has published four of Kissin’s compositions.

Kissin has recorded numerous albums for major recording companies such as RCA Victor, SONY Classical, DGG, and EMI Classics. In 2017, Kissin signed an exclusive contract for the first time in his career, with Deutsche Grammophon. Since then, DGG has released two of Kissin’s albums: Beethoven Sonatas and a chamber music program with the Emerson String Quartet.27


CHAPTER III
PERFORMANCE GUIDE

3.1 MEDITATION

“Meditation” was written between 2012 and 2015. As with late Scriabin, the piece is atonal and densely chromatic. Melodic writing predominates in that it resembles a nocturne in its effect. The music projects an ominous atmosphere through quiet repetition of a G-F# ostinato in the bass register. This figure gives an effect of a pedal tone or drone. After a two-measure hiatus, it returns with octave doubling and an increase in sound. This new intensity gradually disappears, and the piece ends quietly. Structurally, “Meditation” is in ternary form, and motivic developments are prominent.

Table 3.1 Structure of “Meditation”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ternary form</th>
<th>Measure number</th>
<th>Phrase structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>3-10</td>
<td>4 + 4 or 5 + 3 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11-18</td>
<td>4 + 4 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19-26</td>
<td>4 + 4 or 5 + 3 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>27-34</td>
<td>4 + 2 + 2 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>35-42</td>
<td>4 + 4 or 5 + 3 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>43-48</td>
<td>4 + 2 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ternary form is defined by tempo markings in measures 27 (animato) and 35 (Tempo primo). Harmonically, it is atonal, and chromaticism is heavily involved. In
addition, complex texture and rhythm are featured. This piece contains three different
themes, and each is created from a combination of smaller motives. Four different motives
are presented (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 KISSIN “Meditation”
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

The first theme combines motives 1 and 2, and the succeeding phrase adds motive
3 (mm. 8-10). Other “A” sections retain that pattern but include motivic repetition. Figure
3.2 indicates the melodic structure of the second “A” section.

Figure 3.2 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 17-26)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission
The second thematic section is created through a series of modifications of motive 2. This section also features other motives and new melodic material (Figure 3.3), and the third thematic section generally adopts that same procedure. In addition, quasi-retrograded motive 1 prepares a transition to the “A” section (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.3 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 9-16)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

Figure 3.4 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 27-32)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

Motives 1, 2, and 4 undergo modifications such as retrograde, inversion, and rhythmic manipulation throughout the piece. In the ‘animato’ and final “A” section, motive
1 appears both rhythmically modified and in quasi-retrograde. Motive 2, which appears most frequently, is modified in every section including the coda. For example, in the “B” section, measures 11, 12, and 16 present a rhythmically varied motive 2. This motive also appears in quasi-retrograde in measure 13. Motive 4 in the top voice features a quasi-inversion in measure 34, its only modification. Figure 3.5 illustrates motivic manipulations from mm. 33-36. In general, motives are the basis of themes and help to determine the structure of the entire movement.

Figure 3.5 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 33-36)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

**Performance Suggestions**

A challenge of playing the opening ostinato is to maintain a quiet sound consistently. Although the *una corda* pedal tends to soften the sonority, the author suggests avoiding it since the pedal is meant to produce a different timbre rather than to merely sound softer. In addition, the composer specifies *una corda* elsewhere in the piece (e.g. measure 6).
The “A” section commences in measure 3 where the first theme is stated. In terms of phrase structure, there are two possible interpretations: a 4 + 4 bar or 5 + 3 bar phrase (Figure 3.6 and 3.7). The textural pattern and dynamic marking implies a 4 + 4 bar phrase. The first three bars (measure 3-6) present a single-line texture, and a chordal texture follows in the next measure. The following four bars repeat that pattern. In addition, measures 7-10 present a change of dynamic, suggesting a 4 + 4 bar phrase. However, the thematic organization suggests a 5 + 3 bar phrase. The first theme lasts three bars, and the following two measures feature a fragmentation of the theme rhythmically altered. The first theme is repeated in the next three measures, albeit with different notation, indicating a 5 + 3 bar phrase. Depending on interpretation of the phrase structure, one can emphasize either the C-sharp in measure 5 or the G in measure 6 to indicate a start of a new phrase. In places where the left hand plays large interval chords with the ostinato on the top (e.g. measures 9-10), the author suggests playing the ostinato with the thumb. In that way, bass chords can be sustained as written in the music.

The second thematic section begins in measure 11, and the bass note rhythm determines the phrase structure. In Figure 3.8, the bass notes in measure 14 increase in motion, and the following measure reverts back to a slower pace. Thus, taking a little time at the end of measure 14 would give clearer phrase organization. Also, performers should be aware of chromatic step motion in the bass in measures 13-18 and voice that progression so that it can be clearly heard (Figure 3.9). In terms of pedaling, a half-pedal or less should be used since there are more chromatic chords in the second thematic section than in the first.
Figure 3.6 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 1-12)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

Figure 3.7 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 1-12)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission
Generally, the texture becomes thicker as the music progresses. Comparing the three different first thematic sections makes the textural difference obvious (Figure 3.10). The dynamic mark in measure 19 is *mezzo-piano*; however, the passage will sound louder as notes are being played. Thus, playing *piano* is sufficient. As mentioned before, returns
of the first thematic section (measure 19 and 35) include repetition of rhythmically varied motives 1 and 2 that performers should be aware of (Figure 3.11).

Figure 3.10 KISSIN “Meditation”  
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

Figure 3.11 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 17-23)  
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

The third theme is introduced in the “animato” or “B” section. As suggested by the tempo marking, this section should flow and gradually build in dynamic to prepare the climax of the piece, which occurs at the return of the “A” section in measure 35. Sonority needs to be increased at the allargando in measures 33-34. Sonority lessens toward the end,
and only the ostinato remains at the last two measures. The author suggests gradually releasing the pedal after playing the last note to create a fading effect.

In general, voicing and legato playing are the main pianistic challenges in “Meditation.” The piece features four voices that need to be distinguished (Figure 3.12). The soprano should have the most emphasis, and the bass is next in importance as the secondary melody is in the bass voice. The tenor and the alto are subordinate and should be played more softly since they act as fillers. Melodic lyricism dominates in “Meditation” that requires a cultivated legato. In his book, Josef Lhevinne, one of the most prominent pianists of his time, states that “the main principle at the first is to see that the key is touched with as resilient a portion of the finger as possible, if a lovely, ringing, singing tone is desired instead of the hard, metallic one.” Pressing keys from a portion of the finger behind the fingertip gives a legato sound.

Figure 3.12 KISSIN “Meditation” (mm. 17-20, mm. 42-44)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

3.2 DODECAPHONIC TANGO

“Dodecaphonic Tango” was written in 2015. Around that time, Kissin was playing concerts in Latin America, including Argentina where the tango originated, which may have inspired him. A tango is an Argentine couple dance typically in a duple meter, and this tango is in common time. “Dodecaphonic Tango” has two contrasting moods: martial and lyrical. These two idioms constantly alternate, in the nature of a dialogue. Unlike “Meditation,” “Dodecaphonic Tango” lacks motivic development. Instead, this piece is developed through dodecaphonic aggregations. The dense fortissimo hexachords at the end of the piece are climactic. The piece is written in two-part form, and its writing style resembles accompanied solo melody.

Table 3.2 Structure of “Dodecaphonic Tango”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2-part form</th>
<th>Measure number</th>
<th>Phrase structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1-20</td>
<td>4 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 + 2 + 2 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 + 2 + 2 + 2 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A₁</td>
<td>21-36</td>
<td>2 + 2 + 2 + 2 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 + 2 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>37-40</td>
<td>4 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Dodecaphonic Tango” consists of two sections and a coda. The opening four measures may be formally considered in two ways. The coda replicates its opening measures, although with a thicker texture. The first four bars imply an introduction. However, a repeat sign before the coda goes back to the beginning instead of measure 5. Generally, a repeat of a section would not include the introductory measures. Therefore, measures 1-4 would be interpreted as a part of the “A” section, rather than an introduction. Generally, the two motives constantly alternate throughout the piece. The transitions are
contrasting in character. For example, measures 19-20 distinguish themselves from the rest through relatively simple rhythmic patterns. Also, measure 20 is the only place where no motives appear (Figure 3.13). Thus, this measure marks the division between sections “A” and “A₁.”

Figure 3.13 KISSIN “Dodecaphonic Tango” (mm. 17-22)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

“Dodecaphonic Tango” presents three different motives (Figure 3.14), and each has a defined role (Figure 3.15):

- Motive 1 opens/closes the piece and accompanies motive 2
- Motive 2 serves a melodic function
- Motive 3 serves as a transition

Figure 3.14 KISSIN “Dodecaphonic Tango”
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission
The motives usually contain twelve pitches, and pitches are not repeated within the group. The only exception is motive 1, which includes repeated chords. In the “A” section, the most common organization either begins at the last beat of motive 2 and lasts until the end of the next measure or begins at the last chord of motive 1 and lasts until the third beat of motive 2. The first two motives often require a whole phrase to cover all twelve pitches, but motive 3 needs only one beat to state all the pitches. Figure 3.16 indicates dodecaphonic aggregations. In measures 7 and 8, the two aggregations overlap. One aggregation spans from the fourth beat of measure 6 to the end of measure 7. The following aggregation starts at measure 7 and lasts until the second beat of measure 8. Thus, measure 7 contains an elision (Figure 3.17).

The “A₁” section presents more variety in aggregation patterns and less dependence on motives. Generally, the first half of the “A₁” section features thicker texture, resulting in more aggregations. The second half, conversely, has fewer aggregations. Figure 3.18
shows dodecaphonic aggregations in a portion of the “A₁” section. In the coda, both hands simultaneously play hexachords that resemble tone-clusters. Thus, each half-beat features dodecaphonic aggregations (Figure 3.19). In general, dodecaphonic aggregation patterns are consistent in the “A” section but randomized in the “A₁” section. This piece contains a total of seventy aggregations.
Performance Suggestions

The metronome marking is 120 per quarter note. However, the author suggests playing at 116 per quarter note, which improves clarity. The tango is not a rapid dance, so the performer should maintain a moderate tempo.
The opening theme, which consists of hexachords, presents a martial character. It requires articulation with a pronounced staccato and an emphasis on off-beat accents which are slurred to the following downbeat. Also, it must be played at a strict tempo. Because the theme is not melodic in character and every note is important, the chords should not be voiced. The next theme is more lyrical, and to provide contrast, *rubato* is strongly encouraged, which is also appropriate to the elegant character of the tango.

Every measure that includes a melody in the top voice (e.g. measure 5) calls for clear voicing. At the same time, staccato playing must be maintained in the accompaniment in order to delineate contrasting character. In the third theme in measure 9, the first chord of each slur needs a heavy accent to emphasize the syncopation and to produce an agitated atmosphere. The rapid chord changes need special practice for accuracy.

A new phrase begins in measure 11. Performers can prepare for the new phrase by taking time on the chords in the second half of measure 10 (Figure 3.20). More time can be taken in measure 20 since it marks a transition between two sections. However, the thirty-second notes in the fourth beat should be played without tempo fluctuation in order to maintain natural flow.

![Motive 3](image)

Figure 3.20 KISSIN “Dodecaphonic Tango” (mm. 9-12)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission
The “A₁” section includes two passages that need to be emphasized by the performer (Figure 3.21). First, in measure 28, the melody shifts to the bass. Therefore, placing a slight accent on the first note (C natural) of the bass melody is recommended to attract special attention. Second, in measure 32, the melodic writing changes character. The dynamic level should gradually get softer from measures 29 to 31 followed by a subito-forte on the melody, then a decrescendo in measure 32, without rubato. That leaves a room for a gradual crescendo for the climatic coda. If the repeat in measure 36 is taken, the crescendo is interrupted as the piece begins at the mezzo-piano level. In the coda, the sound should have sonority without being percussive.

Figure 3.21 KISSIN “Dodecaphonic Tango” (mm. 25-32)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

The main challenge of performing “Dodecaphonic Tango” is execution of unusually large chords. Tenth chords often occur, presenting a major obstacle for pianists possessing a small hand. Although very rapid rolls might be possible for some players, pianists with small hands might not find this piece to be within their abilities. Playing the chords with a lyrical approach might help to avoid tension, which would improve the sound and therefore the performance.
3.3 INTERMEZZO

Although the intermezzo became an independent character piece in the 19th century, it historically was an interlude within a larger work, and Kissin’s “Intermezzo,” composed in 2015, follows that tradition. The end shares common tones, E and A-flat (G-sharp), with the beginning of the next movement, implying an *attacca*. This movement, lasting only 16 measures, emanates a mysterious atmosphere as if one is standing in a liminal space. *Spare* writing and an exclusively soft dynamic level evoke a feeling of emptiness. This piece only has two voices, with an inevitable absence of chordal writing. The harmonic language mostly relies on the Phrygian dominant scale, yet a tonal center is absent.

**Table 3.3 Structure of “Intermezzo”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Through-composed</th>
<th>Measure number</th>
<th>Texture</th>
<th>Phrase structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 1</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Solo melody</td>
<td>5-bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>Duet</td>
<td>4 + 3 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 3</td>
<td>13-16</td>
<td>Imitation</td>
<td>4-bar phrase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lack of motivic organization suggests that “Intermezzo” is through-composed, although, based on texture, its structural form can be divided into three parts, as shown in Figure 3.22. The melodic material may be said to consist of two ideas (Figure 3.23). Some motivic development is employed. From the second beat of measure 5 to measure 10, the first theme is fragmented, imperfectly augmented, and diminished. Also, that theme is a perfect fourth transposition of the original melody. Measures 11 and 12 present another fragmentation taken from the third beat of measure 2 to the second beat of measure 3 (Figure 3.24). An imperfect augmentation and fragmentation of the second theme appears in measures 11-12. The figuration is based on the eighth-note rhythm in measure 8. The
following four measures show the same fragmentation multiple times in the original rhythm (Figure 3.25).

Figure 3.22 KISSIN “Intermezzo” (mm. 1-7, 11-16)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

Figure 3.23 KISSIN “Intermezzo” (mm. 1-10)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission
As in “Meditation” and “Dodecaphonic Tango,” a tonal center is absent. Instead, harmony is mostly based on a Phrygian dominant scale in A, B, and E, although measure 3 shows the presence of a Phrygian scale in A (Figure 3.26). In addition, E serves as a pitch center which opens and closes the piece.
Performance Suggestions

A soft dynamic level persists throughout “Intermezzo.” Thus, performers face an obstacle of maintaining soft sound with consistently refined tone quality. Also, this piece presents a rhythmic challenge since there are many places without downbeats (Figure 3.27). Rubato is applied in this piece, but good rubato comes only after developing a strong sense of basic pulsation. However, the main challenge of “Intermezzo” is to find a convincing musical interpretation. The sparseness of the music and lack of performance directions leave many choices to the performer, which might be stimulated through imagery. For instance, this piece might be imagined as sound travelling through a liminal space or a deserted cathedral. A quarter pedal applied throughout the piece might create a suitable effect. If not obscured, such pedaling gives an echo effect as if it were played in a space with vibrating acoustics, such as a cathedral. However, the author recommends making some pedal changes if performing in a resonating space or if the piano has a bright sound.
3.4 TOCCATA

During the Renaissance and Baroque Period, “toccata” referred to a prelude to a multi-movement piece. Generally, it was filled with improvised virtuoso passages, offering a technical showpiece for performers. Sometimes the improvisation was a way of testing the organ tuning. In the nineteenth century, the toccata became an independent piece resembling an etude.

Kissin began composing “Toccata” in 1986 and completed it in 2015. It is a jazz-inspired tour de force, requiring advanced technical skills. Challenges include running notes, large leaps, and problems in hand coordination, requiring considerable stamina in performance. In some passages, jazz-like rhythm is combined with fast passages, resulting in difficult hand synchronization and physical control. The compositional style shows the influence of both Prokofiev and Gershwin. Robust etude-like passages, an early 20th century harmonic vocabulary, and jazz influence are the main characteristic traits in “Toccata.” Unlike the other three pieces, tonality is clearly present throughout. This piece features sonata form, and motivic development is prominent. Excitement gradually builds.
toward the end, and the introductory material reappears just before the conclusion but with thicker chords. That section shows the greatest intensity, and the piece ends energetically.

Table 3.4 Structure of “Toccata”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sonata-form</th>
<th>Measure number</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Phrase structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>Dominant harmony</td>
<td>3 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First theme</td>
<td>4-19</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>2 bar phrase 2 + 3 bar phrase 2 + 4 bar phrase 3 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>20-22</td>
<td>Augmented sixth harmony</td>
<td>3 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second theme</td>
<td>23-37</td>
<td>G Major</td>
<td>Asymmetric period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>38-47</td>
<td>Modulatory</td>
<td>4 + 2 + 4 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recapituation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First theme</td>
<td>48-62</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>2 bar phrase 2 + 3 bar phrase 2 + 4 bar phrase 2 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>63-65</td>
<td>Augmented sixth harmony</td>
<td>3 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second theme</td>
<td>66-91</td>
<td>C Major</td>
<td>2 bar phrase Asymmetric period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>92-94</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>3 bar phrase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In keeping with sonata-form, “Toccata” presents two motives (Figure 3.28). The first motive frequently undergoes rhythmic modification, repetition, modified sequential treatment, and fragmentation. These techniques are found in the first thematic section. A repetition of motive 1 is followed by its modified sequences, some based on a quasi-augmentation of the fragmented motive (Figure 3.29).
The development shows similar techniques. This section includes a canonic imitation of motive 1 which is developed through repetitions in octave transposition and sequences. As shown in Figure 3.30, measures 42-43 contain an augmentation of the first four notes of motive 1 followed by a recurrence of the original motive. The transition to the second thematic section contains a brief fragment of the first theme consisting of a tritone figure repeated frequently (Figure 3.31). It also briefly appears in measure 45.

The second motive rarely undergoes rhythmic modification. Measures 34 and 37 are the only places which modify motive 2 through syncopation. However, motive 2 presents octave transposition, sequence, and fragmentation in the second half of the second
Figure 3.30 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 42-44)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

Figure 3.31 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 19-21)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

thematic section (Figure 3.32 and Figure 3.33). In addition to the second thematic section, motive 2 appears at the beginning and the coda. It appears in original form but uses augmented chords.

The harmonic language is in accordance with traditional sonata-form. Interestingly, the first thematic section features a combination of a Phrygian and Hungarian minor scales (Figure 3.34). The development includes a circle of fifths progression (Figure 3.35), and the second thematic section in the recapitulation presents a mediant progression (Figure 3.36). Texturally, two-voiced writing predominates, but the second thematic section has
three or four voices (Figure 3.37). The development includes canonic imitation based on the first motive (Figure 3.38). In keeping with traditional “toccata” writing, constant running sixteenth-notes pervade nearly the entire piece.

**Performance Suggestions**

The introduction shows the second theme in augmented chords. In this section, accenting a syncopated chord in measure 2 creates a jazzy atmosphere. In the following
Figure 3.34 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 5-10)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

Figure 3.35 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 37-44)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission
Figure 3.36 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 80-86)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

Figure 3.37 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 74-79)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission
measure, a glissando leads to the exposition. The author suggests stiffening the right thumb in the glissando, producing a more brilliant sound.

“Toccata” presents various pianistic challenges, and generally, slow practice is required to overcome the challenges. The first thematic section requires rhythmic discipline from both hands. Articulation of running sixteenth notes should sound like separate bows from a string instrument. When playing the sixteenth notes in the first theme, slightly twisting the right hand to the right is recommended in order to align the fingers properly on the keyboard. The left hand features repetitive sixteenth note figuration, with accents outlining a chromatic scale progression which should be clearly delineated by the performer (Figure 3.39). From measures 8-10 and 13-16, giving slight emphasis on every first and third beat in the right hand would sound more rhythmically vital and give more shape to the melodic structure (Figure 3.40). Measures 21 and 63 present difficult shifts in both hands. An effective strategy is to find hand positions that do not require passing fingers over the thumb. The grouping is labelled in Figure 3.41. The main point of this...
grouping strategy is to avoid shifting hand position as much as possible, promoting efficiency and greater speed of execution.

Figure 3.39 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 8-11)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

Figure 3.40 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 8-10)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

Figure 3.41 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 19-21)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission
The second thematic section presents hand coordination problems. The left hand figure includes tied notes preceding downbeats, adding to the rhythmic complexity. This figure accompanies the second theme which includes eighth- and sixteenth-note rhythm. Shown in Figure 3.42, the author suggests releasing rather than sustaining the tied notes during practice sessions. Generally hearing internal rhythm becomes easier when notes are released earlier, and this approach can help to solve the hand coordination issue. Measures 21 to 37 present the most difficult passage in “Toccata.” Difficulty in hand coordination and hand position shift is encountered simultaneously. In addition, voicing technique must be applied since the melody is interwoven within the perpetual motion (Figure 3.43).

Figure 3.42 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 22-24)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission

Figure 3.43 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 31-33)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission
Canonic imitation based on the first theme appears at the beginning of the development. Although it is important to show each entrance of the canonic imitation, playing the left hand softer gives better balance since the lower register resonates more than the upper register. Although, in general, *rubato* would be undesirable, the tempo could be more flexible in measures 42-43 and 46-47 (Figure 3.44). Measures 42 and 43 feature partial augmentation of the first theme, and the tempo can be slightly held back in order to emphasize each thematic note. Also, these two measures are the only place in the development which present octave doubling and an accent marking in thematic materials. Measures 46 and 47 are static harmonically, and forward motion at this particular place enhances excitement.

Figure 3.44 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 42-49)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission
In the recapitulation, the second thematic section is elongated through a prolonged mediant harmonic progression. In addition, the second theme gets fragmented in measure 88, and its duration is compressed in measures 90 and 91, producing increased agitation (Figure 3.45). A long *crescendo* is made during the entire mediant harmonic progression. Although a gradual *crescendo* can build excitement, the author suggests a terraced dynamic plan, delaying the main *crescendo* until measure 88. A steady tempo should be maintained.

Figure 3.45 KISSIN “Toccata” (mm. 86-91)
Copyright 2019 G. Henle Verlag, Munich. Printed by permission
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

This document provides a performance guide to *Four Piano Pieces* by Evgeny Kissin which focuses on artistic interpretation and pedagogical suggestions. Development of technology has made it easier to access Kissin’s compositions, and more musicians are performing his work. Although literature about Kissin is available, it is generally concerned with his performance style and his compositional inspirations and processes. Yet, scholarly resources on his compositions are non-existent. Thus, this document aims to fulfill that needed resource and provide information about this work and strategies that would be helpful in performance of these pieces.

Known as a child prodigy, Kissin attained international fame in 1984 when he performed two concerti by Chopin. At present, he annually plays forty to fifty recitals including collaboration with orchestras and other musicians. He records for such prestigious recording companies as Deutsche Grammophon. His achievements have resulted in honorary doctorates and numerous awards, including two Grammy Awards. Although he mainly performs, he composes and recites poetry as secondary careers.

His compositional styles in *Four Piano Pieces* are widely varied, in that each of the four pieces has its own traits. Written in ternary form, “Meditation” is atonal and extensively uses chromaticism. Complex textures and rhythms dominate the work. Melodically, motives undergo changes such as rhythmic modifications and motivic combinations. “Dodecaphonic Tango” has a two-part form defined by melodic materials.
Texturally, it resembles accompanied solo melody. This piece draws heavily on dodecaphony and contains seventy different dodecaphonic aggregations. “Intermezzo” is through-composed and contains only sixteen measures. As with the previous two pieces, the music is atonal. Harmonically, it presents Phrygian dominant scales. In contrast to the other three pieces, a jazz-inspired “Toccata” clearly establishes tonality. Harmonic and melodic materials are in accordance with traditional sonata-form. In keeping with the toccata tradition, the rhythm is characterized by mostly perpetual motion.

Each of the four pieces presents its own pianistic challenges. “Meditation” requires advanced voicing technique since it is written in four different layers. An ostinato must be played with a consistent tone control throughout the piece. “Dodecaphonic Tango” features numerous large chords that are nearly unplayable for small handed pianists. Each motive must have a distinction through different articulations. Performers need to come up with a concept that draws interest from listeners when playing “Intermezzo.” Also, this piece requires a high level of soft dynamic control. “Toccata” presents a test for performers’ technical skills and mental confidence. Performers encounter many physical obstacles such as rhythmic clarity, hand coordination, and large leaps.

The purpose of this performance guide is to provide guidance for artistic interpretation in the practice and performance of Kissin’s *Four Piano Pieces*. In addition, an overview of structural analysis, which mainly focuses on form and thematic development, can serve as a further aid to the understanding of this work. The author suggests that those interested in Kissin’s compositions should pursue a comprehensive theoretical analysis of the *Four Piano Pieces* as well as research on other compositions by
Kissin. This research would promote more interest in Kissin’s works among professional musicians.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Articles


Dissertations

Scores


Sound Recordings


Websites


“Composer Evgeny Kissin”

“Evgeny Kissin & The Kopelman Quartet in Conversation”
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rylcIEx02Io](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rylcIEx02Io) (accessed June 26, 2021)

“Henle Interview with the Composer Evgeny Kissin”
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RfQJRVndz8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RfQJRVndz8) (accessed March 18, 2021)


“Kissin: Dodecaphonic Tango” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgA_4UJg6Mk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgA_4UJg6Mk) (accessed June 25, 2021)
“Kissin plays Kissin Toccata” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ncn8q3Pjctw
(accessed June 25, 2021)

“Perspectives: Evgeny Kissin”

“Yuja Wang & Gautier Capucon play Kissin – Sonata for Piano and Cello”
presents

ANDREW CHOI, piano

in

DOCTORAL RECITAL

Tuesday, January 28, 2020
7:30 PM • Recital Hall

Sonata in A-flat Major, Hob. XVI: 46
  I. Allegro moderato
  II. Adagio
  III. Finale: Presto

Franz Joseph Haydn
(1732-1809)

Basso ostinato

Rodion Shchedrin
(b. 1932)

Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 58
  I. Allegro maestoso
  II. Scherzo: Molto vivace
  III. Largo
  IV. Finale: Presto non tanto

Fryderyk Chopin
(1810-1849)

---

Mr. Andrew Choi is a student of Dr. Joseph Rackers.
This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Performance.
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
School of Music

presents

ANDREW CHOI, piano

in

DOCTORAL CHAMBER RECITAL

with

HALEY KOVACH, violin
BRENT HOOPER, viola
PAI LIU, cello

Tuesday, March 3, 2020
7:30 PM • Recital Hall

Adagio and Rondo Concertante, D. 487
I. Adagio
II. Rondo: Allegro vivace

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)

Piano Quartet No. 1 in G minor, Op. 25
I. Allegro
II. Intermezzo: Allegro (ma non troppo)
III. Andante con moto
IV. Rondo alla Zingarese: Presto

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

This Program is coached by Prof. Phillip Bush.

Mr. Andrew Choi is a student of Dr. Joseph Rackers.
This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Performance.
presents
ANDREW CHOI, piano
in
DOCTORAL RECITAL.
Wednesday, October 21, 2020
4:30 PM • Recital Hall

Sonata No. 17 in B-flat Major, K. 570   Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
   I. Allegro
   II. Adagio
   III. Allegretto

Mazurka in A Minor, Op. 59 No. 1   Fryderyk Chopin
Mazurka in A-flat Major, Op. 59 No. 2
Mazurka in F-sharp Minor, Op. 59 No. 3

Polonaise in F-sharp Minor, Op. 44

Variations on J.S.Bach "Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen", S. 180   Franz Liszt

Mr. Andrew Choi is a student of Dr. Joseph Rackers.
This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Performance.
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
School of Music

presents
ANDREW CHOI, piano

in
DOCTORAL RECITAL
Friday, April 16, 2021
4:30PM • Recital Hall

Sonata No. 20 in A Major, D. 959
I. Allegro  Franz Schubert
II. Andantino
III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace
IV. Rondo: Allegretto

(1797-1828)

Soirées de Vienne No. 6, S. 427
Franz Liszt
(1811-1886)

(1811-1886)

Four Piano Pieces, Op. 1
I. Meditation
II. Dodecaphonic Tango
III. Intermezzo
IV. Toccata

Evgeny Kissin
(b. 1971)

Mr. Choi is a student of Dr. Joseph Rackers.
This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Performance.