

SCOTT WHEELER'S PIANO WORKS: MUSICAL PORTRAITS AND TRIBUTES

by

Linh Thuy Trinh An  
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Doctor of Music Arts at George Mason University

by

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## **DEDICATION**

This is dedicated to my amazing husband Jesse An, my wonderful daughter Cecilia Trinh An, and my two cats, Melody and Boba, who never fail to make me laugh, who are the reason for my strength, and who have filled my life with continuous and unconditional love.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **SCOTT WHEELER'S PIANO WORKS: MUSICAL PORTRAITS AND TRIBUTES**

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Dissertation Director: Dr. Tom C. Owens

The purpose of this study is to understand the piano works by American composer Scott Wheeler, a student of Virgil Thomson (1896-1989) who claimed to be the first musician in the world to have composed musical portraits following the procedure of depicting sitters by a method he called “disciplined spontaneity.” Actively working as a conductor and composer, Wheeler is best known for his vocal works; however, he also wrote more than forty pieces for piano, categorized as musical portraits and tributes. By looking at Wheeler’s entire body of piano compositions, this study identifies the compositional techniques that characterize Scott Wheeler’s musical portraits and tributes. By providing a deep analysis of ten compositions in both categories, this dissertation provides a closer look at the most common characteristics within these pieces.

The study begins with a brief introduction of Scott Wheeler, a musician/composer based in New York, and includes a list of contributions he has made over the years to the

American classical music community. Chapter One also provides a brief overview of musical portraiture throughout the history of art music as well as an understanding of how the genre was created and evolved through time in various composers' works, especially Virgil Thomson's. Chapter Two gives an overview of Wheeler's piano music focusing on four features: formal structure, tonality and diatonicism, texture, and rhythm. Chapter Three analyzes ten pieces in both categories to show how the discussed elements in Chapter Two work together. The last chapter provides a chronological list of all works for piano by Wheeler in the form of a thematic catalog, with selective information on their subjects and dedicatees.

## CHAPTER ONE

*Every musical portrait is tied to an individual, and the composer of it tends to believe it a true likeness; he hopes it will also be good music.*

Virgil Thomson

What does the composer hear from the essence of people? Each individual is unique in his and her own way, and what the composer hears from their distinctive energy must be different. What happens when he uses this energy as the main source of his creation? Are these musical pieces using this type of subject considered a trustworthy rendering of the people they target? Unlike the capturing process of visual portraits, the sketching of musical portraits follow an entirely different procedure, using musical elements to describe the music that the composer hears from his sitters. Virgil Thomson (1896-1989) claimed that he invented a compositional method called “disciplined spontaneity” to create musical portraits, a process that mimics the sketching procedure that painters use to capture the likeness of their human sitters. As abstract as it sounds, he used this method to compose more than 150 portraits during his career and passed on this unique compositional technique to his students.

To date, there are not many studies that deal with this specific technique employed by other composers after Thomson, if at all. The musical portraits by Virgil Thomson remain the only ones using this particular technique that are known of and studied. Fortunately, a student and close friend of Thomson, who is also a well-known

composer among the American art music community, has been using “disciplined spontaneity” to write more than twenty musical portraits in the same manner as those by Thomson. This composer is Scott Wheeler (b. 1952), who is best known for his vocal works rather than his keyboard compositions. Although he has been recognized as a composer of various genres, there has not been any formal academic studies made on his piano music so far.

To that end, this dissertation provides a musical and textual analysis on ten piano compositions by American composer Scott Wheeler. Five musical portraits and five tributes are chosen from three periods of his compositional career in order to see the evolution in his skills as a composer. The first two musical portraits are “Sketching: A Portrait of Shane Crabtree” (1992) and “Cookie Galop with Walt: A Portrait of Elizabeth Cranstoun” (1993), which belong to the first period when Wheeler composed more tributes than portraits. Therefore, three tributes that have been chosen from the first period are “Pseudo-Rag: A Tribute to Gunther Schuller” (1985), “Epithalamion: A Tribute to Donald Berman and Meredith Moss” (1998), and “Birthday Card for Tony: A Tribute to Anthony Tommasini” (1998).

Pieces that belong to the second period are “Arietta: A Portrait of Nancy Armstrong” (2012) and “Cliff Walk: A Tribute to Courtney Kenny” (2006). During this period, the composer wrote both tributes and portraits, maintaining his clever use of “musical germ”<sup>1</sup> in tributes while changing his approach to create more through-composed portraits with distinctive characters within sections. The most recent pieces are

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<sup>1</sup> Scott Wheeler, email exchange with the author, March 11, 2021.

“Gallery View: A Portrait of Millie Fisher” (2020) and “By the Sea: A Tribute to Stephen Sondheim” (2013), which were written on a higher level of sophistication using the most refined compositional technique.

This paper offers a deep understanding on how Wheeler inherits the sketching technique from his mentor and adapts it in writing such pieces in his own style. Though using the same procedure, Wheeler refines his portraits with more revisions to make certain of how he wants his pieces to sound. The analysis of the tributes further examines the composer’s piano compositional style when he composes under no pressure of spontaneity in order to provide a complete view of Wheeler as a composer. Furthermore, by discussing all forty-two compositions collectively, this paper answers to the questions, “What are the crucial characteristics of Wheeler’s piano music?” “How do these piano compositions reflect Wheeler’s growth as a composer?” “How do Wheeler’s piano compositions contribute to the development of the genre?”

## **Scott Wheeler, an Introduction**

### ***Scott Wheeler as a Musician***

Scott Wheeler was born in 1952 in Washington D.C. He received a bachelor’s degree in composition from Amherst College, did graduate studies at New England Conservatory, and received a master’s degree and a Ph.D. in Music Theory from Brandeis University. His previous teachers included leading composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such as Lewis Spratlan, Arthur Berger, Olivier Messiaen, and Peter Maxwell Davies. Wheeler also studied privately with Virgil Thomson and worked under his supervision for many years.

As an educator, Wheeler has taught at the New England Conservatory and at Brandeis University in the past.<sup>2</sup> He currently teaches at Emerson College in Boston and serves both as a music director in the theatre department and as Senior Distinguished Artist in Residence. As a composer, Wheeler has received commissions by orchestras from everywhere in the United States, including Minnesota, Houston, Toledo, and Indianapolis,<sup>3</sup> as well as well-respected opera companies such as the Metropolitan Opera and the Washington National Opera. Wheeler has also supported important musical societies such as the Virgil Thomson Foundation (as Vice President and as a member of the foundation's Board of Directors), the Harvard Musical Association (as Chair of the Commission Committee), and Friends of Amherst College Music (as a member of its Advisory Board). He has received awards from many organizations, including the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Koussevitzky Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.<sup>4</sup>

On November 18, 2021, Wheeler's *Violin Concerto No. 2, Birds of America* (2021), was given its world premiere by The Orchestra Now at Carnegie Hall, New York, conducted by Leon Botstein (b. 1946), and featuring violinist Gil Shaham (b. 1971). The concerto was written for Mr. Shaham and presented alongside Julia Perry's *Stabat Mater*

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<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Lynn Sgroe, "21<sup>st</sup> Century American Composer: A Selected Study of The Songs of Scott Wheeler" (DMA diss, University of Kentucky, 2008), accessed January 24, 2021, <https://search-proquest-com.mutex.gmu.edu/docview/304550888?pq-origsite=summon>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Scott Wheeler, *Biography*, accessed March 14, 2021, <https://scottwheeler.org/biography/>.

(1951) and George Bristow's *Arcadian Symphony* (1872).<sup>5</sup> Joshua Baron called the concerto "likable" with "elements of timelessness," saying it had "lyricism akin to that of Barber and Korngold's famous violin concertos — but also postmodernism, with snippets of classics like Vivaldi's 'The Four Seasons.'"<sup>6</sup>

As a composer of various genres, Wheeler has written compositions for solo piano, piano duos, a piano concerto, and music for other keyboard instruments, such as the organ. In June 2006, his piano concerto *Gradualia* was premiered at the Alba Festival in Alba, Italy.<sup>7</sup> His compositions for piano and other instruments have been commissioned by Smith College, the Summer Star Foundation, National Sawdust.<sup>8</sup> Anthony Tommasini wrote, "Wheeler's compositions remain tonally grounded, although polychordal harmonies and elements of modified serialism often run through his works. His writing is also characterized by strong rhythms and lucid textures."<sup>9</sup>

In 1975-76, Wheeler co-founded a new music ensemble called the Dinosaur Annex, named after a dance company, the New England Dinosaur Dance Theater. The

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<sup>5</sup> The Orchestra Now, *November 18, 2021, Program Info*, accessed February 10, 2022, <https://www.theorchestranow.org/event/shaham/>.

<sup>6</sup> Joshua Barone, "Review: An Orchestra Offers a Novel View of Music History," *The New York Times*, (November 19, 2021), accessed February 10, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/19/arts/music/the-orchestra-now-review.html?smid=url-share>.

<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Lynn Sgroe, "21<sup>st</sup> Century American Composer: A Selected Study of The Songs of Scott Wheeler" (DMA diss, University of Kentucky, 2008), accessed January 24, 2021, <https://search-proquest-com.mutex.gmu.edu/docview/304550888?pq-origsite=summon>.

<sup>8</sup> Scott Wheeler, email exchange with the author, February 7, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Anthony Tommasini, "Wheeler, Scott," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001), accessed February 14, 2020, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.mutex.gmu.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000048596>.

ensemble's initial purpose was to provide a platform for new and rising composers and performers to feature their own works and talent. However, as the ensemble grew past its original objective, it started attracting grants and expanding its repertoire to include any important music by living composers.<sup>10</sup> During the 1970s, through the Dinosaur Annex, Wheeler met his then-student Donald Berman, who became a frequent collaborator and a friend.

### ***Current Literature on the Composer***

Since Wheeler is best known for his operas and other vocal works, most critical writings about the composer discuss these compositions. His commissioned operas, especially the two-hour long opera *Democracy: An American Comedy*, commissioned and premiered by the Washington National Opera in 2005, and the ninety-minute opera *Naga*, commissioned and premiered by Friends of Madame White Snake and Boston Lyric Opera in 2016, have made headlines in various newspaper and magazines for classical music in the United States including *OperaNews.com*, *BroadWayWorld.com*, and *NewMusicUSA.com*. Wheeler's music has been reviewed in *Fanfare Magazine*, *Chamber Music Magazine*, and *The New York Times*.<sup>11</sup>

In 2008, four of his vocal works became the main subjects of a DMA dissertation by Jennifer L. Sgroe at the University of Kentucky, the first official study into any of Wheeler's compositions. By analyzing two solo songs, "I Will Always Be on Your Side" and "Equinox;" a five-song cycle called *Wasting the Night*; and an extended solo song,

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<sup>10</sup> Scott Wheeler, in *Portraits: The Piano Music by Scott Wheeler*, directed by Fern Lopez, (Entirely Plausible Enterprises, LLC, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Sgroe, 5.

*Helena and the Moonstone*, Sgroe discusses the most distinctive characteristics of Wheeler's vocal music and the importance of the composer's works in modern art music. Many of her conclusions on Wheeler's musical style and compositional echo what has been said by leading music critics, especially those by Anthony Tommasini.

She demonstrates that Wheeler prioritizes words over melody and shows that his style of writing for voice is quite faithful and loyal to the text on which his songs are set. Sgroe also links the deep connection between Wheeler's music and the texts to similar ideas set forth by his teacher Virgil Thomson, that "there has to be a marriage of words and music,"<sup>12</sup> and concludes Wheeler successfully applies this way of thinking in his own vocal works. She observes the composer's preference for small and simple motives across songs to link them together in order to "deepen the connection between the poems and the emotions expressed within them."<sup>13</sup> Finally, she provides Wheeler's most common used elements, including pitch set constructions, motivic variation, rhythmic development, and his use of texture, harmony, and tonality in "linear intervallic relationships" instead of in vertical one,<sup>14</sup> many of which echo what this dissertation discovers.

As of today, there has not been a formal study on Wheeler's piano compositions. His portraits, however, have been occasionally mentioned in reviews of the album *Portraits and Tributes: Works for Piano*, recorded by pianist Donald Berman and

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<sup>12</sup> Virgil Thomson, in Sgroe, 60.

<sup>13</sup> Sgroe, 89.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

distributed by Bridge Music LLC in 2016. The album includes twenty-seven portraits and tributes selected by the composer himself, five of which were included in a piano recital given by Berman a year before the album made its debut. In *The New York Times*, David Allen called Wheeler's portraits "nervously excitable," "gently atonal," and "mercurial." He called the program, in which Wheeler's piano pieces were played along with works by Berio, Fauré, and Ives, an "easygoing and winsome" concert.<sup>15</sup>

Berman's recording received generous reviews the year it came out. Lynn R. Bayley used words including "fascinating," "surprising," and "delightful" to describe the album, which she highly recommended music lovers enjoy on a Sunday morning.<sup>16</sup> Stephen Estep thought Wheeler's pieces were "often dreamy and meditative with not much drama or fire and ice." One of the tributes, "Flow Chart," is considered not dramatic enough to keep it interesting for the composition's 11-minute length; Estep called it the weakest piece in the album. However, the critic still considered the album worth listening to, especially for those who are "lovers of down-to-earth, intelligent American piano writing."<sup>17</sup> The non-dramatic aspect of these works observed by these music critics is a quality quite opposite to qualities often found in Wheeler's vocal pieces.

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<sup>15</sup> David Allen, "Donald Berman Balances Fire and Rhapsody at Bargemusic," *The New York Times* (May 31, 2015), accessed February 15, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/01/arts/music/review-donald-berman-balances-fire-and-rhapsody-at-bargemusic.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Lynn R. Bayley, "Scott Wheeler's Kaleidoscopic Piano Vignettes," *The Art Music Lounge: An Online Journal of Jazz and Classical Music* (June 13, 2016), accessed February 15, 2021, <https://artmusiclounge.wordpress.com/2016/06/13/scott-wheelers-kaleidoscopic-piano-vignettes/>

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Estep, "Piano Pieces," *American Record Guide* 79, no. 5 (Sept/Oct 2016): 189–90, accessed February 15, 2021, <http://search.ebscohost.com.mutex.gmu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=117537827&site=ehost-live>.

Scott Wheeler himself stated that he learned to write portraits from his teacher, Virgil Thomson, who advised him “if you’re ever stuck, try writing a portrait.”<sup>18</sup> This perhaps explains the lightness and meditative quality of many of Wheeler’s portraits, as he composes such pieces as a way of detangling himself from “writer’s block.”

In the one-hour long Fern Lopez documentary, living subjects of six portraits gave brief details on their portrait sketching experiences and their thoughts on the pieces dedicated to them. An interview with Donald Berman, who played and recorded the album, was also included in the documentary, in which the pianist described his experience with Wheeler in the recording studio. Berman also shared details on the first time he met Wheeler in 1986 when the pianist first moved to Boston for graduate school and played with Dinosaur Annex. This event led to twenty years of collaboration between the two musicians, during which time Wheeler wrote much piano music for Berman, the first of which was “Flow Chart” (1993).<sup>19</sup> In 1998, Wheeler wrote “Epithalamion” as a tribute to Berman’s wedding.

Six portraits in the documentary include the portraits “Arrieta” of Nancy Armstrong, “Cowley Meditation” of James Woodman, “Sketching” of Shane Crabtree, “Bleecker Study” of Fern Lopez (the documentary’s producer), and “Life Study” of Megan Marshall. According to the subjects, the sketching of their portraits happened as they sat down in front of the composer and worked on their own projects. For example,

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<sup>18</sup> Scott Wheeler, in *Portraits: The Piano Music by Scott Wheeler*, directed by Fern Lopez, (Entirely Plausible Enterprises, LLC, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Donald Berman, in *Portraits: The Piano Music by Scott Wheeler*, directed by Fern Lopez, (Entirely Plausible Enterprises, LLC, 2016).

Nancy Armstrong was memorizing a Vivaldi's work for an upcoming concert, and Fern Lopez and Shane Crabtree were both doing work in their studios. All of them thought they could see and hear the resemblances between their portraits and themselves.<sup>20</sup>

When discussing his own piano works, Wheeler pays tribute to composers and artists whose works have been highly inspiring and influential to him, including his principal teachers, Arthur Berger and Virgil Thomson, and other 20<sup>th</sup> century composers such as Schoenberg, Webern, Bartok, and Olivier Messiaen. Wheeler was also “obsessed” with Haydn, “spent hours playing through his sonatas,” and described the sense of continuity that “one idea leads to the next, then the next, in a surprising, even goofy way” as a direct influence on how he thinks of portraits.<sup>21</sup> This obsession, he said, led to his interest in C. P. E. Bach with his “wildly discursive continuity,” as well as his preference for J.S. Bach's *French Suites*, *English Suites*, and *Partitas* over the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Lastly, American jazz is an unquestionable source of inspiration in many compositions by Wheeler through works by Bill Evans, Scott Joplin, James P. Johnson, Keith Jarrett, George Gershwin, and Sara Bareilles.

### ***Thomson to Wheeler: Mentor, Fellow Musician, and Lifelong Friend***

Other mentions of Scott Wheeler appear mostly in writings about his teacher, Virgil Thomson. Anthony Tommasini describes his relationship with Thomson and Wheeler as respected colleagues and friends. According to his book, Wheeler introduced Tommasini to Thomson while they were faculty colleagues at Emerson College in

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<sup>20</sup> *Portraits: The Piano Music by Scott Wheeler*, directed by Fern Lopez, (Entirely Plausible Enterprises, LLC, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Scott Wheeler, email exchange with the author, March 13, 2021.

Boston. Tommasini describes Wheeler as “balding, baby-faced, perky, and brilliant, [...] a pragmatic musician with wide-ranging interests.”<sup>22</sup> With Wheeler as the conductor and Tommasini on the piano, the duo ambitiously produced Thomson’s two-act opera *The Mother of Us All* to celebrate Thomson’s 85<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1981, which the composer himself called the “most imaginative I have seen.”<sup>23</sup> The event marked the beginning of a friendship between Wheeler and Tommasini, who remained friends and colleagues through Thomson’s death.

Tommasini describes the relationship between Wheeler and Thomson not only as mentor and student but also close friends. In fact, Thomson wrote a portrait of Wheeler titled “Scott Wheeler: Free Wheeling” in 1981; and in 1986, the late composer sent a piece he wrote to celebrate the birth of Wheeler’s daughter Margaret, along “with a silver baby spoon and a note card saying, ‘Virgil loves you.’”<sup>24</sup> Thomson maintained a mentorship as well as a friendship with Wheeler for years, teaching him and supervising him in orchestrating and arranging Thomson’s own works.<sup>25</sup> A CD titled “Portraits and Self-Portraits,” issued by Northeastern Records (Classical Arts NR 240-CD) includes a set of five portraits by Thomson, orchestrated by Wheeler, among other portraits and self-portraits by the late composer. Rodney Lister described the pieces on this CD as being

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<sup>22</sup> Anthony Tommasini, *Virgil Thomson: Composer on the Aisle*, 1st ed (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 524.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 526.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 546.

<sup>25</sup> Noah Creshevsky, “A Portrait of The Artist as Portraitist,” *Newsletter - Institute for Studies in American Music*, Brooklyn: H Wiley Hitchcock Institute for Studies in American Music (October 1, 1990): 4.

“loving and understanding of the music.”<sup>26</sup> To date, Wheeler still serves as vice president of the Board of Directors of the Virgil Thomson Foundation.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Piano Music by Scott Wheeler**

I began my investigation of Scott Wheeler’s works by making a chart that identified the musical elements in all forty-two pieces, arranged in a chronological order. During this early stage of analysis, I noted the five basic elements within each piece, which include melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, and form. By compiling this chart, I could then easily detect the three periods of Wheeler’s piano writing based on the most common characteristics found in pieces within each timeframe. For instance, earlier works tend to recall thematic materials from the introductory section in the third section while following immediately with new materials, which results in an ambiguous overall structure for the piece. The pieces in the second period, on the other hand, tend to have quite distinctive characters in different sections, which share very little to no elements; and the most current compositions all share the same character revealing process as well as a tripartite formal structure. The three periods are discussed in depth in Chapter Two.

After dividing the pieces into three periods, I identified the most outstanding features and elements of each, such as the ambiguous form in the early portraits, the motivic variations in the tributes, the experimental use of block chords and constant dissonant harmony in the middle portraits, and the short and decorative melodic figures in

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<sup>26</sup> Rodney Lister, "Virgil Thomson: A Portrait of His Music (As Glimpsed in Recent Recordings)," *Tempo*, New Series, no. 175 (1990): 18-22, accessed January 24, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/944577>.

<sup>27</sup> Scott Wheeler, *Biography*, accessed March 14, 2021, <https://scottwheeler.org/biography/>

the latest pieces. Based on these most common elements as well as previously acknowledged works within existing publications on Wheeler's music, I was then able to choose ten pieces of both categories to analyze in-depth. In Chapter Three, I highlight the characteristics mentioned in Chapter Two and also briefly mention the elements that distinguish each piece from the rest of the compositions, making it a unique rendering of its subject or dedicatee.

My private interviews with the composer, Scott Wheeler, play a crucial role in this dissertation. I started exchanging emails with the composer in early 2020 to confirm the availability of the materials as well as to gain his permission to study his piano works. Thanks to Wheeler's accessibility, I was able to obtain all the scores of his piano compositions via Dropbox as well as recordings of the pieces. Due to his busy schedule and COVID-19, since June 2021, our meetings have been conducted on Zoom, during which I received his permission to record audio files for later use. The information that I acquired during these interviews serves as the main material for Chapter Four, which includes the composer's memory of the sketching process and his personal view on the subjects and dedicatees. The information that Wheeler provided on his subjects also helps me make the connection between the musical elements in the portraits and the physical activities that they might represent, discussed in Chapter Three. However, the analysis remains my personal interpretation with little to no influences by Wheeler's descriptions.

### ***The Musical Tributes***

Wheeler wrote eighteen pieces as tributes, which he described as "fairly strictly planned" pieces with the exact opposite compositional methods to those employed for the

portraits.<sup>28</sup> Many of these tributes, including the ones to Anthony Tommasini, Gunther Schuller, and Arthur Berger, which Wheeler calls “grid pieces,”<sup>29</sup> have the number of measures of their dedicatees’ birthdays; so rather than writing from a germ of an idea and following it along, Wheeler opens these pieces with their musical germ. They also tend to have some sort of pre-planned quotation, such as the klezmer wedding hymn in “Epithalamion,” Thelonious Monk’s tune “Round Midnight” in “Midnight Bells,” Stephen Sondheim’s “By the Sea,” and the chords from Virgil Thomson’s portrait of Anthony Tommasini. Other details that Wheeler likes to insert in his birthday tributes are initials of the dedicatees and the years that they were born, using the musical alphabet and *solfège*.

Four tributes are dedicated to weddings of either Wheeler’s family members or his close friends. These tributes include details such as initials of the groom and bride (“Epithalamion”), quotation from their dedicatees’ favorite tunes/pieces (“Midnight Bell”), and the location of the wedding (“Free Ranging”). Wheeler also wrote three tributes to celebrate the birth of babies, either within his extended family or his friend circle. These pieces do not contain the same information as the birthday tributes; instead, they only carry elements associated with the places these dedicatees were born or lived, such as an island in “Island Lullaby,” and a place filled with fireflies as in “Firefly Lullaby.” These tributes set a soothing and gentle mood as in lullabies for babies, created mostly by the composer’s fantasy of the scenarios.

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<sup>28</sup> Scott Wheeler, email exchange with the author, March 14, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Scott Wheeler, email exchange with the author, March 11, 2021.

### *The Musical Portraits by Scott Wheeler*

Carrying on the technique developed by Thomson, Wheeler has written twenty-four portraits so far in his career, the earliest piece from 1977 and the latest 2020. Using the same method, Wheeler also composed his portraits while sitting across his sitters. He explains the process as “the discipline of being connected in the moment and to write down what he was hearing.”<sup>30</sup> Regarding his own sketching procedure, Wheeler explains:

First, I have to sit quietly with the subject, neither of us speaking. I try to listen, breathe quietly, become aware of the person as they settle in to being observed in this way. It can take a few minutes, but at some point, a musical image comes to mind. I listen to it a bit (silently – none of this is played on piano or any other instrument) before writing it down on my music paper. That then becomes the germ of the piece, and likely suggests something that might follow. I follow Virgil’s recommendation to always read back from the beginning before writing the next part of the piece. Occasionally I find I’ve taken a wrong turn and I cross something out. Occasionally I sketch out something on the side, to work out some aspect of the music separate from the main draft. But the goal is to allow my sense of the portrait subject to come out in a single musical impulse, however many little twists and surprises may emerge. So, there is no planning at all, but I’m constantly aware of how different elements seem to be interacting to create the piece.<sup>31</sup>

According to Wheeler, the sketching process is very much alike from subject to subject. It usually takes him approximately one and a half hours to complete a sketch, during which time his subject would be doing a certain activity that does not make much noise, such as reading a book, editing a film, or sketching a visual portrait. On the day of the sketching, the composer would meet with his subject at around 10:30 in the morning, have a brief chat to get comfortable with each other and the scenario, and proceed to the sketching.

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<sup>30</sup> Scott Wheeler, in *Portraits: The Piano Music by Scott Wheeler*, directed by Fern Lopez, (Entirely Plausible Enterprises, LLC, 2016).

<sup>31</sup> Scott Wheeler, email exchange with the author, March 11, 2021.

Once the portrait is in process, there is no interaction between the composer and his subject; the subject would be doing their thing, and the composer would be writing down the music that he hears inside his head. The subjects usually are quite nervous at the beginning, as much as the composer is about whether or not he would be able to finish the job. “It’s hard for me, too, of course. It’s like taking an exam, and it’s always scary. Am I capable of doing this? Can I turn on musical invention just on the spot? And I always fear that nothing will happen. If you are in fact a musician, music goes through your head all the time. So, can I quiet that music and hear what might be coming from this person? But that is what Virgil taught me. That I had to leave my mind alone, and that is the disciplined spontaneity.”<sup>32</sup>

During the sketching, the composer writes down the melodies and harmonies that comes to mind. “The whole point is you’re sensing the person you’re with and where the energy’s going.”<sup>33</sup> He lets his mind alone and listens to the music that comes from what he believes the energy of his subject and captures it with his pencil on a manuscript paper. He always goes back to the beginning of the portrait before moving on to the next phrase, however. At a certain point, the music or energy appears to be in a new place, which results in a next section; however, sometimes, the composer feels an urge to round off the form after going back to the beginning one last time. “And in several of the pieces, the energy goes to a certain point, to a quiet place,” that concludes the portraits.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 21, 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

There is no plan of form, texture, or any other elements prior to the sketching; the entire procedure is similar to an improvisation, only to be written down on paper and to be played later when the final result is polished. After the process, the composer does not touch his sketching until the next morning, where he firstly reads it in silence, then plays it on the piano, and makes his revisions. “I fix what didn’t feel right or not what I had in mind. I made a whole new draft to make sure the whole thing comes together.”<sup>35</sup>

To describe the similarities and differences between his portrait sketching technique and that of Thomson, he continues:

The sitting itself is very much what Virgil describes and what he did when writing my own portrait. He describes occasionally needing more than one sitting to finish a portrait – that has never happened to me. However, I had the impression that his portraits were truly complete after the sitting. Mine seldom are. Typically, I leave the pencil sketch overnight and read it through the next day, still silently. Then I take it to the piano, where I might make some small adjustments. Then I enter it on the computer, which Virgil of course never did, and I make sure the dynamics and articulations reflect how I hear it. I’ll even listen to the computer play it back (I use Finale) to make sure it’s what I’ve been hearing.<sup>36</sup>

The last step that Wheeler follows is what separates him from his mentor. While Thomson edited his original drafts very little if at all, Wheeler goes through multiple stages to perfect his. Thanks to music notation software, the composer is able to listen to the draft without having to master the pieces that he has written on the piano in such a short time. He only needs to type his piece in Finale and the software can play it back in a decent quality, which makes it possible for him to add more details such as dynamics and articulations, and fix the portrait to what he wanted it to sound like. “All the music came

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<sup>35</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 21, 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Scott Wheeler, in *Portraits: The Piano Music by Scott Wheeler*, directed by Fern Lopez, (Entirely Plausible Enterprises, LLC, 2016).

from the sitting, but it gets fixed up. My ears require the actual sounds for me to be sure that I was writing what I heard; it's the imperfection of my own ears. I have to write what sounds right. The important thing is that I wrote a piece that I like and that I'm willing to show other people."<sup>37</sup>

### ***Musical Portraiture through History***

#### *Musical Portraits as Character Pieces*

Using music to depict the characteristics of people or scenarios long predates the work of Thomson and Wheeler. French baroque composer Francois Couperin (1668-1733) was the first composer to claim that he had “painted portraits in music.”<sup>38</sup> Non-visual portraits could be traced back to as early as the 1650s, however, when a “fashion sprung up in France [...] to depict [people] in works called *portraits*”<sup>39</sup> made its appearance and led to a variety of sub-genres of literary portraits (such as *parlor portraits* – portraits for parlor amusement and *diplomatic portraits* – portraits depicting people's careers instead of their hearts and souls). It did not take long for this genre of literary portraits to have its own adaptation in music, with Couperin as the pioneer. The rise of titled instrumental pieces in France towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and especially the appearance of the *tombeaux* (serious memorial pieces commemorating the deaths of notable individuals) directly led to Couperin's *pièces de caractères*-musical portraits

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<sup>37</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 21, 2021.

<sup>38</sup> David Fuller, “Of Portraits, ‘Sapho’ and Couperin: Titles and Characters in French Instrumental Music of the High Baroque,” *Music & Letters* 78, no. 2 (May 1, 1997): 149–174.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

titled according to the composer's intention to depict people and scenarios.<sup>40</sup> According to David Fuller, Virgil Thomson was the only other composer since Couperin to discuss his technique of composing his musical portraits.<sup>41</sup> The two composers shared the same inspiration, using literary portraits to create their own parallel genre in music.

Joshua Walden explores portraiture and the connections between music and language, visual arts, and human characters, in the metaphoric representation used in musical portraits to make such connections. Walden examines selected musical portraits that have direct interactions with literature, painting, and other music, either by portraying poets, painters, and musicians, using elements that resemble their artistic styles in their own fields, or by combining aspects from all the disciplines to create hybrid works of “multimedia portraiture and the genre of the portrait opera.”<sup>42</sup> The author considers Virgil Thomson's portraits of poet Gertrude Stein, “Miss Gertrude Stein as a Young Girl” and painter Buffie Johnson, “Buffie Johnson: Drawing Virgil Thomson in Charcoal;” Pierre Boulez's portrait of poet Stéphane Mallarmé, *Pli selon pli: Portrait de Mallarmé*; Morton Feldman's portrait of painter Willem de Kooning, “de Kooning;” Philip Glass's portrait of visual artist Chuck Close, “A Musical Portrait of Chuck Close,” and many portraits and self-portraits of and by other artists. The scope of Walden's study is much wider and comprehensive than that of this study, therefore it will provide

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<sup>40</sup> David Fuller, “Of Portraits, ‘Sapho’ and Couperin: Titles and Characters in French Instrumental Music of the High Baroque,” *Music & Letters* 78, no. 2 (May 1, 1997): 149–174.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Joshua S. Walden, *Musical Portraits: The Composition of Identity in Contemporary and Experimental Music* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017).

supplemental reading for further understanding of musical portraiture's relationship with other forms of arts.

### *Musical Portraits as a Genre*

Regarding musical portraiture as a singular genre, portraits by Couperin inspired and encouraged other composers, including C. P. E. Bach (1714-1788), Robert Schumann (1810-1856), and Virgil Thomson. C. P. E. Bach imitated not only the French practice of giving generic names to his non-dance pieces, but also used his friends' names as titles as well.<sup>43</sup> The use of the female-gendered article *la* in his piece titles also strongly suggested the influences of French music, especially that by Couperin, on C. P. E. Bach, who used Couperin's portraits as a model for the "gestural and structural elements"<sup>44</sup> in his own compositions of the genre. Imitating Couperin and a self-portrait he had written, titled "La Couperin," C. P. E. Bach was believed to have written at least two self-portraits: the "L'Aly Rupelich" – a "witty and cunning" portrait of the composer as a mischievous and humorous sitter, and the Fantasia in F-sharp Minor titled "C. P. E. Bach's Empfindungen (feelings)" – a portrait of his "interior sensibility."<sup>45</sup> Besides these two self-portraits, he

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<sup>43</sup> David Fuller, "Of Portraits, 'Sapho' and Couperin: Titles and Characters in French Instrumental Music of the High Baroque," *Music & Letters* 78, no. 2 (May 1, 1997): 149–174.

<sup>44</sup> Darrell Berg, "Bach's Character Pieces and his Friendship Circle," in *C. P. E. Bach Studies*, ed. Stephen Clark (England: Clarendon Press, 1988), 1-32, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015013623395>.

<sup>45</sup> Joshua Walden, "Composing Character in Musical Portraits: Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and 'L'Aly Rupalich,'" *The Musical Quarterly* 91, no. 3/4 (October 1, 2008): 379–411.

wrote twenty-three other portraits for solo keyboard, or character pieces, between 1754 and 1757.<sup>46</sup>

Robert Schumann's *Carnaval*, Op. 9 (1834-1835) is among the most famous sets of short character pieces. Schumann used musical elements to depict personalities of masked revelers at Carnival. Lawrence Kramer calls half of the miniatures in Schumann's *Carnaval* "mercurial and caricature-like character sketches [...] both from life and from the improvised theater of Italian *commedia dell'arte*."<sup>47</sup> However, writes Kramer, the individuality of the "subjects," if we could call them as such, is not quite defined as a portrait, because "as a series...the sketches in their crazy-quilt diversity challenge the notion that there is a single self behind all the masks."<sup>48</sup> These sketches, Kramer believes, are of both the composer and his subjects, with a strong "musical signature and poetic projection"<sup>49</sup> of Schumann's two famous alter egos: Eusebius and Florestan, fantasy names given by the composer to two different aspects of his personality.

Other musical portraits have appeared in works by Charles Ives's *Concord Sonata*, Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Five Tudor Portraits*, Benjamin Britten's *Two*

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<sup>46</sup> Berg, in *C. P. E. Bach Studies*, ed. Stephen Clark, 1-32.

<sup>47</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 100-132, accessed February 8, 2021, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.mutex.gmu.edu/lib/gmu/reader.action?docID=223010&ppg=111>.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

*Portraits*,<sup>50</sup> Charles Gounod's *Funeral March of a Marionette* (of Henry Fothergill Chorley),<sup>51</sup> and Richard Strauss's *Symphonia Domestica* (of himself and his family).<sup>52</sup> Two most notable musical portraitists before Virgil Thomson are the Russian pianist and composer Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894), and Sir Edward Elgar (1857-1934).<sup>53</sup> Anthony Tommasini describes the twenty-four piano portraits that Rubinstein composed at a house-party on Kamemnoi-Ostrow island in Russia in 1855 "the only example of explicit musical portraiture from the mid-nineteenth century of any renown."<sup>54</sup> These piano portraits were later published as *Kammennoi-Ostrow* Op. 10, "24 Portraits for Piano." Also according to Tommasini, Elgar's *Variations on an Original Theme* ("Enigma"), op. 36, better known as the *Enigma Variations*, however, trumped the *Kammennoi-Ostrow* to be "the most famous set of musical portraits prior to Thomson's portraits."<sup>55</sup> The composition includes variations based on a common theme, created using characteristics of the composer's wife, himself, and a dozen friends. According to Diana McVeagh,

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<sup>50</sup> Joshua Walden, "Composing Character in Musical Portraits: Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and 'L' Aly Rupalich," *The Musical Quarterly* 91, no. 3/4 (October 1, 2008): 379–411.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph Smith, "Rare Finds: Musical Portraits," *Piano Today* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 8 – 56, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://search-proquest-com.mutex.gmu.edu/magazines/rare-finds-musical-portraits/docview/1470559/se-2?accountid=14541>.

<sup>52</sup> "People and Ideas: Musical Portraits," *Vogue* 113, no. 7 (Apr 15, 1949): 64-65, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://search-proquest-com.mutex.gmu.edu/magazines/people-ideas-musical-portraits/docview/904322720/se-2?accountid=14541>.

<sup>53</sup> For further reading refer to Virgil Thomson's "On Portraits and Operas," in *Virgil Thomson a Reader: Selected Writings 1924-1984*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 273.

<sup>54</sup> Anthony Tommasini, *Virgil Thomson's Musical Portraits* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986), 3-4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

among these subjects who have been identified are Elgar's musical associates, a country squire, and A. J. Jaegar, the publishing office manager at Novello music, who was the inspiration for "Nimrod," the famous ninth variation of the *Enigma Variations*.<sup>56</sup>

*The Musical Portraits by Virgil Thomson*

Virgil Thomson, however, was first to sketch and compose musical portraits in a way that used living humans as sitting subjects in the same manner as for visual portraits. While other composers "have more than dabbled in this area," according to Michael Meckna, most of them "have been wary, feeling perhaps that music is too abstract a medium for the explicit portrayal of human characteristics."<sup>57</sup> Thomson was heavily inspired and influenced by American poet and writer Gertrude Stein (1874-1946), who composed numerous literary portraits. After becoming a subject for one of Stein's portraits in 1928, he started experimenting with what could be considered a parallel genre in music. To depict personalities, Stein made use of extremely vague language and what she called its "associative value."<sup>58</sup> Thomson developed his own technique by using what he called the "discipline of spontaneity" in his musical writing.<sup>59</sup> This spontaneous writing discipline in creating portraits, according to Thomson, benefited him as a

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<sup>56</sup> Diana McVeagh, "Elgar, Sir Edward," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001), accessed March 2, 2021, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline.com.mutex.gmu.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000008709>.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Meckna, reviewed of *Portraits and Other Works* by Virgil Thomson, *American Music* 13, no. 2 (1995): 253-54, accessed January 24, 2021. doi:10.2307/3052266.

<sup>58</sup> Tommasini, "The Musical Portraits by Virgil Thomson," 238.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

composer, and also helped him practice his ability to characterize individuals, a skill he required for his operatic writing.<sup>60</sup>

Little has been done to study musical portraits as a serious and singular musical genre, especially those written by modern composers such as Thomson and Wheeler. Anthony Tommasini was the first and the only music critic who studied and wrote about the genre as an independent genre without connections to other forms of arts, by analyzing the works of the teacher he and Wheeler shared, Virgil Thomson. He described Thomson's approach to writing musical portraits as the exact opposite of Gertrude Stein's, with her literary portraits. He explains,

[...] their respective procedures emanated from opposite ends of a creative spectrum. Stein took the explicit medium of language, tried to purge it of its associative references and specific meanings, and attempted real to create an abstract word portrait. Thomson took the abstract medium of music, tried to cultivate within it specific, referential evocative qualities, and attempted to create an explicit musical portrait. Their convergence from opposite ends of this spectrum represents their similarity.<sup>61</sup>

Thomson's sketching procedure mirrors that of a painter. Among the portraits he composed throughout his life, there are only six portraits (the first six he wrote) that were created by memory. All other portraits were "drawn from life,"<sup>62</sup> written in the presence of the subject, a method that Thomson claimed to be the first composer to have ever used. All were done in one sitting, during which time the subjects were welcome to do anything they liked except make conversation with the composer. The "sketching" of each portrait

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<sup>60</sup> Tommasini, *Virgil Thomson's Musical Portraits* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986), 15.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Wittke, "Vignettes of His Life and Time," commissioned for the Thomson centennial catalog, 1996, accessed March 18, 2021, <https://www.virgilthomson.org/about/vignettes/>

usually lasted between an hour and an hour and a quarter.<sup>63</sup> During the procedure, Thomson wrote anything that came to his mind, pausing briefly at places to go through what he had done, and only stopped when he felt he had captured everything about the sitter's personality. If anything, or anyone, happened to be around when the sketches were in process, he would include that in the portrait as well. An example of this phenomenon is the appearance of a very strong character who suddenly shows up in the musical portrait of Dora Marr, a love partner of Picasso, which later was explained by the painter's curiosity during the sketching of her portrait.<sup>64</sup>

After the procedure was completed, he would give the portrait a day to sit undisturbed as a "setting rule," so that he could make any adjustments needed on the next day with a fresh perspective,<sup>65</sup> such as adding complex harmonic texture or cutting out measures.<sup>66</sup> Thomson, who was a prolific writer and a music critic besides being a composer, provided a brief description of his own method,

There are by now a hundred or more of such portraits, all but the first six drawn from life, and each one bearing, in the judgement of persons acquainted with the sitter, some resemblance to its model. All have been sketched in silence too, usually at one sitting, save for those that comprise several sections, in which case each movement has been composed without interruption. And I do not stop to try out on the piano, to hear, correct, or criticize what I have done. Such adjustments are left for later, as is orchestral elaboration should this occur. Descriptive subtitles, such as Lullaby or Hunting Song, are also subsequent additions. My effort while at work is to write down whatever comes to

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<sup>63</sup> Tommasini, *Virgil Thomson's Musical Portraits* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986), 17.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Wittke, "Vignettes of His Life and Time," commissioned for the Thomson centennial catalog, 1996, accessed March 18, 2021, <https://www.virgilthomson.org/about/vignettes/>

<sup>65</sup> Louis Rispoli, in *Virgil Thomson's Musical Portrait* by Anthony Tommasini (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986).

<sup>66</sup> Virgil Thomson, "On Portraits and Operas," in *Virgil Thomson a Reader: Selected Writings 1924-1984*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 274-5.

me in the sitter's presence, hoping as I transcribe my experience that it will, as the painters say, "make a composition."<sup>67</sup>

### *The Significance of the "New" Musical Portraits*

What made the genre "re-invented" by Virgil Thomson so special that these modern portraits would stand out from those by previous composers such as Couperin, Bach, Schumann, Rubinstein, and Elgar? Many factors affect the answer to this question. The function of portraits by all these composers is almost the same: to depict the human characteristics and likeness of their patrons and friends, people they knew personally and relatively well within their society circles, through music. Couperin wrote hundreds of portraits for his friends, pupils and royal masters, and even self-portraits.<sup>68</sup> C. P. E. Bach's portraits were mostly based on members of his German friendship circle, the *Club* in Berlin, an institution formed by poet Johann Wilhelm Gleim (1719-1803), and of his keyboard students.<sup>69</sup> Schumann's portraits are quite "problematic", according to Tommasini, because they are "strong(ly) autobiographic and filled with literary and musical allusions."<sup>70</sup> Rubinstein's portraits were composed for guests at a party, and Elgar's were written for his wife and friends. Until Thomson, none of the mentioned composers gave details on a compositional method and procedure that they specifically employed to write these portraits; and none of these portraits were written in the same manner as those by Thomson and Wheeler, who follow a strict procedure of sketching in

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<sup>67</sup> Virgil Thomson, "On Portraits and Operas," 273.

<sup>68</sup> Tommasini, *Virgil Thomson's Musical Portraits* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986), 3.

<sup>69</sup> Berg, in *C. P. E. Bach Studies*, ed. Stephen Clark, 1-32.

<sup>70</sup> Tommasini, 3.

the presence of the sitters, many of whom are complete strangers and commissioning patrons.

The result of this sketching techniques by Thomson are short pieces that focus on capturing the essence of their subjects. These portraits are named in a different manner from those before Thomson, not using the name of their subjects but instead activities, places, or phenomenon that relate to them, making the portraits quite personal. For example, Thomson titled many portraits he wrote after the activities that his subjects were performing during the sketching sessions, such as “Buffie Johnson: Drawing Virgil Thomson in Charcoal” (1981), “Charles Fussell: In Meditation” (1983), and “Christopher Cox: Singing a Song” (1981). This method of titling portraits separates his pieces from those by previous composers, who mostly used their dedicatees’ names (Couperin, C. P. E. Bach, and Schumann) or initials (Rubinstein and Elgar).

In the case of Wheeler’s portraits, the composer heightens the personal element even further by naming them after the places and special events associated with their subjects. For example, Wheeler’s piece “Cowley Meditation: A Portrait of James Woodman” was named after a suburb outside of Oxford, where an Episcopal religious order, the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, was first founded in the nineteenth century and known as the Cowley Fathers. James Woodman had been working there for decades.<sup>71</sup> Megan Marshall’s portrait by Wheeler, “Life Study,” received that title because she and her partner, Scott Harney, who commissioned the portrait, first met in a

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<sup>71</sup> James Woodman, in *Portraits: The Piano Music by Scott Wheeler*, directed by Fern Lopez, (Entirely Plausible Enterprises, LLC, 2016).

poetry writing class taught by Robert Lowell, whose 1959 breakthrough book was named *Life Study*.<sup>72</sup> “Epithalamion,” the piece Wheeler wrote as a tribute to his lifelong colleague Donald Berman’s wedding in 1998, was named after a genre of poems written for brides on their wedding day.<sup>73</sup> This method of titling not only demonstrates the close relationship and understanding between the composer and his sitters, but also shows Wheeler’s sense of humor and wittiness. The portraits not only depict their subjects’ physical appearances and their surrounding atmosphere, but also tell their life stories, which consist of everything that makes a person himself or herself.

According to David Fuller, the reason this brilliant genre of music was interrupted after Couperin was the “lack of composers who combined the genius and the inclination to succeed in this most demanding and elusive of descriptive musical genres”<sup>74</sup> and a loss of interest by the public. C. P. E. Bach was only engaged in this genre between 1754 and 1757, and reportedly refused to discuss the possibilities of returning to the genre a decade after his musical portraits were published and applauded, explaining that “one can achieve a more descriptive musical portrait by employing a text,”<sup>75</sup> in a 1768 conversation with writer Matthias Claudius. Bach, like other mentioned composers who had also written works in this genre, only experimented with musical portraiture briefly

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<sup>72</sup> Megan Marshall, in *Portraits: The Piano Music by Scott Wheeler*, directed by Fern Lopez, (Entirely Plausible Enterprises, LLC, 2016).

<sup>73</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, February 7, 2021.

<sup>74</sup> David Fuller, “Of Portraits, ‘Sapho’ and Couperin: Titles and Characters in French Instrumental Music of the High Baroque,” *Music & Letters* 78, no. 2 (May 1, 1997): 149–174.

<sup>75</sup> C. P. E. Bach, in Darrell Berg, “Bach’s Character Pieces and his Friendship Circle,” in *C. P. E. Bach Studies*, ed. Stephen Clark, 1-32.

and did not maintain a repertoire of musical portraits because he believed music was “too abstract as a medium to explicitly portray human characteristics.”<sup>76</sup>

The portraits by the two American composers, Thomson and Wheeler, can be considered a contemporary version of their European predecessors, using a much wider variety of modern musical elements, from the modern piano to American musical idioms. Moreover, these two composers wrote pieces in this genre throughout their lives as opposed to in a particular phase of their development as Bach, Rubenstein, and Elgar did, making these portraits a true reflection of their stylistic evolution throughout their whole careers. Thomson and Wheeler use a strict and conform sketching procedure for all their portraits, separating them from the rest of the so-called portraits by other musicians.

Finally, the problem with writing about musical portraits during the Baroque era is the difficulty, if not the impossibility, to verify the accuracy of the portraits. According to Darrell Berg, the only way for musicologists to study how well these portraits represent their subjects was to read the deep analysis and perceptions by pioneering early writers such as Bach’s biographer Karl Hermann Bitter, who provided their own interpretations of the pieces.<sup>77</sup> Musical portraits by Scott Wheeler, a living composer, do not share this problem, because most of his subjects are still alive, and because there are other mediums nowadays to learn about those subjects, if that is necessary. A study of these portraits also allows us to connect musical portraiture with other types of artistic renderings of personality, which are plentiful in videos, photography, and social media.

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<sup>76</sup> Tommasini, *Virgil Thomson’s Musical Portraits* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986), 4.

<sup>77</sup> Berg, in *C. P. E. Bach Studies*, ed. Stephen Clark, 1-32.

In conclusion, Scott Wheeler's piano works are still under studied and need to be discovered, especially those in the portraiture category. As we live in a time where the old desperately needs preservation and the new frantically needs nurturing, there is a demand for some form of connection that links the past and the present. Musical portraiture as a genre first appeared in the eighteenth century in France and although it was somewhat neglected after a short time of popularity, the genre has been resurrected and has grown through the work of the two mentioned twentieth and twenty-first century composers. This study, by analyzing the brilliance of a handful of these works, hopefully adds to the reasons such a sophisticated musical genre should be maintained and developed.

## CHAPTER TWO

This chapter examines the most general and outstanding features in Wheeler's piano pieces. Though it is not by any means accurate to make a generalization about any composer's works, there are certain elements that a composer favors above others which make appearances in several compositions. In this chapter, I identify four compositional techniques that characterize Wheeler's portraits and tributes: tripartite formal structures, rhythmic motives, texture, and tonality and diatonicism.

### **Wheeler's Forms and Motives**

#### *The Forms of the Portraits*

Wheeler's musical portraits for piano can be studied in three periods as they represent the composer's attempt to be comfortable with his own sketching method. The first period includes the portraits written before 2000, including "Dancing," "Pastorale," "Sketching," "Dad with Kids," and "Shimmer," which are either in ternary form or an ambiguous form of either ABC through-composed or a modified AB-Coda. The portraits written between 2000 and 2014 belong to the second period in Wheeler's sketching career with more pieces in through-composed form and very little related characters between the sections, including "Study in Concord," "The Fifth of July," "Morningside," "Cowley Meditation," "Stone South," "Arietta," and "Bleecker Study." Among these second period portraits, only "Arietta" was written in ternary form with a clear A'

section. The portraits written in 2014 and after, such as “Skyline,” “Sunset,” and “To a Wild Rose,” belong to the third period, in which Wheeler seems to have found a more refined approach in his sketching sessions. The portraits of this period are all in through-composed form in three sections, with the opening section in improvisatory style with loose time, which gradually becomes stronger as the pieces proceed.

In one of my brief email exchanges with Scott Wheeler, the composer mentioned a few early works that he considered “not quite successful” and “should be withdrawn,”<sup>78</sup> including “Dancing, a Portrait of Michael Ricca” (1986), and “Dad with Kids, a Portrait of Charles Hoffman” (1994). However, for the purpose of this dissertation as to provide the most objective view on the entire body of piano works by Wheeler, I felt obliged to study these works just as thoroughly as the others. At the time of the interview, the composer’s request seemed quite curious; and after I have conducted a detailed analysis of his forty-two piano pieces, this comment gradually came to light. One of the reasons for the request could lie in the ambiguity of formal structure in these early works, making them less “successful” than the others.

In particular, in early works that seem to have a ternary form, the A and A’ sections do not quite follow the traditional structure, which can be explained by the compositional technique that Wheeler uses as “disciplined spontaneity.” In short, it is quite difficult, if not impossible, to write a repeated section in a sketching session where the subject is present, and time is of the essence. The result of this technique is a less strict “repeated section,” which sometimes only shares the same pedal point or tonal

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<sup>78</sup> Scott Wheeler, email exchange with the author, February 25, 2020.

center as the A section without repeating the main motive or musical theme. Pieces from the earlier period such as “Pastorale,” “Cookie Galop with Waltz,” and “Shimmer,” show a weak connection between first and last sections while he continues creating new materials in the repeated sections, making it quite difficult to confirm whether the pieces should be considered ABA’ or through-composed.

One of the earliest examples of pieces in this form is “Pastorale,” which could be considered between an ABA’ and an AB-Coda composition. All three of the main motives in A section return later in the last section, making it almost look like an A’, until the very last two measures where the piece suddenly ends with a brief return of the main motive from B section. Examples 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 highlights these main motives, with the red circles signifying those from A and the blue ones signifying those from B. However, one can argue that the motive circled in blue is not entirely similar to the one in section B due to the different time signatures, making it simply a minor passage merely for the purpose of closing the portrait.

Another piece from this early period with a confusing form is “Dad with Kids,” which is almost through-composed except that the exact opening figures in the right hand from A section conclude the last section, making the portrait fall somewhere between an ABA’ and an ABC form. The appearances of both new and old materials in the last section are the cause of this problematic section, making it neither a simple repeated A’ section nor a new C section (example 2.1.3). The confusing A’ section also persists in later works such as “Stone South” of the second period; however, the only repeated figure in the last section of this piece is the use of ostinato in the accompaniment, which

is not enough to recreate the thematic materials from the A section, making the piece a through-composed portrait.

Example 2.1.1 “Pastorale,” motives return in Coda, mm. 35-62

**CODA** Piu Mosso  $\text{♩} = 116$

35 *mp* *mf* *p* *mf*

41 *p* *mf* *p* *mp* *mf*

49 *mp* *mf* *p*

Poco Rit. Poco Accel.  $\text{♩} = 126$

56 *mf* *p* *mp* *pp* *p* *pp*

Example 2.1.2 “Pastorale,” the original motive in B section, mm. 22-25

Rit. **B** Poco Meno Mosso ♩ = 126

Example 2.1.3 “Dad with Kids,” confusing last section with new (in red) and old materials (in blue), mm. 16-37

Accel. Dancing ♩ = 160

Changing his approach in the middle-period portraits, Wheeler wrote more through-composed compositions with very different characters between the sections. A

few compositions from this period have four distinctive sections with very contrasting characters. Pieces such as “Study in Concord,” “Morningside,” and “Bleecker Study” have very little to no related motives in different sections. The related characters from “Sketching” of the first period as well as the four distinctive characters in “Morningside” of the second period are analyzed in-depth in Chapter Three.

The most recent portraits were written in a much more refined form as Wheeler seems more comfortable in writing such works. In particular, these pieces were written almost exclusively in through-composed form ABC. The characters unfold more naturally in works such as “Park View,” “Anima,” “Tracing Shadows,” and “Gallery View,” showing a high level of maturity in Wheeler’s sketching skills. These pieces all share the same procedure, with the first section being closer to an improvisatory introduction of characters with elements such as frequently shifting meters, very short melodic figures, and lots of rests. As the pieces proceed, more stable figures are introduced to give them more steadiness in terms of time, a busier sense with quicker motions, and the ending sections almost always include repeated rhythmic motives, building up the tension as the characteristics of the subjects become clearer towards the end. Examples 2.1.4, 2.1.5, and 2.1.6 demonstrate this process in “Skyline,” which has a through-composed form with three sections.

In conclusion, the portraits by Wheeler in three periods show quite clearly the growth in the composer’s sketching skills. It is important to note that the composer is still actively doing his musical portraits, promising more sophisticated and refined compositions in this category.

Example 2.1.4 "Skyline," A section, short wandering melodic figures with changing meters, mm. 1-8

Calmly gliding forward ♩ = 92

Piano

pp mp pp

5

mp pp mf

RH

\*  
Lia

Example 2.1.5 “Skyline,” B section, steady rhythm in right hand, mm. 34-36

Example 2.1.6 “Skyline,” C section, more motions and time changes, mm. 46-50

A Tempo

### *The Forms of the Tributes and Motivic Variation*

The composing procedure of the musical tributes certainly gives Wheeler more opportunities to create works that have returning sections in a more traditional sense, resulting in more traditional use of ternary form in various pieces. “Calamity Rag,” “F & S Rag,” “Birthday Card for Tony,” and “Cliff Walk” are works that have the most traditional A and A’ sections. Besides these works, “Epithalamion,” “Midnight Bells,” and “Portrait of Steve” also use the ABA’ with an additional section when needed, such as quoted tunes (“Epithalamion” and “Portrait of Steve”) or an introductory section (“Midnight Bells”). The longest composition in this group is “Flow Chart,” a work of 466 measures, with an A section that includes as many as eight short motives that alternate in

different keys; this piece, as mentioned in Chapter One, is not a particular success, due to the lack of dramatic moments within such a grand composition.

Within the tributes that are in a through-composed form, Wheeler uses small motivic cells of previous motives to develop new ones, giving the pieces a sense of continuity even though the sections do not seem to share any common traits at first glance. Brief patterns that first appear as quite a minor part of the introductory section, sometimes as simple as a bridge figure between two phrases, show up again as the main motive in a later section quite surprisingly. In a few cases, Wheeler chooses the smallest and easiest to be overlooked motivic cells to turn into something much bigger and significant to the entire body of his work. In my opinion, this technique is indeed his signature, one that makes a few of his works quite remarkable and outstanding among contemporary art music.

Two of the works with the most brilliant motivic recycling are “Epithalamion” and “Cliff Walk,” which are analyzed in depth in Chapter Three. Another tribute that shares the same clever technique is “To his Music,” where a very small figure that occurs for the first time in the A section as a minor detail that could easily be overlooked later returns as the main motive in the last section. The recycling of this motive is highlighted in examples 2.1.7 and 2.1.8. Indeed, Wheeler had also made quite an attempt to apply this technique in his portraits such as “Cowley Meditation,” “Midnight Bells,” “Shimmer,” “Stone South,” and “Palette;” however, the technique in these pieces is not as cleverly employed since the recycled motives are not as impressive, but rather come back only as

a conversation starter, a small pattern in a brief moment to open a section, or the summarize the materials in a Coda (examples 2.1.9 and 2.1.10).

Example 2.1.7 “To His Music,” the original motive in A section, mm. 1-3

**A SECTION**  
Calm ♩ = 50

Scott Wheeler

*p* *mf*

*Rec. sempre*

Example 2.1.8 “To His Music,” the main motive in C section, mm. 23-35

**C SECTION**  
Poco Meno Mos. ♩ = 60

23

*ff* *mp*

*Rec. 3*

27

*mp*

32

Moving Forward ♩ = 69

*pp*

modified

*Poco Rit.*

Besides through-composed and ternary forms, there are two works that are the exceptions in terms of form. The shorter work, “Island Lullaby” with only twenty-eight

measures, could be divided into two sections that are almost identical with very few differences, giving the tribute an overall form of AA'. The other work, "Green Geese," uses a modified form of theme and variations. Table 1 explains the appearances of motives in this composition.

In conclusion, Wheeler's compositional skills stay quite stable in his tributes without many changes or need for improvement. The composer showed a slight experimental attempt with his form quite early with "Green Geese;" however, his other tributes remain in ternary and through-composed form.

Example 2.1.9 "Shimmer," the original motive in A section, mm. 1-7

Example 2.1.10 "Shimmer," the brief return of the motive from A section in Coda, mm. 50-5



		e	
Variation 3 (m. 42-end)	a d a d e ∅ <sup>79</sup> B ∅ G ∅/C	None	

## Wheeler's Tonal Ground

### *Neotonicity*

Even though Wheeler's compositions for piano have very different characters, they all share a mutual sense of tonality with a few atonal passages. The pieces with most atonal passages all were written before 2000, showing a more experimental sound in comparison to later pieces. The majority of his compositions show a loyalty to tonality with clear tonal centers; however, Wheeler tends to write short passages in atonality as a transition between tonal areas. A few pieces that have a very clear tonal center and no ambiguity include "Free Ranging" in B major, "Island Lullaby" in Ab major, "Portrait of Steve" in C major/A minor, and "Tracing Shadows" in A minor.

Though mostly tonal, Wheeler's compositions are by no means stable in any certain key or tonal center. Indeed, among the forty-two compositions that he wrote for

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<sup>79</sup> ∅: ambiguous key

the piano, there are only four pieces that open and end in the same key: “Free Ranging” in B major, “F & S Rag” in C minor, “Study in Concord” in G minor, and “Island Lullaby” in Ab major. Though key change is a frequent event as for the rest of the compositions, the composer tends to modulate to related keys instead of experimenting with the tonal centers. For instance, “Calamity Rag” begins in C major, modulates back and forth between C major and G major within the second section, then shifts from C major to F major in the trio, and concludes in C major, all of which are keys related by fifths – a quite conventional way to modulate (examples 2.2.1, 2.2.2, and 2.2.3). Chapter Three provides a closer look into the tonality of a few other pieces, including “Arietta,” “Gallery View,” and “Cliff Walk.”

Example 2.2.1 “Calamity Rag,” first section in C major, mm. 1-5

The musical score for Example 2.2.1 shows the first five measures of the piece. The right hand plays a melody with eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes. The dynamic marking *mf* is present at the beginning.

Example 2.2.2 “Calamity Rag,” second section in G major – C major territory, mm. 17-22

The musical score for Example 2.2.2 shows measures 17 through 22. It begins with a first ending bracket over measures 17 and 18. The right hand continues with a more complex melodic line, including some triplets and sixteenth-note patterns. The left hand accompaniment consists of chords and moving bass lines. Dynamic markings of *f* and *mf* are used throughout the section.

Example 2.2.3 “Calamity Rag,” trio in F major, mm. 48-54

The image shows a musical score for a piano trio, measures 48-54. The score is written for a grand piano, with a treble clef on the right hand and a bass clef on the left hand. The key signature is one flat (F major). The tempo is marked 'Trio'. The dynamics are marked *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *f* (forte). The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and frequent changes in tonal centers. The right hand plays a melodic line with many accidentals, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving bass lines.

Another example of frequent changes in tonal centers can be seen in the third section of “Alphabet Dance,” the tribute to the composer’s teacher, Arthur Berger, in which there are five different tonal centers before the piece concludes in a measure of tonal ambiguity. The section begins in C major before moving to a different key area in m. 46, opening a section using the scale of B melodic minor. The piece shifts yet again to C major in m. 58, then Eb major in m. 66, and ends with the dedicatee’s initials played by the right hand (example 2.2.4).

Example 2.2.4 “Alphabet Dance,” key areas by phrases in third section, mm. 37-80

The musical score is divided into six systems, each with a measure number at the beginning:

- System 1 (mm. 37-45):** Starts with *dolce* and *mp*. The key signature changes to **C major** (labeled "warm C major") at measure 40. Dynamics include *mp*, *mf*, and *f*.
- System 2 (mm. 46-51):** Starts with *p*. The key signature changes to **B melodic minor** at measure 46. Dynamics include *p* and *mp*. There are triplets in the right hand.
- System 3 (mm. 52-56):** Continues the **B melodic minor** key signature. Dynamics include *p* and *mp*. There are triplets in the right hand.
- System 4 (mm. 57-62):** Starts with *mp*. The key signature changes to **C major** at measure 57. Dynamics include *mp* and *f*. There are triplets in the right hand.
- System 5 (mm. 63-71):** Starts with *mf*. The key signature changes to **Eb major** at measure 63. Dynamics include *mf*, *p*, and *mf*. There are triplets in the right hand.
- System 6 (mm. 72-80):** Starts with *p*. The key signature changes to **A major** at measure 72. Dynamics include *f*, *p*, and *f*. Performance markings include *Poco Rit.* and *A Tempo*.

North Reading  
5/92

### *Atonal Passages*

Though he did experiment with atonal devices such as twelve-tone integer notation and aggregate completion, as seen in two pieces during this early period, pieces with clear tonal centers are much more prevalent. However, it is worth mentioning certain techniques that he uses to create his atonal passages. In “Dancing: A Portrait of Michael Ricca” (1986), Wheeler uses aggregate completion to introduce all the twelve pitches within a phrase with a few pitches repeated before the entire aggregations appear (example 2.2.5). In “Pseudo-Rag: A Tribute to Gunther Schuller” (1985), the composer only uses certain pitches in dodecaphonic integer notation to spell out numbers (example 2.2.6).

Example 2.2.5 “Dancing,” aggregate completion, mm. 1-3

Scott Wheeler

**Dancing** ♩ = 112

1 2 6 7 9 5 4 10 11 8 7 16 6 16

*f* *calm* *mp* *nonchalant*

Example 2.2.6 “Pseudo-Rag,” dodecaphonic integer notation, mm. 1-7

Scott Wheeler

**Moderato** ♩ = 84

(1) (9) (2) (5) (1) (9) (8) (5)

*misterioso - secco* *mf* *sf* *p* *dolce* *secco*

In a few cases, Wheeler uses tonally ambiguous areas as an introduction before establishing a tonal center for the piece. For example, “Alphabet Dance” begins with

single notes to spell out the dedicatee’s initials, A and B. The first section of this tribute gradually introduces all the letters in the musical alphabet, starting with the initials; C, E, and F appear for the first time in m. 6, while D does not appear until m. 11, followed by the last letter, G in m. 12. The second section of the piece though seems to follow the key signature of D major but lacks functional harmony associated with the said key. Example 2.2.7 illustrates the appearance of the musical alphabet in the first section of “Alphabet Dance.”

Example 2.2.7 “Alphabet Dance,” introduction of letters in musical alphabet, mm. 1-23

*staccato sempre*

1 *p* A B

6 *f* C *p* F E D

12 *p* G *f* *p*

18 *p*

In “Midnight Bells,” though determining the tonal center as C minor quite early, Wheeler immediately follows the first four measures by a long period of tonal ambiguity

before returning to its tonal center of C minor at m. 11 (example 2.2.8). Many other pieces have the same treatment of alternating phrases with a clear tonal center and those without, such as “Chanson Singeresse” (areas of E major, Eb major, and tonal ambiguity), “Shimmer” (F major, Ab major, and tonal ambiguity), and “Sunset” (G minor, F minor, and tonal ambiguity).

Example 2.2.8 “Midnight Bells,” areas of C minor and tonal ambiguity, mm. 16-19

1 Steady  $\text{♩} = 112$

*pp* C minor

*p* *mf* *sf* *p* Ambiguity

(J. G. - C. S.)

5 *sf* *mf* *sf* *p* *mf* *mf* *p* Poco Rit. -----

11 Poco Meno Mosso  $\text{♩} = 104$

*mp* C minor

16 Ambiguity

Poco Accel.

### Parallel Chords in Atonal Passages

Wheeler rarely uses block chords to build harmony in a vertical sense; however, when he does, his chords tend to move in parallel motion. Noticeably, he uses these moving chords mostly in tonally ambiguous areas in a manner similar to *planing* technique, which is associated with music by the famous French composer, Claude Debussy (1862-1918). “Free Ranging,” “Pastorale,” and “Cookie Galop with Waltz” use parallel moving chords most extensively (example 2.2.9). In other cases, Wheeler uses dominant seventh chords in their second inversion to build up harmony (“Bleeker Study,” “Gallery View”), in which they also move in parallel motion. In other cases, such as “The Fifth of July” and “Morningside,” moving dominant seventh chords in their second inversion serve as the main melodic motive by highlighting the top voice (examples 2.2.10 and 2.2.11). Wheeler uses these moving dominant seventh chords mostly in pieces written after 2000, showing that this is a relatively new treatment as the composer continued to explore and develop his compositional technique.

Example 2.2.9 “Free Ranging,” moving chords in parallel motion, mm. 1-13

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of two systems of staves. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 8/8. The first system (measures 1-6) features a treble clef staff with a melodic line of eighth and sixteenth notes, and a bass clef staff with block chords. Dynamics include *p* and *mp*. The second system (measures 7-13) continues the melodic and harmonic development, with dynamics *mf* and *mp*. The bass clef staff shows a series of parallel chords moving in the same direction as the treble clef staff.

Example 2.2.10 “The Fifth of July,” dominant seventh chords, mm. 1-4

*poco misterioso* **Poco Accel.**

*p*

Example 2.2.11 “Morningside,” dominant seventh chords, mm. 35-43

<sup>35</sup>

*p* *mp* *p* *p* *mp* *p* *f* *p*

In conclusion, the majority of Wheeler’s piano compositions can be considered neotonal with a touch of atonality in between the sections in clear tonal centers. The loyalty to tonality shows that the composer is somewhat influenced by his study of traditional compositions. The tendency to wander around tonally ambiguous areas and the use of atonal devices such as aggregate completion and *planing* technique reflect Wheeler’s innovative and personal style, affected by his mentors who are renowned composers of the twentieth century.

## Texture

### *Harmonic Treatments*

#### *Harmonic Buildup*

In general, Wheeler favors building harmony horizontally by sustaining notes in different voices over using block chords, giving his music a gentle and dreamlike quality and avoids a thick and heavy texture. Almost all of his pieces use this particular method with very few exceptions. An example of layers of sustained notes can be seen in the third section of “Morningside,” the third section of “Oracle,” and “Portrait of Steve,” where the left hand builds up harmony by sustaining notes across several measures or by pedal (examples 2.3.1, 2.3.2, and 2.3.3). Other pieces such as “Arietta” and “Gallery View,” which are closely examined in Chapter Three, also have this particular harmonic treatments.

Example 2.3.1 “Morningside,” layers of sustained notes for harmony, mm. 65-72

The musical score for Example 2.3.1, "Morningside," mm. 65-72, is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 65-68) features a right hand with melodic lines and a left hand with sustained notes and triplets. The second system (mm. 69-72) continues this texture, with the right hand playing melodic lines and the left hand providing harmonic support. Dynamics range from *mp* to *mf*.

Example 2.3.2 “Oracle,” layers of sustained notes for harmony, mm. 28-35

♩ = ♩    Tranquillo ♩ = 84                      ♩ = ♩    Moving forward ♩ = 96

28

32

*mf*

*f*    *p*    *sfz*

Ped.    \*

8va---

Example 2.3.3 “Portrait of Steve,” layers of sustained notes for harmony, mm. 1-6

*mf*

Con ped

*mp*

Certainly, there are a few exceptions worth mentioning within Wheeler’s compositions, where he indeed uses more block chords than usual. “Bleecker Study” is a



2.3.5). This harmonic treatment creates an overall color of something new and innovative, a sense of an open-mindedness. “Epithalamion” is made up by a series of seconds and tritones between the two hands and even within each hand’s part over a sustained pedal, as seen in Chapter Three. And in the case of “Stone South,” the dissonant color is created simply by the ongoing trills in the left hand over a sustained pedal underneath a wandering melody in the right hand (example 2.3.6). This use of unresolved dissonant intervals gives Wheeler’s music a unique sound, a persisting conflict between consonance and dissonance within his sonority that is surprisingly not at all disruptive to the quality of the music as there is no urge for a tonal resolution.

Example 2.3.5 “Arietta,” constant dissonance in every measure, mm. 1-11

The musical score for Example 2.3.5, "Arietta," measures 1-11, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 1-5) begins with a piano (p) dynamic. The left hand features a sustained pedal point (marked "Con ped") with a sequence of chords and intervals that create a dissonant color. The right hand has a wandering melody. The second system (measures 6-11) continues this dissonant texture, with dynamics ranging from mezzo-forte (mf) to piano (p). The time signature changes from 3/8 to 4/4 and back to 3/8.

Example 2.3.6 “Stone South,” ongoing trills, mm. 1-11

The image displays a piano score for the piece "Stone South," focusing on measures 1 through 11. The score is written for piano and consists of two staves: a right-hand staff in treble clef and a left-hand staff in bass clef. The right-hand part features a complex melodic line with frequent trills and slurs, while the left-hand part provides a steady accompaniment of single notes. The tempo is marked as *con ped sempre*. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mf*, *mp*, and *pp*, along with crescendo and decrescendo hairpins. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 4/4. The first system covers measures 1-5, and the second system covers measures 6-11.

### Pedal Point

The last common harmonic device that makes appearances in several of Wheeler’s compositions is the pedal point. He first used this device for the first time in the form of repeated single note in “Flow Chart” (1993), but rarely used it again until the most recent portraits such as “Skyline,” “Sunset,” “Quiet Sunday,” and “Anima.” The most noticeable use of pedal point can be seen in “To a Wild Rose,” where it sets the tonal center for the section (examples 2.3.7 and 2.3.8). The repeated A reaffirms the tonal center throughout the piece, which switches between A minor and A major; and when G becomes the pedal point in section B, the tonal center shifts to C major before returning to A minor in the last section with the return of A as the pedal point.

Example 2.3.7 “To a Wild Rose,” A as pedal point, mm. 1-10

Example 2.3.8 “To a Wild Rose,” G pedal point in section B, mm. 27-29

Meno Mosso ♩ = 69

### Melodic Treatment

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a melody is “a sweet or agreeable succession or arrangement of sounds, a rhythmic succession of single tones organized as

an aesthetic whole.”<sup>81</sup> Based on this definition, Wheeler’s melodies do not quite follow a traditional sense; indeed, there are very few pieces where he writes a hummable melody. If the overall dissonant quality of the harmony is the canvas, Wheeler’s melodies or melodic figures serve as the colorful ornaments, the decorative details that give his musical tributes and portraits the sparks.

Wheeler almost always writes his melodic figures in the top voice played by the right hand; however, in certain pieces, the melodic lines seem to travel across the hands when there is a need of more registers. This melodic treatment can be seen in quite a few pieces, as early as “Green Geese” and “Free Ranging,” and as recent as “To His Music” and “Tracing Shadows” (example 2.3.9). Sometimes, as seen in “To a Wild Rose,” the melodic figures have to move across voices to work around a pedal point; and there are a few occasions where the melody is repeated in canon between the two hands as in “Gallery View” (example 2.3.10).

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<sup>81</sup> *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “melody,” accessed February 10, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/melody>.

Example 2.3.9 “To His Music,” wandering melody across hands, mm. 7-19

The musical score for Example 2.3.9, "To His Music," mm. 7-19, is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 7-11) features a "Poco Accel." marking and a dynamic of *mp*. A red box highlights a melodic passage in the right hand. The second system (mm. 12-15) includes a *mf* dynamic and a red box highlighting a melodic passage in the left hand. The third system (mm. 16-19) is marked "Poco Più Mosso" (♩ = 63) and "Poco Rit.", with dynamics of *f*, *mf*, and *mp*. Red boxes highlight melodic passages in both the right and left hands.

Example 2.3.10 “Gallery View,” canon figures, mm. 1-4

The musical score for Example 2.3.10, "Gallery View," mm. 1-4, is in 4/4 time and features canon figures in both hands. A dynamic of *p* is indicated. Red boxes highlight the melodic lines in both the right and left hands.

As discussed above, the overall sense of dissonance is usually caused by the accompaniment; as a result, working on top of this accompaniment are the melodic figures, which could be considered a decoration to bring out the sparkling details and the striking elements of the pictures. However, in a few cases, there is no longer harmony or

melody but only a single melodic figure played by both hand in unison. Indeed, this is one of Wheeler’s favorite devices to build up tension. “Bleecker Study,” “Study in Concord,” “By the Sea,” and “Life Study” are only a few pieces to name that use this technique. An excerpt of the longest unison passage can be seen in the example below, which indeed runs for the entire third section of “Bleecker Study” (i.e., mm. 32-55).

Example 2.3.11 “Bleecker Study,” unison as main motive, mm. 32-37

*Più Mosso* ♩ = 88

The musical score consists of two systems of piano music. The first system covers measures 32 to 34. It begins with a treble clef and a bass clef, both containing the same melodic line. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The first measure is marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. Above the first measure, there is an 8va dynamic marking. The second system covers measures 35 to 37. It continues the unison melodic line. The third measure of this system has a 3rd measure rest. The dynamic is marked mezzo-piano (*mp*). The score concludes with a repeat sign.

In conclusion, Wheeler uses harmony as his canvas to set the background and the overall mood of his music, where melody in the manner of brief melodic figures plays the role of decorative ornaments that gives the music a memorable presence. Together, these two elements work hand-in-hand to give the music a unique flavor, a beautiful and very distinctive quality in music compositions that can only be described as pictures in sounds.

## Rhythm as a Portraying Tool

### *Rhythm for Physical Activities*

Though physical activities appear rarely within his works, Wheeler sketches a few pieces in the presence of working artists as well as active children. The movement of a working artist with a pencil is indeed very present in pieces as “Sketching” and “Gallery View,” which have a certain steadiness in time created by repeated rhythmic patterns distributed throughout. In the case of pieces that involve children, the child’s energy is quite difficult not to include, even just as an influence in a short portrait of their caregivers as seen in “Dad with Kids.” The bouncy notes, the hyper energy, and the “all-over-the-place” figures can hardly represent a working professor at a university, but more appropriate to describe a hectic life of a dad with multiple kids and a busy career (example 2.4.1).

Example 2.4.1 “Dad with Kids,” bouncy note figures across registers, mm. 21-37

The musical score for "Dad with Kids" (mm. 21-37) is presented in three systems. The first system (mm. 21-24) features a piano introduction with a treble clef staff containing a series of eighth notes and a bass clef staff with a simple accompaniment. Dynamics include *mf mp* and *pp*. The second system (mm. 25-28) continues the piano part with a treble clef staff showing a series of eighth notes and a bass clef staff with a simple accompaniment. Dynamics include *pp*. The third system (mm. 29-37) features a treble clef staff with a series of eighth notes and a bass clef staff with a simple accompaniment. Dynamics include *pp*. The score is written in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C).

### *Rhythm as a Representative of Characters*

If Wheeler uses sonority mostly as a coloring tool, his rhythmic patterns serve as the skeleton of his pieces. They not only represent the characters of his subjects and dedicatees but also describe their gestures as they maintain their activities during the sketching. While using rhythm to reflect physical activities in the portraits, Wheeler uses rhythmic patterns to define the main characteristic of his tributes. For instance, in “Firefly Lullaby” and “Island Lullaby,” there is a certain steadiness in time that gives these pieces the rocking quality usually heard in lullabies, achieved either by a rhythmic pattern that repeats every measure (example 2.4.2) or a combination of repeated rhythmic patterns and accents (example 2.4.3). This steadiness separates the lullabies from the rest of the compositions, which are filled with rhythmic uncertainty as well as frequent time changes.

Example 2.4.2 “Island Lullaby,” repeated rhythmic pattern, mm. 1-5

Gently rocking  $\text{♩} = 72$

*p*

Example 2.4.3 “Firefly Lullaby,” repeated rhythmic pattern and accent, mm. 1-4

*f p*

Pedal throughout

Besides tributes to celebrate newborn babies in the form of lullabies, Wheeler also composed a handful of tributes to his living family members as well as friends in celebration of special events such as weddings and birthdays. In these pieces, the composer uses rhythm to carry personal details of his dedicatees, such as their ages. “Green Geese,” “Calamity Rag,” and “Cliff Walk” imitates the famous oom-pah pattern of American ragtime and its highly syncopated rhythm, recognizing Willa Walker and Courtney Kenny’s interest in jazz (example 2.4.4). “Free Ranging” was written in 6/8 with a strong relation to the cowboy song “Home on the Range,” which was Wheeler’s tribute to his sister’s wedding that took place in New Mexico. “Birthday Card for Tony,” “Alphabet Dance,” and “Pseudo-Rag” are written in a preplanned number of measures to celebrate their dedicatees’ birthdays: Anthony Tommasini’s 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, Arthur Berger’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, and Gunther Schuller’s 60<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Example 2.4.4 “Calamity Rag,” oom-pah pattern as ragtime, mm. 1-5

Moderato ♩ = 69

The musical score for "Calamity Rag" (measures 1-5) is presented in a two-staff format. The tempo is marked "Moderato" with a quarter note equal to 69 beats per minute. The music is in 2/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) features a syncopated melody with eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. The left hand (bass clef) provides a bass line with chords and single notes, including a prominent bass drum-like pattern. The dynamic marking *mf* (mezzo-forte) is indicated at the beginning of the piece.

From a performer’s perspective, one of the most striking features in almost all Wheeler’s compositions for piano is the time signature. As complicated and chaotic as human personalities, Wheeler’s use of time is by no mean straightforward or simple, but rather tricky and difficult to follow at times. A recurring treatment in almost all the pieces is shifting meter, which can be as frequent as every single measure, as seen in the

opening of “Firefly Lullaby,” and the beginning of the second section in “Pastorale” (examples 2.4.5 and 2.4.6). There are very few pieces that stay in a single time signature from beginning to ending, all of which belong in the tribute category; however, even within these pieces, syncopated rhythmic patterns as well as off-beat figures can make the pulse quite difficult to find, creating a sense of metric ambiguity. “Pseudo-Rag” is the perfect example of tricky rhythm despite its loyalty to 2/4; the extensive use of rests and single notes on upbeats or beat fragments make the tribute one of the most difficult pieces to play (example 2.4.7).

Example 2.4.5 “Firefly Lullaby,” frequent meter changes, mm. 1-9

The musical score for "Firefly Lullaby" (mm. 1-9) is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 1-4) starts in 6/8 time and changes to 2/4 time at the end. The second system (mm. 5-9) starts in 2/4 time and changes to 3/4 time at the end. The score features a treble and bass clef, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and dynamic markings of *f* and *p*. A "Pedal throughout" instruction is noted below the first system. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests.

Example 2.4.6 “Pastorale,” frequent meter change, mm. 22-34

Rit. Poco Meno Mosso ♩ = 126

Meno Mosso ♩ = 100

Example 2.4.7 “Pseudo-Rag,” rests and notes on upbeats and beat fragments, mm. 1-14

Moderato ♩ = 84 Scott Wheeler

*cantabile*

In combination with frequent meter changes and tricky note placements, Wheeler also liberally uses complex note-grouping such as quintuplets (e.g., “Bleecker Study,” “To His Music,” “Dad with Kids”), septuplets (e.g., “Pseudo-Rag”) against duplets and

triplets (example 2.4.8) to create a sense of polyrhythm. These complex rhythmic patterns, however, are only used for mature subjects with whom the composer has a close relationship, such as Wheeler's piano teacher, Monica Jakuc Leverett, and the composer's lifelong mentor and friend, Gunther Schuller. This note-grouping also appears in other portraits of adult subjects such as "Palette," "Dad with Kids," and "Anima."

On the other spectrum, rhythmic patterns in pieces written for children in either of the categories tend to be quite simple in nature. "Cookie Galop with Waltz," though hectic and restless in character, consists of simple rhythmic patterns such as running eighths, triplets, and a dance-like bass on straight beats. "Island Lullaby," as mentioned above, uses one simple repeated rhythmic pattern that hardly varies from measure to measure, resulting in a very steady rocking motion. "Lullaby for Cece" is steady from beginning to ending in 6/8 with the left hand playing mostly eighth notes. The most complicated piece written for children, "Firefly Lullaby," though switches meters many times throughout, indeed has a very steady pulse and is easy to follow once good counting is established (e.g., count the eighth notes during the first section).

In conclusion, the choice of rhythmic patterns in Wheeler's compositions somewhat reflects the characters of the pieces: the more complex the subject is, the more complicated the rhythmic patterns. The portraits tend to include more tricky rhythms, which could be explained by the spontaneity of the sketching procedure: these moments are captured instinctively without much calculation or consideration in comparison to the careful composing process of the tributes.

Example 2.4.8 "Morningside," polyrhythm by triplets in left hand against other groups in right hand, mm. 1-4  
Allegro moderato ♩ = 72

The musical score is presented in two systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked "Allegro moderato" with a quarter note equal to 72 beats per minute. The first system (measures 1-2) shows the right hand with a melodic line featuring a quintuplet in measure 1 and a triplet in measure 2. Dynamics are *f* in measure 1 and *p* in measure 2. The left hand has a triplet in measure 1 and a triplet in measure 2. The second system (measures 3-4) shows the right hand with a triplet in measure 3 and a triplet in measure 4. Dynamics are *mp* in measure 3, *mf* in measure 4, and *p* in measure 4. The left hand has a triplet in measure 3 and a triplet in measure 4.

## CHAPTER THREE

This chapter provides a deep analysis of ten compositions for piano by Scott Wheeler. By focusing on the most outstanding elements in five musical portraits and five tributes, this chapter strengthens the characteristics discussed in Chapter Two. This chapter also discusses other noteworthy features of each piece which give it the distinctive characteristic from the rest of the compositions, including musical quotations, exceptional harmonic and melodic treatments, and other important elements.

### **Five Musical Portraits**

#### ***Sketching, a Portrait of Shane Crabtree (1992)***

The portrait of Shane Crabtree – a contemporary visual artist who draws and paints – was sketched at the same time as Crabtree was herself making a sketch of visual arts. To describe the sketching process, Wheeler said, “it was totally unconscious, whatever came to my mind, ... there was no verbal anything, ... this was a visual artist, and the fact that she was physically working on her art affected my sense of how I would try to approach this (portrait).”<sup>82</sup>

The portrait can be divided into four big sections, ABCD, based on the gestures that the musical elements represent. The first section is the first eight measures of the portrait as a calm and relaxing introduction. The second section begins at m. 9 in a

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<sup>82</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, November 11, 2021.

quicker with high paced musical figures such as running sixteenth notes, and frequent changes of meter. This section slows down at m. 26 with eighth notes in 6/8 meter, accompanied by long note figures such as multiple tied notes across measure and dotted quarter note. The third section begins with the same motive that opens the portrait, only to pick up in a quick pace again at m. 36 with a sixteenth notes ostinato in the right hand while the left hand plays a melody of eighth notes. Noticeably, this section builds up the tension to what can be considered the piece's climax at mm. 45-46. The last section begins at m. 47 in a much quieter and slower pace with long and tied notes across measure. The portrait ends with repeated eighth notes interrupted by eighth rests, and eventually, a single whole note in 4/4 meter.

The first section of the portrait starts with two measures of eighth notes in 12/8 meter, followed by six measures of moderate paced note figures in 9/8 and 6/8 meters such as dotted quarter notes, quarter-eighth notes, and very few sixteenth notes, creating a nice and calm introduction. The overall color of this introduction is quite consonant with 4ths and 5ths; however, the first chord in the left hand already creates the dissonance seen in almost every other composition with the appearance of both E and F#. This relaxing theme reappears in the middle of the piece at m. 34 for only two measures as an opening the third section, making this section neither a repeated section A' nor an entirely new section C. Examples 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 show how the opening theme appears and returns. This formal ambiguity is a recurring event in almost all of the portraits during this early period as discussed in Chapter Two.

Example 3.1.1 “Sketching,” the calm introduction, mm. 1-8

1  
*mp*

5  
*p*

Example 3.1.2 “Sketching,” opening materials returns in third section before new materials, mm. 31-39

31  
*Relaxing*  
*p*

36  
*pp*

The second section immediately changes the pace with completely different materials. The music begins with quick gestures in the left hand, represented by running sixteenth notes first in both directions, then lingers around A and Bb at mm. 12-13, only to return to going up and down the scale (example 3.1.3). This gesture quickly moves to the right hand after seven measures but in 6/8 instead of 4/4 meter, making it sound even busier. Shortly after this running movement in the right hand at m. 22, the running sixteenth notes now alternate between the two hands in a contrary motion with the left

hand running up and the right hand running down, which might be the musical description of the strokes of the pencil on the canvas. The section ends with the right hand playing repeated octave figures for the first time as a grand gesture while the left hand is still busy with a melody on top of a sustained A. This particular eighth note figures in the melodic line later become a major character in the upcoming section (example 3.1.4).

Example 3.1.3 “Sketching,” running sixteenth notes in second section, mm. 12-15

Example 3.1.4 “Sketching,” melody in left hand and octaves in right hand, mm. 25-30

The third section continues the flow seen in the second section after a quick break as mentioned above. During this two-measure break, while the right hand recreates the introductory theme, the left hand plays a syncopated rhythm pattern consisted of dotted eighth notes in 12/8 meter, resulting in a sense of resistance as seen in example 3.1.2. The relaxing break only lasts for two measures before the music picks up again at m. 36 with the right hand playing repeated D and G in sixteenth note figures while the left hand returns to the eighth note melody. All materials in this section have appeared in the second section, with the exception being the abrupted groups of sixteenth notes which is

the result of the sixteenth rest at the end of each group. The reappearance of old materials from B section with new materials also makes it neither a Coda with both thematic materials from A and B sections nor an independent C section. The climax comes in at mm. 45-46 with both hands playing two chords repeatedly for the first time in a loud dynamic (ff), leading the piece into the last section (example 3.1.5).

Example 3.1.5 “Sketching,” old and new materials in third section, leading to climax, mm. 36-46

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (mm. 36-39) shows a right hand with a continuous stream of sixteenth notes, labeled "Running sixteenths" in red, and a left hand with a simple, single-line melody, labeled "Monophonic melody" in blue. The second system (mm. 40-43) introduces "New material" in the right hand, highlighted with green boxes, while the left hand continues with a more complex rhythmic pattern, also highlighted with a red box. The third system (mm. 44-46) is labeled "Climax" and features a large black box around the final two measures, which are marked with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic.

The last section of the piece returns to the slow and calm mood as seen in the introduction with the composer’s marking, “Lirico.” Long note figures such as half notes and tied notes across the measures dominate this section, in combination with 4/4 and 3/4 meters, resulting in a very still and peaceful character for the section, which is quite appropriate after two such exhausting but exciting sections. The second to last measure

contains the longest break using an eighth rest and a quarter rest, creating a quick delay before ending the piece with a single whole note. All materials in this section are new and contrasting to the busy motives seen earlier in the piece.

In terms of tonality, the piece seems to have clear tonal centers; however, each of his phrase or section seems to have its own tonal center. For example, while the first phrase of the piece seems to start in A major with F#-C#-G#, the second phrase changes to F major with Bb without any preparation in a traditional manner. As seen in Chapter Two, the composer also favors seconds and ninths for his harmonic intervals as well as chords to create a constantly dissonant color; example 3.1.6 shows such sonority.

Example 3.1.6 “Sketching,” seconds in the introduction, mm. 1-8

Texture is a noteworthy element of this portrait. While the piece does not use heavy chords very often but more running passages up and down the keyboard, the distance between the two hands seems to vary quite a lot with the hands going further away in one phrase and getting closer in the next. These texture changes might represent the way that the artist creates her artwork by going back and forth between working on

the small details and working on the big picture simultaneously. This texture manipulation together with the rhythmic motives prove Wheeler's proficiencies at using musical elements as highly descriptive tools to sketch his musical portraits.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Wheeler's early portraits have sections that share the same characteristics due to the lack of strongly contrasting materials. Besides the obvious return of the opening theme at the beginning of the third section, other motives have a close relationship; for instance, the melodic line in the left hand to close the third section seems to relate to the short figure, also in the left hand, in m. 2 (see example 3.1.6). The running passages in the left hand of the fourth section also relate to the scale running in the second section (see examples 3.1.3 – mm. 14-15 and 3.1.5 – m. 42). This use of related motives proves that Wheeler's tendency to recycle his motives appeared quite early in his career and developed in his compositions. However, this technique creates a similarity between the characteristics presented in each section, which somewhat blurs the definition of the sections.

Though written quite early in comparison to the rest of the portraits by Wheeler, "Sketching" has many features that are maintained and developed in later works, such as constant use of dissonance, rhythmic motives for physical activities, and motivic development in later sections to unify a through-composed composition. As he continues writing portraits, Wheeler's sketching capability extends and eventually reaches a certain maturity over time, with more sophisticated and efficient use of musical elements. "Sketching" is the perfect opening piece for this analytical chapter.

*Cookie Galop with Waltz, a Portraits of Elizabeth Cranstoun (1993)*

The only piece with a young child as its live subject, this piece has several noteworthy features. To depict an active little child, Wheeler uses short and quick articulations, such as staccato, abrupt eighth notes on strong beats, eighth rest to begin measures, as well as big intervals for a jumping or galloping motion. Throughout the entire piece, musical ideas are presented continuously without breaks, representing the various activities a seven-year-old girl can find to entertain herself while “sitting” for her portrait. Though Wheeler concluded that he would never sketch another piece with a young subject,<sup>83</sup> I found the result of this collaboration quite fascinating, and that it is such a pity that the other pieces he wrote for young children are only tributes.

The piece starts with two measures of two hands playing alternatively on half beats, which can easily be related to the image of a young child on a seesaw or a bouncy animal around a playroom. After these two measures, a completely different idea – if not entirely opposite – is presented in the right hand with staccato running eighth notes while the left hand still plays on upbeats, which might suggest that the child was playing with the same toy but in a different way or bouncing on the same animal in a different manner. The first idea comes back for two measures at m. 5, only to be followed by the second idea again at m. 7 before switching to a completely different idea at m. 9, which also only lasts for two measures. M. 11 then follows with yet an entirely new idea with accented long quarter notes, suggesting a stomping motion, before leading into m. 13 with the first triplets in the right hand while the left hand attempting to maintain the idea with long

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<sup>83</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, November 11, 2021.

note figure in mm. 11-12 but unsuccessfully as the eighth note triplet makes an appearance. In short, in the first section of only fourteen measures marked by the composer, there are five short musical ideas, which cannot be mistaken with any other type of living subject but someone with an extremely short attention span, or “just any seven-year-old child.”<sup>84</sup> Example 3.2.1 illustrates the five different ideas within the first section.

Example 3.2.1 “Cookie Galop with Waltz,” five musical ideas in the first section, mm. 1-16

Bright and Active (♩ = 144) *A Portrait of Elizabeth Cranstoun* Scott Wheeler

The musical score is in 3/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). It consists of four systems of staves. The first system (measures 1-4) contains two musical ideas: a chordal melody (Idea 1, red box) and a sixteenth-note figure (Idea 2, blue box). The second system (measures 5-8) contains two musical ideas: a chordal melody (Idea 1, red box) and a sixteenth-note figure (Idea 2, blue box). The third system (measures 9-12) contains two musical ideas: a sixteenth-note figure (Idea 3, green box) and a melody with a triplet (Idea 4, pink box). The fourth system (measures 13-16) contains one musical idea: a triplet melody (Idea 5, yellow box). Dynamics include *mp*, *f*, *p*, and *mf*. The score includes performance markings such as *scda* and *scda*.

<sup>84</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, November 11, 2021.

M. 14 ends with a double bar, signaling that the first section has come to an end. Indeed, if the first section could be considered the bouncy galop mentioned in the title of the piece, the second section must be the waltz. The left-hand part is a typical accompaniment of a waltz in 3/4 meter with single bass note on the first beat of each measure, while the right hand plays a nice melody in simple dotted pattern. This waltz, however, does not last long either, as the section closes after four measures at m. 25 with half and quarter note *hemiola*, suggesting a drop in the subject's energy. Example 3.2.2 explains this clever transition.

Example 3.2.2 "Cookie Galop with Waltz," the waltz and the sudden energy drop in the second section, mm. 24-29

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The first staff is in treble clef and the second in bass clef. Measures 24-25 are circled in red and labeled 'Waltz pattern'. Measures 26-29 are circled in blue and labeled 'The energy drop'. The score includes dynamic markings 'mf' and 'p'. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4.

The musical idea in the first four measures then briefly returns in m. 29, leading to yet a different idea in m. 33, which could still be considered a waltz with omitted third beat in each measure. This musical idea is followed by a brand new one in m. 41 with legato eighth notes in both hands for two measures. These two measures, however, are articulated in three instead of two, suggesting that the subject of this musical portrait might be an extremely creative individual, or simply, any seven-year-old who likes to experiment with tradition in new style or to sing with her own innovative phrasing (example 3.2.3). This section ends in a relatively quieter mood and slower pace than the previous section with longer notes such as half notes and dotted half notes, suggesting that the child might be running out of enthusiasm or energy.

Example 3.2.3 “Cookie Galop with Waltz,” unconventional grouping of eighth notes in 3/4 meter, mm. 41-42

41



The last twenty measures of the piece consist of mostly waltz-like materials with 3/4 meter, waltz accompaniment in left hand, and articulated groups of three notes in right hand. As the last effort at entertaining herself, the hopping or galloping figure with staccato eighth notes return for two measures at m. 64 before the piece ends with a single abrupt staccato eighth note, as seen in example 3.2.4.

Example 3.2.4 “Cookie Galop with Waltz,” ending measures, mm. 63-68

63



“Cookie Galop with Waltz” is an outstanding example of Wheeler’s tendency to use rhythmic patterns as a story and/or character telling device. Undoubtedly, these rhythmic patterns cannot be as efficient as they are in this piece without an appropriate use of articulations such as legato, staccato, accents, etc. The use of texture also is another important element to be discussed in the case of this piece. For example, Wheeler uses melodies in running eighth notes to suggest the image of a running (in staccato) or dancing (in legato) child; however, he occasionally uses a slightly thicker texture such as harmonic intervals at the end of a gesture, as seen in examples 3.2.5 and 3.2.6, to describe

another kind of motion, which in this case might suggest the child’s stomping with both feet or sitting down on the ground.

Example 3.2.5 “Cookie Galop with Waltz,” harmonic intervals for a stomping motion, mm. 9-10



Example 3.2.6 “Cookie Galop with Waltz,” harmonic intervals for a sitting down motion, mm. 63-68



Regarding tonality, this portrait is quite tonal centric with a touch of modes. It begins in E major with a written in key signature, which is not usually seen in other compositions. Starting at section two at m. 15, the piece is full of accidentals regardless of its marked key signature. Noticeably, these accidentals do not appear randomly but are persistent within each section when they do make an appearance, suggesting the sections are in certain modes. For example, the use of F-natural (flattened seventh) in the second half of the second section gives it a Mixolydian color. In m. 33, even though the four-sharp key signature returns for the fourth section, the constant use of A# suggests that the scale is indeed a C# Dorian with a raised sixth. The last section of the piece has the key signature of C major with a constant use of Bb which eventually ends the piece, again giving it a Mixolydian color. These modes, however, are used in the form of general

guidelines for each section only, due to the appearances of other accidentals for a creative reason to suggest the quick change of temperament and the short attention span of a child.

In conclusion, the active seven-year-old Elizabeth Cranstoun, with her endless energy and unstoppable activities, might not have been Wheeler's favorite subject, but she inspired one of the most interesting pieces in the composer's body of piano works. "Cookie Gallop with Waltz" is the best representation of rhythmic patterns as a tool to describe physical activities among the portraits by Wheeler.

### ***Morningside, a Portrait of Monica Jakuc Leverett (2007)***

The portrait of Monica Jakuc Leverett, a performer and teacher of historical keyboard instruments, represents the works written in the middle period of Wheeler's sketching career with four very strongly defined sections. Each of the sections features a very different character from the other three, which could be linked to the complexity that the composer insisted when talking about his subject. Originally writing the piece for the *fortepiano*, Wheeler did admit that despite his effort to maintain the soft touch that is more suitable for the *fortepiano*, his musical expression naturally and inevitably turns towards the fuller and more sustainable sounds due to his personal perspective on the subject, making the portrait "work better"<sup>85</sup> on the modern piano than the instrument it was intended for. "Morningside" was commissioned by Smith College to celebrate Ms. Jakuc Leverett's retirement after her thirty-nine years of working in the faculty.

The portrait opens with a long section of a contrapuntal duet between the left hand and the right hand. While the left hand steadily plays triplet figures, representing a

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<sup>85</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, November 22, 2021.

reliable and firm character, the right hand plays an improvisatory melody with loose time and speech-like figurations ranging from duplets to quintuplets with several tied notes within and crossing the bars, resulting in a strong metric ambiguity. Both hands play from the middle range up on the piano without extreme dynamics (i.e., *forte* is the loudest), which makes the section the most suitable to be played on the *fortepiano*. Example 3.3.1 shows the flowy melody of the right hand and the steady character of the left hand at the opening measures.

Example 3.3.1 “Morningside,” two different characters in first section, mm. 1-4

Allegro moderato ♩ = 72

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system (measures 1-2) shows the right hand starting with a *f* dynamic, playing a melodic line with a quintuplet and a slur. The left hand plays a steady accompaniment with triplets. The second system (measures 3-4) continues the melodic line in the right hand with dynamics *mp*, *mf*, and *p*, and the accompaniment in the left hand with triplets and slurs.

The contrapuntal duet between the two hands might represent many things: a manifestation of both the old tradition and the new, with the former being the two *fortepiano* and the latter the modern piano in Ms. Jakuc Leverett’s study room; a conversation between the two musical souls of two different generations of musicians; and a presence of two different roles that the subject was living, one being a professional

musician and educator whom Wheeler knew, and the other being a warm and relaxed friend who was hosting another friend in her family home. In terms of rhythm and tempo, there are not many changes throughout the first section except seven measures at mm. 13-19 with a slight *accelerando*, changing from a 3/4 meter to 3/8 briefly, only to return to 4/4 in the original tempo at m. 20. The tempo also picks up vaguely starting at m. 25 leading to the second section, which has a completely different character in comparison.

If the first section can be considered an imitation of the contrapuntal Baroque style, the second section departs quite far from such characteristic. The right hand now plays only chords; in particular, unresolved dominant seventh chords all in their second inversions. This specific choice of sonority is a striking example of Wheeler's tendency to use chords in an innovative and coloristic manner as discussed in Chapter Two. Specifically in the case of this portrait, when combined with the syncopated rhythm that Wheeler uses in this section, these chords create a playful and jazzy mood, pushing the character of this section even further from that of the first one. Example 3.3.2 shows an excerpt of the section.

Example 3.3.2 “Morningside,” syncopated chords in right hand in second section, mm. 35-43

Texture is not the only element that changes in the second section. Both hands now play in the lower registers of the piano instead of the middle and higher range as in the first section. Articulations switch from smooth legato to playful staccato and accented notes, which perform quite nicely on the *fortepiano*. However, the left hand plays many long note figures such as tied notes across multiple bars, which is not particularly the strength of the *fortepiano*. Starting from this section, the music starts to have more sustained note figures, giving the modern piano more advantages over its older fellow instrument. Especially during the last six measures of the section, the left hand can be seen holding a B3 for the entire period with added pitches on higher voices, which eventually connects to the next section as a residual sonority, making the *fortepiano* no longer the superior choice.

The third section of the piece has a spacious and meditative quality, which is the result of the left hand playing and sustaining the same notes repeatedly in an ostinato. The pitches in this section again reaffirm Wheeler’s propensity to use seconds as a color-

setting tool. This section also represents the composer's favorite harmonic treatment as seen in many other compositions mentioned in Chapter Two, in which he builds the harmony by layers of sustained notes. The right hand compliments the calm and introspective mood set by the left hand with more dissonant melodic intervals over a sustained bass and continuous pedal, which also is another harmonic motive seen in many other works. Example 3.3.3 highlights the dissonant intervals that Wheeler uses to set the mood for the section, with seconds on top of seconds (e.g., E-F, B-C) and tritones (e.g., F-B, C-F#).

Example 3.3.3 "Morningside," dissonant intervals for colors in third section, mm. 56-64

The musical score for Example 3.3.3, "Morningside," mm. 56-64, is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 56-60) begins with a tempo change to "Poco Più Mosso, ma calmo" and a tempo marking of ♩ = 84. The second system (mm. 61-64) includes a "cantabile" marking. The score is in piano and features a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature that shifts between 3/4 and 4/4. The right hand plays a melodic line with dissonant intervals highlighted by red and blue boxes. The left hand provides a sustained bass line with a continuous pedal. Dynamics include piano (p), mezzo-piano (mp), and mezzo-forte (mf). The score also includes markings for accents (>) and triplets (3).

The last section of the piece is the most metrical as well as consonant section of the entire piece. Also written as a duet, this section is the opposite of the duet in the first section which was a contrapuntal one between two moving melodies; it is a lyrical duet for soprano and bass with the bass providing harmonic support for the melody in the soprano this time. Even though the meter constantly shifts between 4/4 and 3/4, the sense

of rhythm is quite strong as the syncopated rhythmic patterns by rests on strong beats often favored by the composer appear very few times in this section. Though there still are omitted strong beats caused by tied notes at a few places, the other hand tends to fill in the void, giving a strong support to maintain the rhythm. This section is an example of exceptional cases of long and singable melody within Wheeler’s piano compositions.

The piece ends in a strong sense of C minor as key, with an occasional raised 7<sup>th</sup>. Especially during the last three measures of the piece, all the flats that belong to C harmonic minor scale appear over a sustained bass of C, confirming the tonal center of the portrait as well as creating a beautifully longing ending. One of Wheeler’s favorite compositional methods is to manipulate time by silent moments with rests and tied notes, which create a sad and longing feeling at the end of this portrait (example 3.3.4). Perhaps this was the composer’s own feeling; or perhaps it was the subject’s regarding her own retirement after such a long and successful career; or perhaps the feeling was mutual.

Example 3.3.4 “Morningside,” tied notes at the end, mm. 96-101



In conclusion, “Morningside” is a beautiful and flattering portrait of Ms. Jakuc Leverett, written by Wheeler not only as a former student but also as a lifelong friend who shares the similar love and passion for music. A composition with many different characters unfolded as beautiful layers of colors on a canvas, the portrait is well loved by its subject as she called it “an awfully good piece” with features that she “absolutely

claimed.”<sup>86</sup> This portrait exemplifies the middle period of Wheeler’s sketching career, when he to change his approach by writing more pieces using a through-composed form.

*Arietta, a Portrait of Nancy Armstrong (2012)*

One of the most easy-going pieces by Wheeler, “Arietta” portrays a gentle character. The right hand plays a flowing and singable melody, accompanied by harmonies in the left hand. Noticeably, the right-hand melody could be played in loose time to imitate a singing voice. Throughout the entire piece, phrases follow each other in a continuous motion; each starts in a quiet tone and grows to its highpoint only to wind back down to end before another one comes in. This relationship between the dynamic and the direction of the melody is quite a traditional one, where higher passages are louder than lower ones. The dynamic progression mimics the natural phrasing of a singable melodic line. The range of pitches fall within C4 and C6, with occasional high note up to a G6 during climax moments. This phrasing also suggests that the subject was singing while the portrait was sketched; indeed, Mrs. Armstrong explained that she was preparing and memorizing a piece by Vivaldi at the time.<sup>87</sup> Example 3.4.1 illustrates the dynamic progression within phrases in the piece. The melody also progresses using mostly close intervals (i.e., 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, etc.) with the furthest jump being an octave, making it a relatively simple melody to be sung.

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<sup>86</sup> Monica Jakuc Leverett, interview with the author, August 26, 2021.

<sup>87</sup> Nancy Armstrong, in *Portraits: The Piano Music by Scott Wheeler*, directed by Fern Lopez, (Entirely Plausible Enterprises, LLC, 2016).

Example 3.4.1 “Arietta,” dynamics in phrases, mm. 1-15

Andante cantabile  $\text{♩} = 60$

Piano

Con ped

Phrase 1

Intro

Phrase 2

Highest point

Phrase 3

Phrase 4...

*p* *mf* *p* *f* *p<sub>sub</sub>*

Accompanying the beautiful and singable melody in the right hand is the colorful harmony in the left hand. The tonal center of the piece appears to be C major with C as the pedal point of A section and the end of A' section, and C major chord (examples 3.4.2, 3.4.3, and 3.4.4). There are two main motives in the left-hand accompaniment: a pedal point underneath chords; and repeated triads. Examples 3.4.5, 3.4.6, and 3.4.7 show such bass. The use of only two main motives for the bass proves the efficiency in Wheeler's compositional method and style. Throughout the piece, the accompaniment keeps a very steady beat, giving it a trustworthy and reliable character. On top of that, the sonority is full of second intervals across registers created by the prolonged bass note and the chords on top, held together by the sustained pedal, creating an interesting color and

Impressionistic atmospheric effect for the entire piece. This use of pedal point together with harmonic intervals to build harmony reaffirms Wheeler’s favorite choice of texture as less bulky. Examples 3.4.8 and 3.4.9 illustrate such sonorities.

Example 3.4.2 “Arietta,” C major chord at opening phrase, mm. 1-5

Example 3.4.3 “Arietta,” C major chord at cadence of A section, mm. 16-26

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Example 3.4.4 “Arietta,” C major chord at closing, mm. 46-51

Example 3.4.5 “Arietta,” two bass motives in A section, mm. 1-11

Piano

A section

*p* *mf*

Con ped

Motif 1

Motif 2

6

*p*

Detailed description: This musical score shows the piano part of the first system of 'Arietta' (mm. 1-11). The piece is in 3/8 time. The first system (mm. 1-5) features a bass line starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic, marked 'Con ped' (con pedal). A red box highlights the first five measures, labeled 'Motif 1'. The second system (mm. 6-11) continues the bass line, with a blue box highlighting measures 10-11, labeled 'Motif 2'. The dynamics shift to mezzo-forte (*mf*) in measure 6 and return to piano (*p*) in measure 10. The right hand plays a melodic line in the upper register.

Example 3.4.6 “Arietta,” two bass motives in B section, mm. 20-31

Poco Rit. Moving forward

*mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mp*

B section

20

27

Detailed description: This musical score shows the piano part of the second system of 'Arietta' (mm. 20-31). The piece is in 3/4 time. The first system (mm. 20-26) is marked 'Poco Rit.' and 'Moving forward'. It begins with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. A blue box highlights the bass line in measures 21-26, labeled 'B section'. The second system (mm. 27-31) continues the bass line, with dynamics of mezzo-forte (*mf*), piano (*p*), and mezzo-piano (*mp*). A red box highlights the bass line in measures 30-31. The right hand plays a melodic line in the upper register.

Example 3.4.7 “Arietta,” two bass motives in A’ section, mm. 37-45

Musical score for Example 3.4.7, showing two bass motives in the A' section of "Arietta" (mm. 37-45). The first system (mm. 37-40) is marked "A Tempo, calm" and "mp". A red box highlights a bass motive in the first system. The second system (mm. 41-45) is marked "Moving forward" and "pp". A blue box highlights a bass motive in the second system.

Example 3.4.8 “Arietta,” seconds in A section, mm. 1-2

Musical score for Example 3.4.8, showing seconds in the A section of "Arietta" (mm. 1-2). The score is in 3/4 time. The first system (m. 1) is marked "p" and "Con ped". A red box highlights the bass motive. The second system (m. 2) is marked "p". A red box highlights the bass motive. Chord symbols "C-D/A-G" and "C-D/A-Bb/F-F#" are written above the notes.

Example 3.4.9 “Arietta,” seconds in B section, mm. 20-26

Musical score for Example 3.4.9, showing seconds in the B section of "Arietta" (mm. 20-26). The score is in 3/4 time. The first system (m. 20) is marked "mf" and "Poco Rit.". A red box highlights the bass motive. The second system (m. 21) is marked "p". A red box highlights the bass motive. The third system (m. 22) is marked "p". A red box highlights the bass motive. The fourth system (m. 23) is marked "p". A red box highlights the bass motive. The fifth system (m. 24) is marked "p". A red box highlights the bass motive. The sixth system (m. 25) is marked "p". A red box highlights the bass motive. The seventh system (m. 26) is marked "p". A red box highlights the bass motive. Chord symbols "A-G", "B-C", "B-C", and "C-D-E" are written below the notes. The copyright notice "© Scott Wheeler Music 2012" is at the bottom.

The piece was written in the diminutive form of an ABA’ aria, which is “a song in an opera or similar work, shorter and less elaborate than a fully developed aria.”<sup>88</sup> This is

<sup>88</sup> Tim Carter, "Arietta," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001), accessed November 8, 2021, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline->

an excellent choice of form for soprano Nancy Armstrong, who is quite familiar with such a traditional form. However, one might ask, did Wheeler decide to use this form prior to the sketching of the portrait due to the background of the subject, or did he name the piece accordingly to the sketch? According to the composer, the process of sketching the portrait was entirely unconscious and unplanned. “This piece was literally a portrait. It came out as it came out. And I realized, when I got to a certain point, that it was actually fine to recap.”<sup>89</sup>

In conclusion, the piece shows a great balance between the tradition and the contemporary by using a conventional form and innovative harmonic treatments. Though not as complicated as many other pieces, “Arietta” combines the most common characteristics of Wheeler’s piano compositions such as constant dissonance, clear tonal centers, and horizontal harmonic buildup. It also is one of the very few portraits that Wheeler wrote in a clear ternary form without questionable motives in the recap, marking a level of maturity in his sketching career.

### ***Gallery View, a Portrait of Millie Fisher on Zoom (2020)***

Unlike the rest of the portraits, “Gallery View” was written through Zoom in a special circumstance as of COVID-19 first hit the world in early 2019. The sketching session happened as its subject, Ms. Millie Fisher, was making a pencil sketch of Scott Wheeler. For this reason, the character portrayed in the piece is less dramatic in comparison with other portraits, as movements were somewhat limited by the gallery

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[com.mutex.gmu.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000001235](https://com.mutex.gmu.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000001235).

<sup>89</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, November 11, 2021.

view of Zoom window. The characteristics of the sections therefore are more similar rather than contrasting each other.

This portrait, like “Arietta,” among Wheeler’s more easy-going works. The piece begins in C major with a simple yet beautiful melody in the right hand, accompanied by a linear bass in the left hand. Throughout the entire piece, this texture seems to be favored over chunky block chords, with the exception being the second to last section. Based on the appearance of different melodies as well as the changes in texture, the overall form of the piece can be seen as A-A’-B-C-Coda, though motivic cells from previous sections tend to return and develop in the later ones, representing Wheeler’s motivic development as a tool to unify sections.

The first section is indeed a written-out repeated section with multiple endings, with the first ending starting from m. 12 and the second from m. 29. The second ending is much shorter than the first one, lasting for only three measures instead of six before leading into the second section of the piece. As usual, the music that begins these two endings is quite similar with very different resolutions for each; in the case of this portrait, the second ending has an added measure (m. 30) in between two similar measures with the first ending (m. 12 and m. 29, and m. 13 and m. 31), which immediately leads into the B section, making it much shorter than the first ending (example 3.5.1). As a result of this uneven length between the two endings, the music from m. 14 to the return of the theme at m. 18 gives the impression of a bridge between two different sections.

Example 3.5.1 “Gallery View,” the similarities and differences between two endings, mm. 12-15

Example 3.5.2 “Gallery View,” the similarities and differences between two endings cont., mm. 27-35

The second section begins with repeated E6 as well as lingering sonority created by tied notes, as seen in example 3.5.1, which gives the impression of an arrival of the music from section A as contrasting to the bridge idea at m. 14. This arrangement is a clever method to connect the two sections without disrupting the flow of music, which Wheeler uses quite often in his compositions. The pedal point as the repeated highest note in the right hand is the main feature that defines section B, while the left hand builds up harmonies by holding the notes as it goes, creating both a melodic line underneath the pedal point and harmony in the big picture. This method of building up harmonies and

colors appears in many other examples as Wheeler’s favorite harmonic treatment.

Example 3.5.2 illustrates this process.

Example 3.5.3 “Gallery View,” ostinato in right hand while left hand builds up harmony, mm. 46-51



Unlike the first two sections of the piece, both of which have clear motivic plans, the third section, which starts at m. 58, sounds closer to an improvisation. Instead of specific roles for each hand, both seem to work together to make up a wandering melody for the first part of the section before entirely new materials appear at m. 73. The repeated note figure from section B returns only briefly at the beginning of the section to connect with the existing mood (example 3.5.3). From m. 73 to the end of section C at m. 87, both hands play dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords in a syncopated rhythm with decorating notes in the top voice to create a sense of a melody (example 3.5.4). The third section ends with only dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords played by both hands in an alternating motion (example 3.5.5). Noticeably, these chords move in a parallel motion, using *planing* technique that is typical in works by the French composer, Debussy.

Example 3.5.4 “Gallery View,” repeated note figure in right hand to connect B and C sections, mm. 58-63

Poco Più Mosso ♩ = 144

58

*mp* *pp*

Example 3.5.5 “Gallery View,” dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords in syncopated rhythm with decorating figures, mm. 73-76

73

*p* *mf*

Example 3.5.6 “Gallery View,” dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords end the third section, mm. 82-87

A Tempo (♩ = 144) Poco Rit.

82

*pp*

The last section has motivic cells from previous sections, including the dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords from section C and the skeleton of the melody from section A played across the hands in the style of section C and long tied notes across several beats that first seen in section B (example 3.5.6). However, this melody is transposed into F major as the piece closes with F as its tonal center. The Coda is dominated by long note figures such as half notes and dotted half notes as well as many tied notes, which in combination with the 9/4 meter creates a very slow pace for the section. The last measure consists of three

long notes and fermata for the last two, which are marked *pianissimo*, creating a sense of gently vibrating sonority even after the notes are already played. Similar to “Sketching,” which is also a portrait of a working visual artist, this ending is a perfect way to imply the eternity of artworks.

Example 3.5.7 “Gallery View,” the melody in A section is modified in the Coda, mm. 1-4

Quietly gliding forward ♩ = 120

Example 3.5.8 “Gallery View,” the melody in A section is modified in the Coda cont., mm. 88-89

88 A Tempo

As mentioned above, “Gallery View” has a limited perspective in comparison to other portraits, given the circumstance the piece was sketched through the restricted view from only one angle on the composer’s laptop. The subject’s movements that Wheeler could observe therefore were minimal, leading to relatively similar characteristics between the sections. The A section is connected to the B section by tied notes and the arriving point of E6; the B section is carried onto the C section also by tied notes and the reappearance of repeated note figures in the right hand; and materials from all three previous sections return in the Coda. The overall mood of the piece is quite mild with

dynamics ranging from *pianissimo* to *forte* and neither dramatic build up nor climax. The piece is played mostly in *legato* with many tied notes over pedal points with mostly consonant harmony, giving it a gentle character as well as a sweet and warm color. In term of tonality, the portrait remains tonal centric, begins in C major, wanders only briefly to C minor in section B and A minor in section C, and settles in F major in Coda.

In conclusion, “Gallery View” paints quite a nice and sweet picture of its subject. The narrow view of the computer screen is reflected by the simplicity of the musical characters, which makes it a special case among the portraits by Wheeler. The recycling of motivic cells is somewhat similar to that of “Sketching;” however, the sections in “Gallery View” are much better defined in comparison. This is the perfect indication that these portraits indeed depict and capture not only the subjects but also the surroundings at time of the sketching session, a feature that the tributes do not share, as seen in the next section.

## **Five Musical Tributes**

### ***Pseudo-Rag, a Tribute to Gunther Schuller (1985)***

One of the earliest compositions for the piano by Scott Wheeler, “Pseudo-Rag” carries many elements that the composer favors and continues to develop throughout his entire body of works. Compositional methods such as assigning a piece a certain number of measures as the number of its dedicatees or subject’s birthday, spelling out initials using musical notations, and quoting music from popular tunes, can all be seen in this piece. This tribute also has elements that show the composer’s wittiness, which has been acknowledged by discussed musicians and critics. “Pseudo-Rag” is one of the only two

compositions that contains more atonal sections than tonal centric areas. It is also an extreme case of meter ambiguity, caused by a combination of emphasis on beat fragments and odd groupings (i.e., septuplets).

As a tribute to the famous American composer/musician/educator for his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, Wheeler carefully begins the piece with four measures in the left hand that indeed spell out the numbers associated with Mr. Schuller’s date of birth and date of composition of the tribute. Using dodecaphonic integer notation, the composer assigned G as number 0 (of the name Gunther), as seen in example 3.6.1. A is number 1, F is number 9, Bb is number 2, and C# is number 5, resulting in 1925 as the year that Mr. Schuller was born. Using the same analysis, A-F-E-C# is the next group of notes to form number 1985 as the year this piece was written to celebrate Mr. Schuller’s 60<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Example 3.6.1 “Pseudo-Rag,” the 1925-1985 remark, mm. 1-7

The musical score for Example 3.6.1, "Pseudo-Rag," mm. 1-7, is presented in a two-staff format. The top staff is the right hand, and the bottom staff is the left hand. The time signature is 2/4. The tempo is marked "Moderato" with a metronome marking of 84. The right hand begins with a "dolce" section in measure 5, which is a transposition of a motif from Scott Joplin's "The Entertainer." The left hand features a "loco" section starting in measure 5. The score includes various dynamics such as *mf*, *sf*, *p*, and *secco*. The right hand has a "secco" section starting in measure 6. The score is by Scott Wheeler.

Also seen in example 3.6.1 is Gunther Schuller’s initials in m. 5 – G.S – that Wheeler spells out using G and Eb – Es in European musical notation system, pronounced similar as the letter S. This measure is indeed a transposition of m. 5 from Scott Joplin’s 1917 famous classical rag piece, “The Entertainer,” which according to Wheeler was one of Mr. Schuller’s favorite rags. Another musical quote that Wheeler uses in this piece is The Beatles’ “When I’m Sixty-Four,” wittily inserted in m. 59. The

composer only quotes the music that sings “when I’m sixty” and cuts out the word “four,” replaced by G and Eb for the initial in m. 60, as a clever musical joke that cannot be more appropriate in the case of this tribute. Example 3.6.2 highlights this musical idea.

**Example 3.6.2 “Pseudo-Rag,” Wheeler’s quote of The Beatles’ “When I’m Sixty-Four,” mm. 58-61**

The image shows a musical score for piano, measures 58 through 61. The score is in G major and 2/4 time. The right hand features a melody with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note, and a quarter note followed by an eighth note. The left hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. A red box highlights measures 59 and 60, which contain the lyrics "When I'm Six - ty...". In measure 60, the notes G and Eb are written above the staff, indicating the replacement of the word "four". The score includes dynamic markings of *p*, *mp*, and *mf*. The piece concludes with a *p* dynamic and a *G.S.* (Grand Finale) marking.

The piece is not by any means a rag as suggested by the title, “Pseudo-Rag” – a false rag. The left hand does not follow a steady oom-pah rhythmic pattern of the typical ragtime pieces, but instead plays different pitches in short notes alternating with rests of various lengths, resulting in a non-metrical feeling overall. Due to this rhythmic idea, the melodic accents by the right hand in between metrical beats usually seen in classic rags are impossible to be heard; indeed, besides the quoted tune from Joplin’s “The Entertainer” and The Beatles’ “When I’m Sixty-Four,” there is not a singable melody within the piece. The main texture of this tribute seems to be an alternation between the two hands with very few places where they play simultaneously to create a thicker harmony. Based on this texture and its build up, the piece can be divided into three main sections.

Imitating the short introduction in classic rags, the first four measures of the piece where the years are spelled out can be considered the opening of “Pseudo-Rag.” The first section consists of this short introduction, the quoted tune from Joplin’s “The Entertainer,” and Wheeler’s own musical idea or motive of short notes alternating with

rests in the left hand, alternating with the right hand mostly when the left hand is at rest (example 3.6.3). This alternation of hands carries into the second section starting at m. 19, which develops into longer running passages across the two hands first appear at mm. 26-31 (example 3.6.4). These two motives take turn in the second section, leading it into what could be considered a climax moment at the end of the section at m. 48 when the right hand reaches the highest note in the entire piece, an F7 (example 3.6.5).

Example 3.6.3 “Pseudo-Rag,” the first motive, mm. 8-14

Example 3.6.4 “Pseudo-Rag,” the first and second motives in the second section, mm. 20-30

Example 3.6.5 “Pseudo-Rag,” the climax at the end of second section, mm. 46-48

The musical score for Example 3.6.5, "Pseudo-Rag," shows measures 46-48. It is written for piano in 2/4 time. Measure 46 begins with a dashed line labeled "(8va)" under the left hand, indicating an octave shift. The right hand starts with a syncopated melody. Measure 47 continues the right-hand melody with a piano (*p*) dynamic. Measure 48 features a forte (*f*) dynamic and ends with a chord marked with a circled "F".

The third section starts at m. 49 as the left hand continues playing the running sixteenth notes from the second motive; however, the right hand plays a new musical idea of dotted eighth – sixteenth note figure. The two hands finally together form a glimpse of the syncopated rhythmic pattern usually seen in classic rag at mm. 52-53, followed by the same quote from Joplin “The Entertainer” but in different pitches at m. 54 (example 3.6.6). The last measures before the quote from The Beatles’ “When I’m Sixty-Four” have the two hands playing in harmony on top of a sustained pedal, using Wheeler’s favorite dissonant intervals (i.e., seconds, tritone, sevenths) as seen many times in other compositions.

Overall, “Pseudo-Rag” is not a strong composition by Wheeler when compared to other tributes. Though it shares many features that the composer favors in his writings, such as the witty quoted tunes and the recycling of motives, this tribute lacks the clever build up before the climax as seen in later compositions such as “Birthday Card for Tony” and “By the Sea.” Moreover, the sections are not very well-defined, resulting in a confusing structure; the different characters suggest a through-composed composition while the use of the same quote in the first and the third section suggests otherwise. The third section, though different from the other section with a stronger sense of flow, does

not reflect a strong contrast in character despite the use of opposite articulations such as slow and legato movement in the left hand.

**Example 3.6.6 “Pseudo-Rag,” the classic rag syncopated rhythmic pattern and another quote from “The Entertainer” in the third section, mm. 49-57**

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system, starting at measure 49, shows a right hand with a 'flowing' texture and a left hand with a syncopated rhythmic pattern. A section of the right hand is circled and labeled 'loco'. The second system, starting at measure 54, includes markings for 'cantabile', 'mp', 'p', and 'ff', along with 'Red.' and '5' annotations.

In conclusion, “Pseudo-Rag” consists of aspects that would later mature in his other works for the piano, even though it is not quite strong as other compositions. Methods such as using dissonant intervals as color-setting tools, recycling motives to create new ones as well as to define sections, are continued to be practiced and developed on a more sophisticated level within the body of works by Wheeler.

### ***Epithalamion, a Tribute to Donald and Meredith Berman (1998)***

The word “epithalamion,” according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is the Greek variant of the Latin word “epithalamium,” which means “a song or poem in honor of a bride and bridegroom.”<sup>90</sup> In practice, “epithalamion” is a song or poem celebrating a marriage. As a tribute written for the wedding of Donald Berman and Meredith Moss, Wheeler’s “Epithalamion” carries many details directly associated with its dedicatees.

<sup>90</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. “epithalamium,” accessed November 22, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/epithalamium>.

The composer opens the piece with four notes that spell out the dedicatees' initials: a D and a B for Donald Berman, and two E's – *mi in solfège* – for Meredith Moss, which then becomes the accompaniment in the right hand. Throughout the entire piece, D, B, and E continue to reappear as an ostinato in the right hand, creating a busy and flowing motion while the left hand plays single notes across the registers, adding onto a slowly built-up harmony in combination with the pedal points.

The piece can be divided into five sections, A-B-A-Coda-klezmer with the first section from the beginning to the end of m. 24; the second section continues to the end of m. 38, immediately followed by the third section in m. 39 with the same materials that opens the piece. The Coda combines materials from both A and B sections, which ends at m. 75, followed by the quoted klezmer wedding song, “Firn di Mekhutonim Aheym,” meaning “Escorting the Parents of the Bride and Groom Home.” The use of this quoted tune also reveals yet another detail on the dedicatees: their wedding was in a Jewish tradition. Even though klezmer songs do not appear exclusively in weddings, “the Jewish wedding was the one venue where most if not all of the genres of klezmer music could be heard.”<sup>91</sup> And Scott Wheeler, knowing the groom and the bride personally, chose to deliver this tune as an important feature in his musical wedding present to them.

Regarding tonality, even though the piece has a strong sense of C minor resulting from the repeated figure in B section (i.e., G-C as accompaniment in right hand with Eb and Bb in left hand melody), the piece does not particularly sound bounded to any

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<sup>91</sup> Walter Zev. Feldman, "The Jewish Wedding and its Musical Repertoire," *Klezmer: Music, History, and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Oxford Scholarship Online, 2016. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190244514.003.0006.

specific key. Indeed, with the persistent Bb, Eb, and F# that continuously occur throughout the piece as accidentals, the scale seems closer to G harmonic minor. However, instead of using a specific scale or mode in a traditional sense, Wheeler continues to favor dissonant intervals for a colorful effect. The right-hand part constantly plays seconds and ninths almost every measure, and the left-hand harmony is built on tritones across registers. Examples 3.7.1 and 3.7.2 present these intervals, which serve as motivic cells that make up the four main motives in the first section of the piece.

Example 3.7.1 “Epithalamion,” the ninths and seconds in the right hand, mm. 1-7

(D. B. - M. M.)

*f* *p* *pp*

*sed. sempre* *mp*

*pp*

Example 3.7.2 “Epithalamion,” the tritones in the left hand, mm. 1-7

(D. B. - M. M.)

*f* *p* *pp*

*sed. sempre* *mp*

*pp*

The first section of the piece consists of three main motives. The first motive can be seen at the opening of the piece as the right hand plays an ostinato of running sixteenth notes as seen in example 3.7.1; and the left-hand plays and holds notes across registers which build tritones, as seen in example 3.7.2. The second motive features a change of meter (to 9/16), with the right hand playing and sustaining the top voice made of dotted eighth notes, and the left hand holding a tied note from the previous measure. The third motive appears for the first time at m. 13 after the first two are played twice, characterized by running sixteenth notes across the hands. Though it appears very briefly at first, this motive grows as the piece proceeds, lasting two measures at mm. 20-21, three measures at mm. 45-48, and five measures at mm. 65-69. Examples 3.7.3 and 3.7.4 highlights the second and third motives.

Example 3.7.3 “Epithalamion,” the second motive appears for the first time, mm. 5-7

Example 3.7.4 “Epithalamion,” the third motive appears for the first time, mm. 12-14

The B section starts at m. 25 with a new motive, characterized by the right-hand playing only two pitches repeatedly in running sixteenth notes and the left hand playing a

melody made of descending notes (example 3.7.5). At the end of this section, the second motive makes a quick occurrence at m. 37 for only two measures before leading into the third section in m. 39. In this section, each of the first three motive reappears only once in the same order as in the A section before leading to the Coda at m. 49. All four motives can be seen in the Coda quite clearly, starting with the fourth motive, followed by the first, second, and third. The ending measures of the Coda consist of a new material in the form of clustered chords in both hands, creating the formal ambiguity seen in other discussed pieces of the first period of Wheeler’s piano compositions.

Example 3.7.5 “Epithalamion,” the third motive, mm. 24-31

The image shows a musical score for Example 3.7.5, "Epithalamion," measures 24-31. The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano accompaniment. The third motive is highlighted with a black box. The score includes dynamics such as *mp*, *pp*, and *cantabile*, and a tempo marking *And.*

An early example of Wheeler’s tendency to recycle motives within a composition, the last section of “Epithalamion” does not carry any new materials but indeed reuses three of the four main motives introduced in the previous sections. However, this section should not be considered as a part of the Coda due to the quoted tune from the klezmer song that appears for the first time. While the fourth motive essentially dominates this section, the second motive also makes a few returns in the same manner as it appears in the first section, which is to alternate very briefly with the other motive in only one or

two measures. The tune of the klezmer song is cleverly inserted in both the top voice of the right hand and the bass in the left hand, while other voices are busy with the second motive as an ongoing accompaniment. The third motive appears for only one measure to lead the piece into its finale using the fourth motive. Examples 3.7.6, 3.7.7, and 3.7.8 explain the use of these motives in the second section.

Example 3.7.6 “Epithalamion,” the second and the fourth motives in the second section, mm. 84-91

The fourth motif

The second motif

84

88

*pp* *mp* *pp*

Example 3.7.7 “Epithalamion,” the klezmer tune in top voice and bass, mm. 76-83

Calm ♩ = 104

*cantabile* *pp*

*poco.*

76

80

Example 3.7.8 “Epithalamion,” the third motive leads to the finale, mm. 105-108

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Epithalamion" by Scott Wheeler, specifically measures 105 to 108. The score is written for piano in 3/4 time. It features a treble clef for the right hand and a bass clef for the left hand. A green box highlights a musical phrase in measures 105-107, labeled "The third motif". A red box highlights a musical phrase in measures 107-108, labeled "The fourth motif". The score includes dynamic markings such as *f* and *ff*. The piece concludes with a final chord in measure 108.

With the clever alternation and development of only four motives, a popular klezmer tune skillfully quoted and inserted underneath the reused motives, and the carefully chosen sonority that results in a beautifully atmospheric musical picture of a Jewish wedding, “Epithalamion” is an important work in the piano repertoire by Scott Wheeler. The tribute proves the composer’s skills at manipulating musical elements to represent personal details of his dedicatees, for which reason it deserves to be considered one of his greatest compositions.

***Birthday Card for Tony, a Tribute to Anthony Tommasini (1998)***

As discussed in Chapter Two, “Birthday Card for Tony” is a grid piece, which was written in a planned number of measures, 50, to celebrate its dedicatee’s 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. The piece also carries the closing chords from “A Study in Chords,” Virgil Thomson’s portrait of Anthony Tommasini’s. A combination of an E major chord in the right hand and a D major chord in the left hand gives an interesting effect for an opening, especially when played *piano*. These chords, when played simultaneously, create a striking dissonance, which could be considered quite startling; however, when played quietly, the feeling suggests a strange mood: something out of the ordinary but not

aggressive. Could this be intentionally implying that Tommasini, despite his reputation and powerful remarks as a well-known music critic, “one of the most influential classical music critics in the world, (...) and a supporter of boundaries-pushing artists,”<sup>92</sup> is not as intimidating in real life?

Wheeler took the concluding seven measures in Thomson’s piece in reverse order and distributed them to start the first seven phrases, each is five measures long (examples 3.8.1 and 3.8.2). The beginning of the eighth phrase uses Thomson’s entire m. 19 (example 3.8.3), and the opening chords return in the last two phrases, which are also five measures each, adding up to fifty measures as a tribute to Tommasini’s 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. These quoted chords explain Wheeler’s note for the piece, as the “further study in chords, after V.T.” The phrases all start with chords and are immediately followed by four melodic measures except for the 8<sup>th</sup> phrase, creating a nice contrast within each phrase.

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<sup>92</sup> Susan Seligson, "The Case for New," *Bostonia* (Winter–Spring 2011): 22–26, accessed on March 11, 2021, <http://www.bu.edu/bostonia/winter-spring11/tommasini/tommasini.pdf>.

Example 3.8.1 "A Study in Chords," Thomson's concluding seven measures, mm. 20-28<sup>93</sup>

20

25

7.

6.

5.

4.

3.

2.

1.

<sup>93</sup> "A Study in Chords," Music by Virgil Thomson © 1984 Virgil Thomson Foundation. Reproduced by permission of the Virgil Thomson Foundation, Ltd., as successor to Virgil Thomson.

Example 3.8.2 "Birthday Card for Tony," Wheeler quotes Thomson's chords, mm. 1-20

Scott Wheeler

1. Moderate ♩ = 144

1

2.

6

11

3.

16

4.

*p*

*pp*

*mp*

*pp*

*cresc. poco a poco*

*mf*

*p*

Example 3.8.3 "Birthday Card for Tony," cont., mm. 21-34

5.

21

6.

26

7.

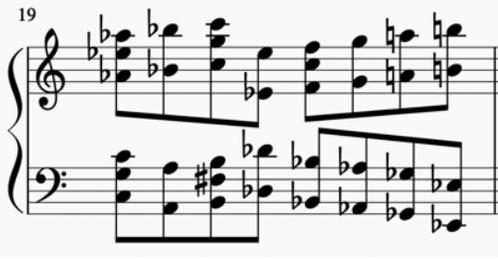
31

Seq.

Example 3.8.4 "Birthday Card for Tony," mm. 36-37

36

Example 3.8.5 “A Study in Chords,” m. 19<sup>94</sup>



The choice of rhythm also contributes to the purpose of signifying number 50 and its division, as well as the unfolding of the piece. The 5/8 meter plays an essential role in the use of 5s, which Wheeler referred to as “a microcosm of the larger rhythmic structure.”<sup>95</sup> The rhythmic pattern does not change much during the first few phrases, each starts with a dotted quarter note that is followed by four measures of melody in the right hand, which consist of sixteenth-eighth note syncopated rhythm. This rhythmic pattern together with the texture of the music in the right hand, therefore, defines the first A section as the first fifteen measures of the piece.

The B section starts at m. 16 with octaves in the right hand while the syncopated rhythmic pattern from the A section persists. This section consists of new materials such as sextuplets in m. 29 and pedal point at m. 26 and m. 32, both of which are Wheeler’s favorite treatments. As discussed, even though Wheeler prefers building his harmony by layers of sustained notes and pedal point, he occasionally uses thick block chords in a few of his compositions, and “Birthday Card for Tony” is one of them. Starting from m. 34, the texture becomes much thicker with a pattern of block chords continuously in *forte*. The last phrase of this section starts at m. 36, using the chords from m. 19 in Thomson’s

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<sup>94</sup> “A Study in Chords,” Music by Virgil Thomson © 1984 Virgil Thomson Foundation. Reproduced by permission of the Virgil Thomson Foundation, Ltd., as successor to Virgil Thomson.

<sup>95</sup> Scott Wheeler, email exchange with the author, March 13, 2021.

piece, however in highly syncopated rhythm in both hands, creating a fast pace, building up to the climax of the entire composition at m. 38.

The A' section consists of the last two phrases of the piece, beginning with the same chords that open the entire piece. However, this section uses more longer notes to slow down the pace, concluding the piece in the same way it started, with left hand holding long tied notes and right hand playing syncopated melody. Wheeler recalls the materials from the A section in his last, making it quite obvious that the form of the tribute is ABA'. The ending measure consists of octaves on B in dotted quarter and quarter notes in different registers across the piano.

The uses of melodic lines, block chords, rhythm, texture, dynamics, and form prove that Wheeler wrote this piece in a very carefully measured manner with specific goals in mind. He admitted that "this is the most rigorous grid I ever gave myself,"<sup>96</sup> and even though he tried composing other pieces in the same manner, the music always led him to abandon his grid. "Birthday Card for Tony" in my opinion is one of the most outstanding tributes that Wheeler ever composed.

*Comparison to Virgil Thomson's portrait of Anthony Tommasini, "A Study in Chords"*

There are profound differences between Virgil Thomson's original composition and Wheeler's version of the piece. Thomson's piece is quite conventional in the use of rhythm and meter with common meter, 3/4 meter, and simple and straight forward rhythmic patterns with quarter and eighth notes. There is no dynamic marking in Thomson's manuscript, suggesting that he either left this detail to the performers or used

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<sup>96</sup> Scott Wheeler, email exchange with the author, March 15, 2021.

it to imply a characteristic of its subject, or both. Personally, I think of this detail as Thomson's intention of saying that Tommasini's character is only as colorful as others perceive.

Thomson also uses many block chords throughout his entire piece with very few changes in rhythmic patterns, creating a thicker texture and more hectic atmosphere for the piece. Like Wheeler, his harmonies are built on a tonal ground with the majority as major chords; however, the overall color of the piece is quite dissonant due to the extensive use of bitonally superimposed chords across the hands. Example 3.8.4 explains the use of such chords. Given that Tommasini was a piano student of Thomson for quite some time, the overwhelming appearances of block chords might imply his pianistic style.

Example 3.8.6 "A Study in Chords," Thomson's bitonally superimposed chords across the hands, mm. 5-8<sup>97</sup>

In conclusion, even though Wheeler used Virgil Thomson's exact chords in his own, the two pieces are significantly different. Using the original chords by Thomson to open his phrases, Wheeler created an entirely different piece in his own compositional style using methods that can be seen in other compositions such as recycling motivic cells, syncopated rhythmic patterns, and pedal points.

<sup>97</sup> "A Study in Chords," Music by Virgil Thomson © 1984 Virgil Thomson Foundation. Reproduced by permission of the Virgil Thomson Foundation, Ltd., as successor to Virgil Thomson.

*Cliff Walk, a Tribute to Courtney Kenny (2006)*

Commissioned by Courtney Kenny, a pianist whom Wheeler met in Newport, Rhode Island, “‘Cliff Walk’ recalls ragtime and the stride piano style of James P. Johnson.”<sup>98</sup> The most apparent feature of such style is in the left hand, with a bass note on beats one and three and a chord on beats two and four in each measure. The tempo marking also somewhat suggests a high influence of jazz music with swing eighths requested by the composer.

“Cliff Walk” is among Wheeler’s most consonant compositions. The harmony throughout the piece suggests a minor color with lots of minor ninth chords and major seventh chords, which reaffirms the strong influence of jazz. Wheeler noted that the piece “is perhaps a slightly more dangerous, maybe more scenic version of a cakewalk,” an important feature of ragtime pieces, and that “the title also refers to a scenic walk by the Narragansett Bay in Newport, Rhode Island.”<sup>99</sup> The character hinted by such musical elements suggest a person who lives an adventurous life and enjoys “walking on a cliff.”<sup>100</sup> Example 3.9.1 shows how the chords are built on a chromatic bass, together with a highly syncopated rhythm, creating a strange picture of a “cliff hanging” walk. In m. 3, the chord G-Maj.7<sup>th</sup> is played first in the right hand on the second half of beat three (syncopated beat) before it is confirmed by the left hand on beat four; the C# half-diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord in m. 4 happens the same way, as well as many other chords throughout the entire tribute.

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<sup>98</sup> Scott Wheeler, “Cliff Walk,” program notes (Scott Wheeler Music, 2006).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Scott Wheeler, email exchange with the author, March 13, 2021.

Example 3.9.1 “Cliff Walk,” harmonic progression, mm. 1-4

The musical score for Example 3.9.1, "Cliff Walk," harmonic progression, mm. 1-4, is presented in 4/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic, playing chords and a melodic line with triplets. The left hand (bass clef) plays a moving bass line with chromatic intervals. The harmonic progression is as follows: *Ebm9*, *Em9*, *Ebm9*, *Em9*, *GM7*, *F half dim*, *C# half dim*, and *F#M*. The dynamics shift to mezzo-piano (*mp*) in the second measure.

The main rhythmic patterns are built on syncopated eighth - quarter notes, eighth note triplets, and eighth rests. The moving bass using chromatic intervals could represent small and careful steps; when played in swing style, this bass, together with the right-hand chords in a highly syncopated rhythm create a picture of a person who walks playfully, almost dancing with a carefree attitude.

Wheeler uses ABA-Coda as the overall form of the piece. The B section differs from the A section by the use of triads in the right hand without syncopated rhythm but rather on straight beats, and a clear change of texture, where the oom-pah pattern of ragtime is replaced by moving melodic line in the left hand. Compared to the energy in the A section, this section could be considered a downtime for an enthusiastic character in a much less jazzy and playful mood. The B section and the second A section are connected by a three-measure bridge which does not make a reappearance later in the piece. Wheeler uses thin moving melodic lines in both hands for the first time for the bridge, followed immediately by the chords that opened the entire piece, leading to the identical A section. The Coda includes the moving bass and triads on straight beats from the B section, and the moving bass in stepwise motion with chords in a syncopated rhythm from the A section.

The most striking feature in this piece, however, is the efficiency of Wheeler’s motives. The entire piece of ninety-eight measures is built upon three main motives that are introduced, recycled, and alternated in a way that fundamentally determines the structure. The first motive is made of two hands alternating block chords and bass back and forth every half a beat as the main motive of section A; the second motive is first seen in the left hand at the beginning of section B; and the third motive is made of triads on every beat, which first appears in section B in the right hand. Examples 3.9.2, 3.9.3, and 3.9.4 illustrate the appearances of the three main motives throughout the entire piece.

Example 3.9.2 “Cliff Walk,” motive 1 in A section, mm. 1-12

Moderate  $\text{♩} = 120$  – Swing eighths throughout

**A section**

Piano

*p* *mp*

Motif 1

Bridge motif

The image displays a piano score for the first 12 measures of the 'A section' of 'Cliff Walk'. The score is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 120 beats per minute and a swing feel. It features two staves: a right-hand treble staff and a left-hand bass staff. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The first measure starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second measure is marked mezzo-piano (*mp*). The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains measures 1 through 4. The second system contains measures 5 through 8. The third system contains measures 9 through 12. Red boxes highlight 'Motif 1' in measures 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. A red box also highlights a section in measures 9 and 10. Yellow boxes highlight the 'Bridge motif' in measures 11 and 12. The bridge motif consists of a sequence of triads in the right hand.

Example 3.9.3 “Cliff Walk,” motives 1, 2, and 3 in B section, mm. 26-41

**B section**

Motif 3

Motif 2

26

32

37

41

*p*

*mp*

*f*

*p*

*f*

Example 3.9.4 “Cliff Walk,” motives 1, 2, and 3 in B section cont., mm. 42-59

42

47

50

55

*p*

*f*

*ff*

*mf*

*p*

Example 3.9.5 “Cliff Walk,” motives 1, 2, and 3 in Coda, mm. 80-98

The image shows a piano score for the Coda of "Cliff Walk," measures 80-98. The score is divided into three systems. Motive 1 is highlighted in blue boxes, Motive 2 in green boxes, and Motive 3 in red boxes. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mp*, *mf*, *f*, and *p*. The key signature has two flats, and the time signature is 4/4. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat signs.

In conclusion, the careful and efficient compositional method in this piece speaks volume of Wheeler’s skills as a composer. The tendency to recycle and alternate one or two main motives throughout an entire piece is one of the most striking features in all Wheeler’s compositions, as discussed in Chapter Two.

***By the Sea, a Tribute to Stephen Sondheim (2013)***

To speak of this piece, one cannot neglect its dedicatee, “possibly the greatest musical theater composer and lyricist of all time,”<sup>101</sup> who during his prolific career received an Academy Award, eight Tony Awards, and eight Grammy Awards, as well as

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<sup>101</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, November 11, 2021.

a Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama in 2015.<sup>102</sup> Mr.

Sondheim composed many popular works in American musical theater such as *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962), *Company* (1970), and *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1979). “By the Sea” was written as a tribute to the dedicatee on the occasion of his Edward MacDowell Medal, using the song with its original name from *Sweeney Todd*.

“By the Sea” from *Sweeney Todd* serves as what Wheeler described as a “germ of musical idea.”<sup>103</sup> In a scene where the two main characters, Mrs. Lovett and Sweeney Todd, are having a conversation regarding what the former hopes for the future, “By the Sea” is the happiest and most joyful tune of the entire show. Wheeler cleverly inserts this happy tune sung mostly by Mrs. Lovett throughout the piece across the hands in different voices, and eventually ends the entire piece with the popular two measures of the accompaniment from Mr. Sondheim’s original score.

Wheeler’s “By the Sea” can be divided into four sections. The first section ends at m. 25; the second section ends at m. 40; and the third section ends at m. 54. Throughout the first section, Wheeler imitates the main tune from Sondheim’s song several times only in brief moments, alternating with his own musical ideas, making it quite difficult for listeners who are not familiar with the original tune. The use of the quoted tune in combination with Wheeler’s own musical figures is indeed what characterizes this section. Also in this section, musical ideas are introduced in short figures, such as

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<sup>102</sup> Wikipedia contributors, “Stephen Sondheim,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, accessed February 10, 2022, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen\\_Sondheim#Honors\\_and\\_legacy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Sondheim#Honors_and_legacy).

<sup>103</sup> Scott Wheeler, email exchange with the author, March 11, 2021.

running sixteenth notes in groups of four, running triplets in groups of two, and staccato eighth notes alternating with eighth rests, all of which reappears later in section two.

Example 3.10.1 shows the quoted tune from the original score by Mr. Sondheim; and example 3.10.2 highlights Wheeler's use of this tune in his own version.

**Example 3.10.1 “By the Sea,” Sondheim’s main tune, mm. 29-38<sup>104</sup>**

sea, Mis - ter Todd, that's the life I cov - et. By the sea, Mis - ter Todd, ooh, I

*(leggiero)*

know you'd love \_ it! You and me, Mis - ter T, we could be a - lone. In a

house wot we'd al-most own. \_ Down by the sea! Would-n't that be

**TODD:**

An - y - thing you say. \_

<sup>104</sup> “By the Sea,” Words and Music by Stephen Sondheim (c) 1979 RILTING MUSIC, INC. All Rights Administered by WC MUSIC CORP. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission. Reprinted by permission of Hal Leonard LLC.

Example 3.10.2 “By the Sea,” Wheeler’s use of the main tune in his version, mm. 1-19

Cool and Breezy ♩ = 96

Piano

*p* *mp*

6

11

16

*f* *p* *mf* *p*

*sfz* *p* *mf* *p*

8<sup>va</sup>

3 3

The second section reuses all the musical ideas that first appear in the first section with developments. Instead of alternating them, each musical idea only reappears once or

twice before the section entirely focuses on running triplets played by both hands in unison (example 3.10.3). Except for these running triplets, both section one and two do not have the feeling of strict time, but closer to wandering thoughts, due to the extensive amount of single notes and rests as well as frequent changes of meter.

Example 3.10.3 “By the Sea” by Wheeler, running triplets in unison in section two, mm. 35-42

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system, starting at measure 35, is marked "Poco Più Mosso" with a tempo of quarter note = 116. It shows both hands playing unison triplets. The second system, starting at measure 39, is marked "Poco Accel." followed by "Poco Più Mosso" with a tempo of quarter note = 126. It continues with unison triplets and includes dynamic markings like "pp" and "f".

Unlike the first two sections, the third and fourth sections are relatively metric, especially section four with the composer’s own tempo marking as “cheerfully chopping.” The third section recycles the staccato eighth notes and eighth rests introduced in section one, using it as a rhythmic device to keep the steady beat for the entire section, again proving Wheeler’s skill at manipulating rhythm and recycling motives. Last, section four also uses the same staccato eighth notes to keep the beat but in a much quicker pace in 3/8 meter without rests, giving it both the cheerful and the chopping feeling requested by the composer. Noticeably, Wheeler quotes another tune

from *Sweeney Todd*, this time played by the left hand. Example 3.10.4 shows the original tune by the late composer, and example 3.10.5 highlights Wheeler’s imitation of the tune. In addition to quoting this tune, Wheeler also quotes two measures of Mr. Sondheim’s accompaniment for the ending measures as seen in examples 3.10.6 and 3.10.7.

Example 3.10.4 “By the Sea,” the original tune by Sondheim, mm. 1-7<sup>105</sup>

Moderato (♩ = 84)

MRS. LOVETT: (kisses him) (again)

Ooh, Mis-ter Todd, I’m so hap-py I could

(again)

eat you up, I real-ly could. You know what I’d like to do, Mis-ter Todd?

<sup>105</sup> “By the Sea,” Words and Music by Stephen Sondheim (c) 1979 RILTING MUSIC, INC. All Rights Administered by WC MUSIC CORP. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission. Reprinted by permission of Hal Leonard LLC.

Example 3.10.5 “By the Sea,” Wheeler’s version of the quoted tune, mm. 71-79

Example 3.10.6 “By the Sea,” Mr. Sondheim’s original accompaniment, mm. 29-31<sup>106</sup>

Example 3.10.7 “By the Sea,” Scott Wheeler’s ending measures in his version, mm. 75-79

Wheeler’s “By the Sea” unfolds in the same manner of a movie or a show, with the first section/act introducing the characters and the storyline, while the later ones

<sup>106</sup> “By the Sea,” Words and Music by Stephen Sondheim (c) 1979 RILTING MUSIC, INC. All Rights Administered by WC MUSIC CORP. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission. Reprinted by permission of Hal Leonard LLC.

focusing on each character or a certain aspect of the story, and the last section pushing to a climax with drama and concluding with a short closing scene. This particular form can also be seen in “Bleecker Study,” a portrait of the movie producer Fern Lopez, who directed the documentary on Wheeler’s musical portraits as mentioned in Chapter One.

In conclusion, “By the Sea” by Scott Wheeler, though it uses many quotes from the show tune by Stephen Sondheim, is undoubtedly an original composition with great intention and careful plan. The tribute uses many features that Wheeler favors, such as a through-composed form and the reuse of motivic cells.

## CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter presents a chronological list of all Wheeler's piano works and a thematic catalog, modeled on Tommasini's catalog of Virgil Thomson's portraits.<sup>107</sup> This catalog includes the most basic and general information on the subjects of Wheeler's portraits and the dedicatees of his tributes, such as names, occupation, and the nature of their relationships with the composer. The process of collecting this information included direct email exchanges and/or interviews with available subjects, email exchanges with the composer, and selected information from public records. All photographs used in this chapter are permitted by their owners.

### A Chronological List of Piano Works by Scott Wheeler

**Table 2 Scott Wheeler's piano works**

NUMBER	TITLE	YEAR
1	Green Geese: A tribute to Willa Walker	1977
2	Chanson Singeresse: A tribute to Wendy and Patrick	1978
3	Calamity Rag: A tribute to Willa Walker	1979
4	Free Ranging: A tribute to Jill Wheeler and Curtis Garry	1983
5	Pseudo-Rag: A tribute to Gunther Schuller	1985
6	Dancing: A portrait of Michael Ricca	1986
7	F & S Rag: A tribute Fits and Starts, <i>clown show by Sophie Parker and Steve Seidel</i>	1986
8	Pastorale: A portrait of Sara Davies	1991
9	Sketching: A portrait of Shane Crabtree	1992
10	Alphabet Dance: A tribute to Arthur Berger on his 80 <sup>th</sup>	1992

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<sup>107</sup> Anthony Tommasini, *Virgil Thomson's Musical Portraits* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986).

11	Cookie Galop with Waltz: A portrait of Elizabeth Cranstoun	1993
12	Flow Chart: A tribute to Donald Berman	1993
13	Dad with Kids: A portrait of Charles Hoffman	1994
14	Firefly Lullaby: A tribute to Alexa Rose	1996
15	Birthday Card for Tony: A tribute to Anthony Tommasini	1998
16	Midnight Bells: A tribute to Jon Garelick and Clea Simon	1998
17	Shimmer: A portrait of Peter Stringham	1998
18	Epithalamion: A tribute to Donald and Meredith Berman	1998
19	To his Music: A tribute to Malcolm Peyton	1999
20	Study in Concord: A portrait of Marianne Evett	2000
21	Cliff Walk: A tribute to Courtney Kenny	2006
22	The Fifth of July: A portrait of Dr. Stephen Krane	2007
23	Morningside: A portrait of Monica Jakuc Leverett	2007
24	Cowley Meditation: A portrait of James Woodman	2009
25	Stone South: A portrait of Susan Unterberg	2009
26	Island Lullaby: A tribute to Shalin Liu	2009
27	Arietta: A portrait of Nancy Armstrong	2012
28	Bleecker Study: A portrait of Fern Lopez	2012
29	By the Sea: A tribute to Stephen Sondheim	2013
30	Portrait of Steve: A tribute to Stephen Malawista	2013
31	Life Study: A portrait of Megan Marshall	2014
32	Skyline: A portrait of Jill Steinberg	2016
33	Sunset: A portrait of Christen Frothingham	2016
34	Park View: A portrait of Barbara Senchak	2017
35	Quiet Sunday: A portrait of Plácido Domingo	2017
36	Anima: A portrait of Susan Napier	2018
37	Oracle: A portrait of Kathleen Ludwig	2018
38	Palette: A portrait of Stephen Coit	2018
39	To a Wild Rose: A portrait of Cheryl Young	2018
40	Tracing Shadows: A portrait of Edward Ludwig	2019
41	Gallery View: A portrait of Millie Fisher	2020
42	Lullaby for Cece: A tribute to Cecilia Trinh An	2022

## A Thematic Catalog

### 1. Green Geese, a Tribute to Willa Walker

#### Example 4.2.1 “Green Geese,” mm. 1-3

Moderato ♩ = 63

*mf*

Date: July 19, 1977, Edgartown, MA

Dedicatee: Willa Walker. Vice President of the Chamber Music Society of Detroit in Michigan. She was Wheeler’s classmate at Brandeis and his former girlfriend/lover, during which time she was a graduate student in music theory at Brandeis.

I took it as a kind of figure that is used in country music piano playing... people like Roger Miller... that kind of pop country music that occasionally I heard. There was a particular piano player that did that (figure); I don’t remember his name. But I liked it with the G pedal and a little melody going on underneath it. It was a way of exploring pop; it’s very much a pop music piece (for piano playing.)<sup>108</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2015, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

### 2. Chanson Singeresse, a Tribute to Wendy and Patrick

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<sup>108</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 13, 2021.

Example 4.2.2 “Chanson Singeresse,” mm. 1-5

Andante - dolce e legato

Scott Wheeler

Musical score for "Chanson Singeresse" mm. 1-5. The score is in 3/8 time and consists of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The treble staff begins with a melodic line in G major, marked *mp* and *Andante - dolce e legato*. The bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment, marked *Con ped sempre*. The piece features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some measures containing rests. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Date: June 1978, Edgartown, MA

Dedicatees: Wendy Wheeler and Patrick Padonti.

I have two sisters, Jill and Wendy Wheeler. I wrote a piece for each of their weddings, and this piece was for Wendy. “Chanson Singeresse” was a little bit of a reduction of a trio I wrote called “Singeresse.” “Singe” is French for “monkey.” So “singeresse” was a little bit of a joke as in French I would say “monkey business,” [...] so when I wanted to give something to Wendy for her wedding, I adapted the trio and I gave it a name that shows the adaptation, so I called it “the song of the monkey business.” We all studied French with my mom; my mom spoke some French and she loved to teach us different languages. We all had French lessons together when we were growing up. French might be a little bit of a pet language that you might use.<sup>109</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2008, Scott Wheeler Music

3. Calamity Rag, a Tribute to Willa Walker

Example 4.2.3 “Calamity Rag,” mm. 1-5

Musical score for "Calamity Rag" mm. 1-5. The score is in 2/4 time and consists of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The tempo is marked *Moderato* with a quarter note equal to 69 (♩ = 69). The treble staff begins with a melodic line in G major, marked *mf*. The bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment. The piece features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some measures containing rests. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Date: 1979, Washington D.C./Boston, MA

Dedicatee: Willa Walker.

<sup>109</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, November 22, 2021.

She was doing research on transcribing jazz piano music from the 1920s. I was exploring Scott Joplin for the very first time. So, because I was studying Scott Joplin and she was a jazz person, [as well as] a good classical pianist, [...] so when I was exploring Joplin, I came up with this little thing and I decided to give it that name. It was just a personal nickname/pet name thing with a girlfriend, and it didn't mean anything [...] It was just as close as I could get to writing classic Joplin. My intention was not to try to update it or do a comment on it, but to just see if I could write one that would be fun to play that felt very much like the original. Joplin would never recognize it as himself, I'm sure.<sup>110</sup>

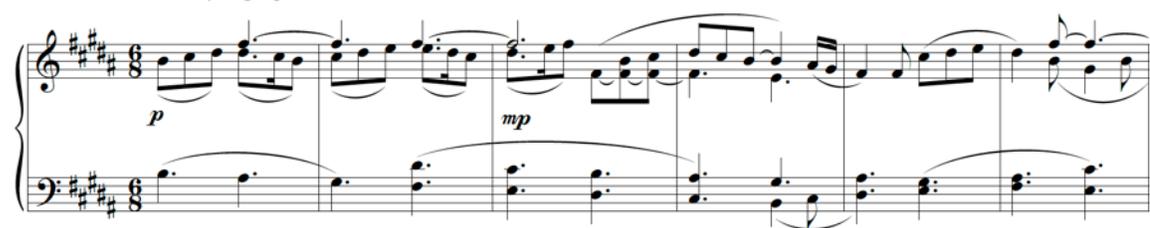
Sources: Manuscript – 2008, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

#### 4. Free Ranging, a Tribute to Jill Wheeler and Curtis Garry

Example 4.2.4 “Free Ranging,” mm. 1-6

Easily Loping ♩ = 60 Scott Wheeler



Date: August 1983, Boston, MA

Dedicatees: Jill Wheeler and Curtis Garry. Mrs. Wheeler is the composer's sister. The piece was written on the occasion of the dedicatees' wedding in New Mexico.

It's loosely based on Virgil Thomson's portrait of me, which is called "Free Wheeling." Since Jill was out west, I had a sense that it was fitting in with "Home on the Range." She was in Arizona, living in New Mexico; when we went out there, there were cowboy hats and deserts and horses, very different from what I knew in Boston. She was getting married out there, so I just thought that since Virgil's portrait of me was in 6/8, I just let it shift into "Home on the Range" for Jill. The combination of the two pieces were made through meters.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, November 22, 2021.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

Sources: Manuscript – 2015, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

### 5. Pseudo-Rag, a Tribute to Gunther Schuller

Example 4.2.5 “Pseudo-Rag,” mm. 1-7

Moderato ♩ = 84

Scott Wheeler

*misterioso - secco*  
*mf*  
*p*  
*sf*  
*p*  
*sf*  
*secco*  
*p*

(1) (9) (2) (5) (1) (9) (8) (5)

*dolce*  
(G.S.)

*loco*

Date: November 1985, Boston, MA

Dedicatee: Gunther Schuller (1925-2015). American composer, conductor, horn player, author, historian educator, publisher, and jazz musician.

He was president of New England Conservatory when I was a student there. I would see him at concerts... My first CD, he produced; he was in the studio with me while the players were working, and he was coaching them through what takes they would take next. He was absolutely on top of it, following the score with me while doing that. My first orchestral performance, he conducted with the Pro Arte Orchestra... He had many, many musicians he was far closer to than me; he was my teacher at the Wellesley Composers Conference in 1985. So, he was a constant presence, but he was everywhere at that time; he was on every committee. I'm sure he got me my Guggenheim and my Koussevitzky in the '80s because he liked my music. He was interested in me when I was in my 30s. He picked up on me and he said, 'this is a good one' and got me some big prizes... So, we were pretty close.<sup>112</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2008, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

<sup>112</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, November 22, 2021.

6. Dancing, a Portrait of Michael Ricca

Example 4.2.6 “Dancing,” mm. 1-3

Dancing ♩ = 112

The musical score for 'Dancing' is written for piano in 4/4 time. It begins with a tempo marking of ♩ = 112. The first measure (m. 1) features a forte (*f*) dynamic in the right hand, with a series of eighth notes and a quarter note. The second measure (m. 2) is marked *calm* and *p* (piano), with a half note in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. The third measure (m. 3) is marked *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *nonchalant*, with a half note in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Date: April 1986, Somerville, MA

Subject: Michael Ricca. Student at Emerson College, MA.

The portrait was one of my earliest attempts, and while it has aspects of my musical “handwriting,” I have never been satisfied with the piece, so I consider it a misfire. It’s in the catalogue but I didn’t choose to record it with Donald Berman.<sup>113</sup> He signed up to do it (the portrait was for an auction event at Emerson College). It was one of those auction things of some sort and he probably bought it. So, I went ahead and did it; but for whatever reason, it was a misfire. I never liked it; whatever came out didn’t quite work for me. It was my music, but it wasn’t jelling into a piece. Honestly, I didn’t have a very close relationship with him; I didn’t feel like I was getting much from him in the sitting... This was somebody who probably did not feel like he could share who he was with me.<sup>114</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2008, Scott Wheeler Music

7. F & S Rag, a Tribute to Fits and Starts, *clown show* by Sophie Parker and Steve

Seidel

Example 4.2.7 “F & S Rag,” mm. 1-6

Scott Wheeler

Cheerful ♩ = 144

The musical score for 'F & S Rag' is written for piano in 12/8 time. It begins with a tempo marking of ♩ = 144. The score is marked *mp* (mezzo-piano). The first measure (m. 1) features a half note in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. The second measure (m. 2) features a half note in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. The third measure (m. 3) features a half note in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. The fourth measure (m. 4) features a half note in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. The fifth measure (m. 5) features a half note in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. The sixth measure (m. 6) features a half note in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

<sup>113</sup> Scott Wheeler, email exchange with the author, June 23, 2021.

<sup>114</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 6, 2021.

Date: August 23, 1986, Somerville, MA

Dedicatee: Fits and Starts, the clowns by Sophie Parker and Steve Seidel.

It's the arrangement of incidental music for a clown show... This was a clown show and they commissioned me to write a little tune for them that was sort of like their theme for the clowns coming in. I have worked in theater all my life; so, in this case, the clarinet player who was also a player in my chamber music group Dinosaur Annex asked me to help out with the show. So, ... I wrote this little tune, which they loved. I loved the tune and I decided to make it into a little piano piece (paying tribute to the clowns in the show).<sup>115</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 1986, Scott Wheeler Music

#### 8. Pastorale, a Portrait of Sara Davies

Example 4.2.8 “Pastorale,” mm. 1-4

Moderate - flowing  
♩ = 72

1

*mf*

The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of 'Pastorale'. The score is written for piano and features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The tempo is marked 'Moderate - flowing' with a quarter note equal to 72 beats per minute. The dynamics are marked 'mf'. The score is in 2/2 time and consists of four measures, each with a different time signature: 2/2, 3/2, 2/2, and 3/2. The melody is characterized by a steady eighth-note pattern with a descending line, and the bass line consists of a simple eighth-note accompaniment.

Date: September 7, 1991, Evansville, IN

Subject: Sara Davies.

This was another theater project of mine that brought me to Evansville in Indiana. I was commissioned to write a piece called “The Little Dragon” by a group of chamber music that did music for little children... One of their board members was Sara Davies, and as a way of thanking her, I had her sit for a portrait and I gave her this portrait, because she and her husband hosted me in their home in Evansville, Indiana. The title probably refers to the idea that I was out in the middle of America, ... Evansville was the mid-west but it's very close to the south... I think there's a feeling of being out in nature, in the countryside, in the field... there is a sense of peace and space. That was the kind of feeling I had, and this person was a very warm and hospitable host.<sup>116</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2008, Scott Wheeler Music

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<sup>115</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 6, 2021.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

9. Sketching, a Portrait of Shane Crabtree

Example 4.2.9 “Sketching,” mm. 1-4

Andantino  
♩. = 56

Scott Wheeler

1

*mp*



Figure 1 Shane Crabtree; courtesy of Ms. Crabtree

Date: June 1992, Andover/North Reading, MA

Subject: Shane Crabtree. Visual artist/painter.

I was aware that Shane was sketching. It was the feeling of the pencil on the paper that I felt like I was responding to in that opening music. It was a physical sensation that she was doing this, and I started feeling my fingers do it and that was what came up in that little passage (the opening of the piece).<sup>117</sup> “(I chose the name) just because she was sketching. I had the sense that there was the quality of the pencil.”<sup>118</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 1992, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

#### 10. Cookie Galop with Waltz, a Portrait of Elizabeth Cranstoun

Example 4.2.10 “Cookie Galop with Waltz,” mm. 1-4

Bright and Active (♩ = 144) *A Portrait of Elizabeth Cranstoun* Scott Wheeler

Date: January 1993, Middleton, WI

Subject: Elizabeth Cranstoun. A classmate of Wheeler’s daughter. The portrait was taken at the childcare that her mother ran at their family home.

The fact that the piece keeps on shifting characters and rhythm clearly has to do with the fact that she was all over the place... It was chaos because it was a kid place. Elizabeth was the only child there when I was doing the portrait... This portrait, like a few of them, was done for the school as I offered it as an auction item for a fundraiser. It was commissioned through the auction process for the school.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, November 11, 2021.

<sup>118</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 6, 2021.

<sup>119</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, November 11, 2021.

Sources: Manuscript – 2008, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

### 11. Alphabet Dance, a Tribute to Arthur Berger on his 80<sup>th</sup>

Example 4.2.11 “Alphabet Dance,” mm. 1-5

Allegro ♩ = 144  
*staccato sempre*

Scott Wheeler

1

*p*

Date: May 1992, North Reading, MA

Dedicatee: Arthur Berger (1912-2003). American composer/music critic/educator. Scott Wheeler studied with him at Brandeis.

Alphabet comes from alpha and beta; that’s why I was using the words (for the title)... I was conscious of his musical style. Arthur Berger knew Copland very well. He was an American neo-classicist... Arthur was my teacher and I got that from him, and I adored that music and I have listened to it so many times. I think he’s just wonderful. So, I was, in a way, using that to imitate his style... He was very proud of the fact that somebody referred to him as “diatonic Webern”... He was a good friend, one of my senior teachers that I was very close to.<sup>120</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2008, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

### 12. Flow Chart, a Tribute to Donald Berman

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<sup>120</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 6, 2021.

Example 4.2.12 “Flow Chart,” mm. 1-4

I. Smoothly gliding forward (♩=76-84)  
*semplice*

1

*p*

*mp*

Date: February 1993, North Reading, MA

Dedicatee: Donald Berman. Pianist. He was the pianist who recorded the album “Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes” in 2016.

The piece is clearly made up of repeating chunks... of little elements that are like Lego blocks that go in different places and then you come back to this other block and flip it... He (Donald Berman) is a great player and a great friend; and I just wrote a piece that I felt like hearing... The repetitive features of it relates both to minimalism - looking for the way that I was interested in minimalism, and jazz.<sup>121</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 1993, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

13. Dad with Kids, a Portrait of Charles Hoffman

Example 4.2.13 “Dad with Kids,” mm. 1-3

Moderate ♩ = 96

*p*

Date: 1994, Wenham, MA

<sup>121</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 6, 2021.

Subject: Charles Hoffman. Educator and research scientist. Currently he works at Boston College as professor of Biology. As a scientist, he is “involved in both basic research of signal transduction pathways in yeast and applied research identifying compounds that have a particular effect on potential drug targets as an early step in drug development.”<sup>122</sup>

This was another auction piece. This was another one that I wasn’t crazy about. He was a very sweet dad and a lovely, lovely guy. I don’t remember much about it, I’m afraid.<sup>123</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2008, Scott Wheeler Music



**Figure 2 Charles Hoffman; courtesy of Dr. Charles Hoffman**

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<sup>122</sup> Charles Hoffman, interview with the author, August 11, 2021.

<sup>123</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 6, 2021.

#### 14. Firefly Lullaby, a Tribute to Alexa Rose

Example 4.2.14 “Firefly Lullaby,” mm. 1-4

Scott Wheeler

Pedal throughout

Date: March 1996, North Reading, MA

Dedicatee: Alexa Rose Wheeler.

This piece was written for my brother’s daughter when she was born... Many years later, we had a performance of it at Bard (college) and she came to Brooklyn. She heard the piece when she was a young woman. She liked it; we had a good time. I love that piece. The quality of firefly is a blinking, irregular pattern.<sup>124</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2009, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

#### 15. Birthday Card for Tony, a Tribute to Anthony Tommasini

Example 4.2.15 “Birthday Card for Tony,” mm. 1-5

Scott Wheeler

Ped.

Date: April 13, 1998, North Reading, MA.

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<sup>124</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 6, 2021.

Dedicatee: Anthony Tommasini. Musician/critic for *The New York Times*. He was a piano student of Virgil Thomson and a close friend to the two composers.

He and I met when we were both hired to teach at Emerson College in 1978, where we comprised the two-person music department for the next seven years. I introduced Tony to Virgil Thomson, which led to Tony's two books on Thomson. Virgil's portrait of Tony formed the basis of my 50th birthday present to Tony.<sup>125</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2008, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

#### 16. Midnight Bells, a Tribute to Jon Garelick and Clea Simon

Example 4.2.16 “Midnight Bells,” mm. 1-5

The musical score for "Midnight Bells" (mm. 1-5) is presented in a standard piano score format. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for the right hand and a bass clef staff for the left hand. The time signature is 5/8. The tempo is marked "Steady" with a quarter note equal to 112. The dynamics are indicated as *pp* (pianissimo) in the first measure, *p* (piano) in the second, *mf* (mezzo-forte) in the third, *sf* (sforzando) in the fourth, and *p* (piano) in the fifth. The piece is dedicated to Jon Garelick and Clea Simon, as indicated by the initials "(J. G. - C. S.)" at the bottom of the score.

Date: May 1998, North Reading, MA.

Dedicatees: Jon Garelick and Clea Simon. The piece was written on the occasion of the dedicatees' wedding in Boston.

They are both writers. I have known Jon since the 80's; and I met Clea when they got involved and then married. Jon and I have gone to jazz show together because he's a jazz critic. That's why I quoted Thelonious Monk... The piece is basically a version of "Round Midnight" that ends in bells because it was for their wedding.<sup>126</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2008, Scott Wheeler Music

<sup>125</sup> Scott Wheeler, email exchange with the author, January 1, 2022.

<sup>126</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 6, 2021.

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

17. Shimmer, a Portrait of Peter Stringham

Example 4.2.17 “Shimmer,” mm. 1-7

1

Calm ♩ = 88-92

*p*

Più Mosso ♩ = 104

*mf*



Figure 3 Peter Stringham; courtesy of Dr. Stringham

Date: June 18, 1998, NY.

Subject: Peter Stringham. Doctor and educator. He worked for 34 years at the East Boston Neighborhood Health Center in the pediatrics and adolescent departments, where he had helped about 2,000 patients and taught many medical students, residents, nurse practitioner students and dental students. He met Wheeler at church where he was a quilter for exhibits.

He's one of those people doing God's work, literally. I went to his office in Southeast Boston, a very poor neighborhood in Boston; and almost everything he's doing there is serving the poor, giving medical services in a clinic to people who cannot afford healthcare or anything else. He spent most of his career doing that. We met him in church where my wife was ordained. He's also a painter, and he gave my wife a painting of an abstract angel for her ordination. I think I might have been thinking of that when I used that title."<sup>127</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2008, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

#### 18. Epithalamion, a Tribute to Donald Berman and Meredith Moss

Example 4.2.18 “Epithalamion,” mm. 1-4

Allegro ♩ = 112  
(D. B. - M. M.)  
Scott Wheeler

*f* *p* *pp*  
*f* *mp*  
*And. sempre*

Date: 1998, Boston, MA

Dedicatees: Donald Berman and Meredith Moss. The piece was written on the occasion of the dedicatees' wedding.

<sup>127</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 6, 2021.

Don was a graduate student in piano at the New England Conservatory. I think the year was 1985, (when) I was looking for a pianist for my new music group Dinosaur Annex, and we were doing a very difficult program, ... He came in and he was amazing; he was so great that we brought him in and made him the pianist of the group, ... Since then he has become best known for his Ives' and he worked with the Ives' scholar at Yale. Don is now the President of The Charles Ives Society. He is a real scholar, and a very distinguished modern pianist. And he has been a close friend all these years; so, when he got married, I wrote him this tribute.<sup>128</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2008, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

### 19. To His Music, a Tribute to Malcolm Peyton

Example 4.2.19 “To His Music,” mm. 1-3

Scott Wheeler

Calm ♩ = 50

*p* *mf*

*And. sempre*

Date: 1999, North Reading, MA

Dedicatee: Malcolm Peyton. The piece was written on the occasion of the dedicatee's 35<sup>th</sup> year of teaching at the New England Conservatory.

Malcolm was my composition teacher at New England Conservatory for a year. He was a great man, and a very fascinating and deep musician. This piece is based on one of his Shakespeare songs, and I recorded those. I conducted a recording of those beautiful songs of his; and this (piece) quotes a particular one named “Orpheus with His Lute.” “To His Music” is a phrase from the poem from the Shakespeare; but since I was making a tribute

<sup>128</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, November 22, 2021.

to my composer mentor, I took those words for the title of the piece. The music is quite clearly based on this beautiful song.<sup>129</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2008, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

## 20. Study in Concord, a Portrait of Marianne Evett

Example 4.2.20 “Study in Concord,” mm. 1-4

Thoughtful ♩ = 100  
*delicate*  
*p*  
5  
3  
5  
3

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<sup>129</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, 2021.



**Figure 4 Marianne Evett; courtesy of Mr. Charles Evett**

Date: May 2000, Concord, MA

Subject: Marianne Evett.

This is a bit of a pun on the word “concord,” another word for “harmony” in the sense of people getting along, ... The pun is that Marianne was living in Concord, a town in MA, where I went to do this portrait in her home, ... Marianne was a very intelligent and sharp lady who had been a drama critic. I did not know her as a drama critic, however; I knew her from our church. There was a bit of a lullaby at the end the piece, because she was for some reasons very concerned of the health of this grandchild at that time.<sup>130</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2000, Scott Wheeler Music

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<sup>130</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 6, 2021.

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

## 21. Cliff Walk, a Tribute to Courtney Kenny

Example 4.2.21 “Cliff Walk,” mm. 1-4

Moderate  $\text{♩} = 120$  - Swing eighths throughout

Musical score for "Cliff Walk" in 4/4 time. The piece is in a key with two flats (B-flat major or D minor). The tempo is moderate at 120 beats per minute with a swing feel for eighth notes. The score shows the first four measures. The right hand starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic, playing chords and moving to a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic in the second measure. The left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. There are triplets in both hands in the second and fourth measures.

Date: 2006, North Reading, MA

Dedicatee: Courtney Kenny. Musician/pianist. The piece was commissioned by Mr. Kenny for his recital at the Purcell Room, London in May 2006.

Sources: Manuscript – 2006, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

## 22. The Fifth of July, a Portrait of Dr. Stephen Krane

Example 4.2.22 “The Fifth of July,” mm. 1-4

Moderate  $\text{♩} = 60$   
*poco misterioso* Poco Accel.

Musical score for "The Fifth of July" in 2/4 time. The piece is in a key with one sharp (F# major or D minor). The tempo is moderate at 60 beats per minute with a "poco misterioso" character. The score shows the first four measures. The right hand plays chords, and the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment with triplets. The piece concludes with a "Poco Accel." marking.

Date: July 2007, Newton/North Reading, MA

Subject: Dr. Stephen Krane (1927-2015). A distinguished physician and scientist who worked at the Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School.

This was an auction piece. This is a rare case where I met the subject at the sitting; I had never met him before. We had a cup of coffee in his kitchen or something; and I found out that like me, he loved jazz. So, there was a feeling of jazz, something softer than ragtime, that comes in alternate phrases (in the piece) in a kind of relaxed jazz timbre. The title is simply the date of the sitting.<sup>131</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2007, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

### 23. Morningside, a Portrait of Monica Jakuc Leverett

Example 4.2.23 “Morningside,” mm. 1-2

*Allegro moderato* ♩ = 72

The musical score is written in 3/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic, playing a melodic line with a five-fingered chord (5) and a piano (*p*) dynamic. The left hand (bass clef) plays a triplet pattern (3) in the bass. The tempo is marked *Allegro moderato* with a quarter note equal to 72 beats per minute.

<sup>131</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 6, 2021.



Figure 5 Monica Jakuc Leverett; courtesy of Ms. Jakuc Leverett

Date: August 2007, Florence/North Reading, MA

Subject: Monica Jakuc Leverett. Elsie Irwin Sweeney Professor Emerita of Music at Smith College, where she taught from 1969 to 2008. Scott Wheeler studied piano with her at Smith College during his undergraduate years at Amherst College from 1969 to 1973. This piece was commissioned by Smith College Music Department for Ms. Jakuc Leverett's retirement and was premiered by the subject at her recital in February 2008 on her own five and a half octave Walter-style fortepiano.

Monica was a free spirit, crazy lady, very beautiful, very glamorous. We talked and talked and talked. We played but she was very kind and put me at the end of her day and week so that we would continue to talk, and we would go get a coffee before and go grab a bite afterward. And we just kept on talking and talking through all my time; and we got to be very good friends as well as student-mentor [...] I think of her as a glamorous,

dramatic, and yet warm and unpretentious somehow. She is not a diva in any way but there is a lot of theatrical presence of her.”<sup>132</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2007, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

#### 24. Cowley Meditation, a Portrait of James Woodman

Example 4.2.24 “Cowley Meditation,” mm. 1-8

Calm ♩ = 108



Date: August 11, 2009, Cambridge, MA

Subject: James Woodman. Monastery organist/composer.

James as you know is a pianist and composer; he also plays organ, ... When I did his portrait, I thought of meditation, ... I think he’s quite a good composer, especially choral music; he writes beautiful choral pieces. He’s a thoughtful, well-educated gay man living in Harvard Square.<sup>133</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2009, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

#### 25. Stone South, a Portrait of Susan Unterberg

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<sup>132</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, November 22, 2021.

<sup>133</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 13, 2021.

Example 4.2.25 "Stone South," mm. 1-5  
Moderate ♩ = 112

*p* *mf* *p* *mp* *mf*

*pp*  
*con ped sempre*



Figure 6 Susan Unterberg; photo by Alain Simic; courtesy of Ms. Unterberg

Date: July 18, 2009, Yaddo, NY

Subject: Susan Unterberg. American contemporary photographer and philanthropist.

She was somebody I became friendly with at Yaddo. So, when you become friendly with people at one of these residencies, sometimes you visit their studios and find out about their works. Her studio was called “Stone South,” and that’s why I gave it that title. She took photographs of me during that residency that we both had at Yaddo. I later visited her studio in Manhattan, which was part of her home, ... We are very friendly, but we don’t know each other all that well. She is a private and pulled together with a wild and somewhat violent imagination in her art.<sup>134</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2009, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

### 26. Island Lullaby, a Tribute to Haicha Wu

Example 4.2.26 “Island Lullaby,” mm. 1-5

Gently rocking ♩ = 72



Date: North Reading, MA.

Dedicatee: Haicha Wu, granddaughter to Shalin Liu. The piece was written on Haicha’s birth.

Shalin Liu is a friend who has commissioned a couple of big pieces from me. She lives here in Cambridge; and she is best known for the Shalin Liu Performance Center - a beautiful concert hall in Rockport, MA, which she basically funded, ... She also has a nature conservancy near Boston, the Shalin Liu Nature Center, which takes care of injured animals, ... So, when her granddaughter was born, I sent her that lullaby. The title has two meanings: the granddaughter lives on Long Island; and Shalin is from Taiwan, her island home.<sup>135</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2008, Scott Wheeler Music

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<sup>134</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 13, 2021.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

27. Arietta, a Portrait of Nancy Armstrong

Example 4.2.27 “Arietta,” mm. 1-5  
Andante cantabile  $\text{♩} = 60$

Musical score for the piece "Arietta" in 3/2 time, measures 1-5. The score is written for piano. The right hand (treble clef) begins with a whole rest in measure 1, followed by a melodic line starting in measure 2. The left hand (bass clef) plays a steady accompaniment of chords. Dynamics include piano (p) and mezzo-forte (mf). Pedal markings (ped.) are present under the first and third measures. The tempo is marked "Andante cantabile" with a quarter note equal to 60 beats per minute.



Figure 7 Nancy Armstrong; courtesy of Susan Wilson

Date: June 25, 2012, North Reading, MA

Subject: Nancy Armstrong. Soprano. She has been Artist in Residence for the Brandeis University Theatre Arts Graduate Program.

Nancy is a dear friend of mine; she has sung my music and was well known for singing Purcell and Handel and a lot of Baroque music over the years. She is a wonderful soprano and a great family friend. Nancy came over to the house where I am right now and sat in the living room, and a melody started happening out of all that, and I said, well, I guess this is a little aria for her.<sup>136</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2012, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

## 28. Bleecker Study, a Portrait of Fern Lopez

Example 4.2.28 “Bleecker Study,” mm. 1-4

Quietly intense ♩ = 80

*p* *sfz* *p*

Date: July 18, 2012, Bleecker St., NY

Subject: Fern Lopez. Director/writer.

What I remember most about the writing of this piece is that we went down into his basement, the lowest level in a three-story apartment on Bleecker Street where Fern lived. Downstairs is his study. He was editing a film; so, this is a very rare case where somebody else was literally listening to music while I was writing music. He had headphones on; and he was focusing on a video monitor that I couldn't see. He was sitting at his computer at his desk while I did the portrait. He then took photographs of me on that same visit in his apartment, and one of those photos was the cover for Don Berman's Bridge CD, ... He is a totally brilliant guy, one of the most brilliant people I've ever met in anything.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 13, 2021.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

Sources: Manuscript – 2012, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

### 29. By the Sea, a Tribute to Stephen Sondheim

Example 4.2.29 “By the Sea,” mm. 1-5

Cool and Breezy ♩ = 96

The musical score for "By the Sea" is presented in a grand staff format. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 3/4. The piece begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The right hand melody starts with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. The left hand accompaniment consists of quarter notes G2, A2, and B2. The piece concludes with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic marking and a fermata over the final notes.

Date: Summer 2013, North Reading, MA

Subject: Stephen Sondheim (1930-2021). The piece was written as a tribute to Mr.

Sondheim on the occasion of his Edward MacDowell Medal in summer, 2013.

He's possibly the greatest musical theater composer and lyricist of all time. This (piece) was from his musical, really kind of an opera, called "Sweeney Todd." I sent him a recording of a show of his that I conducted at Emerson College, "Merrily We Roll Along." I think we did the first production after its Broadway flop. It was a famous flop; he had a terrible time with it on Broadway, and it closed very quickly. I saw it on Broadway, and I loved it. And I got us to do it at Emerson. Then I sent him a tape of the recording, ... He was very grateful that I did that; he wrote me a beautiful note; and I sent him some of my music. Over the years, we corresponded and eventually we met a few times, ... He gave me DVDs of productions that were not released, and songs before they were even published.<sup>138</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2013, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

### 30. Portrait of Steve, a Tribute to Stephen Malawista

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<sup>138</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 13, 2021.

Example 4.2.30 “Portrait of Steve,” mm. 1-3

Scott Wheeler

Elegantly gliding ♩ = 58

*mf*

Con ped

Date: October 2013, North Reading, MA

Dedicatee: Dr. Stephen E. Malawista (1934-2013). An important figure in the American medical field. He was an American medical researcher and Professor at Yale School of Medicine for over 50 years, and co-discover of Lyme disease.

He was also an amateur singer, ... One of the old songs that he liked to sing was called “Me and My Shadow” so I wrote this piece as a version of the old tune, ... It really is just an arrangement of a pop tune.<sup>139</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2013, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

31. Life Study, a Portrait of Megan Marshall

Example 4.2.31 “Life Study,” mm. 1-4

Pensive ♩ = 112

<sup>139</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 13, 2021.



**Figure 8 Megan Marshall; courtesy of Gail Samuelson**

Date: June 18, 2014, North Reading, MA

Subject: Megan Marshall. American scholar, writer, and biographer. She was a finalist for the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for Biography or Autobiography.

The title has multiple meanings. Megan is a biographer; she won prizes as a biographer. What she does is study life; but she also worked as a poet with Robert Lowell at Harvard, and his most famous book was called “Life Study.” And a life study in art school is when you draw in the presence of a model, which was exactly what I was doing musically. So, she’s a fascinating and close friend. It was commissioned by her partner as a present for her sixtieth birthday. When we did a birthday party for her with some friends, they gave

her a cake with the beginning notes (of the portrait) decorated on the cake; and I played it for her friends at the party.<sup>140</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2014, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

### 32. Skyline, a Portrait of Jill Steinberg

Example 4.2.32 “Skyline,” mm. 1-4

Calmly gliding forward ♩ = 92

*pp* *mp* *pp* RH

Ped. \*

Date: August 9, 2016, NY

Subject: Jill Steinberg. Multimedia/live performance photographer.

The title refers to NYC as seen from her apartment as I wrote the portrait, because it was the sixty-eighth floor where she lives above Columbus Circle. I had a particular idea in mind because she was a photographer who photographed, in particular, a lot of musicians. So, we were developing and still haven't put on a program of the musicians who have been working with Jill and her photos of them. You will see some photos of me by Jill, ... She hosted a party for my ballet where we did excerpts of the ballet and taught the choreography and I talked about it to a bunch of people while we were trying to raise money and get interest in our new ballet project, ... Jill is loved by everyone; she is the most positive and generous spirit in the music world.<sup>141</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2016, Scott Wheeler Music

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<sup>140</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 13, 2021.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).



Figure 9 Jill Steinberg; courtesy of Ms. Steinberg





**Figure 10 Christen Frothingham; courtesy of Mrs. Frothingham**

Sources: Manuscript – 2016, Scott Wheeler Music

Recording: Scott Wheeler: Portraits and Tributes (Bridge Records, Inc.: New York, 2016).

34. Park View, a Portrait of Barbara Senchak

Example 4.2.34 “Park View,” mm. 1-4

Gently rocking ♩ = 84

The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of 'Park View'. The score is written for piano in 3/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with a slur over the first two measures, followed by a series of chords and a final chord with a fermata. The left hand (bass clef) has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Dynamics include *mp* and *p*. A 'Con ped' instruction is at the bottom. A '8va' marking is above the right hand in the second measure.

Date: June 7, 2017, Central Park West, NYC

Subject: Barbara Senchak.

I met her as a vibrant hostess during a party in Florida, a party for MacDowell, which she and her husband are in the board of. They were trying to raise money, of course, because that is what the boards do. And we got to be friendly. There was some music at the party that she was not happy with, and I wasn't either, and she asked me "what would you do?" So, I said, "I would do portraits, because they are short, and they have to do with specific people." So, I offered (to do a portrait of her); and one time when I was in New York, I went to their beautiful apartment in Center Park West. She found the experience quite remarkable. She said, "Oh my God. Oh my God. He's writing music! What is he hearing?" Some weeks later, she came up to Boston, ... I played the piece for her; and she was in tears. She said, "how did you know this about me? How did you know?"<sup>143</sup>

<sup>143</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 13, 2021.



Figure 21 Barbara Senchak; courtesy by Ms. Senchak

Sources: Manuscript – 2017, Scott Wheeler Music

### 35. Quiet Sunday, a Portrait of Plácido Domingo

Example 4.2.35 “Quiet Sunday,” mm. 1-5

Calm, floating ♩ = 76

A musical score for piano, consisting of five measures. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The music is marked *mp* (mezzo-piano). The right hand features a melody of quarter notes and half notes, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with dotted half notes and quarter notes. The overall mood is calm and floating.

Date: May 11, 2017, NY

Subject: Plácido Domingo. Famous Spanish opera singer, conductor, and arts administrator.

The title was a joke on the name. “Plácido” means quiet; “Domingo” means Sunday; so, his name means “quiet Sunday.” He commissioned my second opera. He is one of the greatest opera singers of all time, one of the super stars of music, except that he was accused of sexual harassment by multiple women, ... He was running the Washington National Opera Company; it was set up by his PR person, who saw workshops of my opera “Democracy” back in 1999-2000, ... He was in rehearsals with me, was involved with it and made sure that the opera happened, ... We stayed in touch; I sketched this portrait literally backstage in the dressing room of the Metropolitan Opera. The experience was crazy because he doesn’t actually stop to sit for the portrait. I was only able to do a little bit and I had to finish it at home. It’s a little bit of a fake to me; it wasn’t done right, but it was the only way to do his portrait, because he was a super star (and too busy).<sup>144</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2017, Scott Wheeler Music

### 36. Anima, a Portrait of Susan Napier

Example 4.2.36 “Anima,” mm. 1-4

Still ♩ = 100

Date: February 12, 2018, Cambridge, MA

Subject: Susan Napier. Professor of Japanese Program at Tufts University.

Susan is a scholar, and her topic is *anime* – Japanese cartoon. Her husband is a portrait artist; and he commissioned me to do her portrait for her birthday. So, I went to her study, and she was reading in her apartment in Harvard Square in Cambridge, ... I think the music is about her soul, ... I premiered her portrait at a book launch at her home, ... Susan and her husband, Stephen, are people who live in the middle of one of the greatest intellectual centers of the country; and they connect with them.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 21, 2021.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

Sources: Manuscript – 2018, Scott Wheeler Music

### 37. Oracle, a Portrait of Kathleen Ludwig

Example 4.2.37 “Oracle,” mm. 1-4

Contemplative ♩ = 84

*mf* *p* *mf*

Ped. \* Ped. \*

Date: July 10, 2018, Peterborough, New Hampshire

Subject: Kathleen Ludwig.

Kathleen was somebody who bought the portrait at a MacDowell auction. As it happened, I was at MacDowell that summer; and she and her husband, Edward, drove up to MacDowell from their place. She sat for me in my MacDowell studio. The studio is called Chapman studio at MacDowell, which has a building that used to be an outdoor bathroom. It was called “Oracle,” where people put in little pieces of paper asking questions, ... and they got the answer from the “oracle.” So, I decided to call Kathy’s portrait “Oracle.” And people apparently called her “Oracle” (as a nickname) because she understands and guesses things, and they laughed when they saw it was the name of her portrait.<sup>146</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2018, Scott Wheeler Music

### 38. Palette, a Portrait of Stephen Coit

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<sup>146</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 21, 2021.

Example 4.2.38 "Palette," mm. 1-4

Steady ♩ = 92

The musical score for Example 4.2.38 "Palette," mm. 1-4, is written in bass clef. It begins in 3/4 time and changes to 4/4 time in the fourth measure. The tempo is steady at 92 beats per minute. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mp*, *p*, *mf*, *p*, *sfz*, and *p sfz*, along with articulation like slurs and accents. The right hand part features a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the left hand part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with triplets and slurs.

Date: April 3, 2018, Somerville, MA



Figure 32 Stephen Coit; courtesy by Mr. Coit

Subject: Stephen Coit.

He is a painter, and I did the portrait at his painting studio. He was working on a portrait of his wife Susan Napier. I went down to his studio to do his portrait. I premiered his portrait at his birthday party.<sup>147</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2018, Scott Wheeler Music

### 39. To a Wild Rose, a Portrait of Cheryl Young

Example 4.2.39 “To a Wild Rose,” mm. 1-3

Gliding forward ♩ = 84



Figure 43 Cheryl Young; photo by Joanna Eldredge Morrissey; courtesy by Ms. Young

Date: April 24, 2018, MacDowell Colony, NYC

Subject: Cheryl Young.

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<sup>147</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 21, 2021.

Cheryl was the executive director of MacDowell for many years. I did this portrait in her office in Manhattan where she just sat at her computer, working. It was presented at the MacDowell gala in May of that year. Cheryl is a beautiful blond woman; and “To a Wild Rose” of course is the name of the most famous piano piece by Edward MacDowell. It’s also a good name for her portrait, because she is a sort of an American beauty rose of a person. She is a very charming person, and she has done a lot for MacDowell for many years. She is a person of some power, a powerful and beautiful woman, one of the most impressive people around.<sup>148</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2018, Scott Wheeler Music

#### 40. Tracing Shadows, a Portrait of Edward Ludwig

Example 4.2.40 “Tracing Shadows,” mm. 1-4

Andante ♩ = 78



Figure 54 Edward Ludwig; courtesy by Mr. Ludwig

<sup>148</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 21, 2021.

Date: March 19, 2019, North Reading, MA

Subject: Edward Ludwig. The piece was commissioned by Edward's wife, Kathleen Ludwig, for his birthday.

Ed has a habit of making photographs of himself but all you see is his shadow. So, different kinds of light, and there is always a shadow of him. He's taking the photograph, but he is not taking a selfie; it's a picture of the ground, ... Ed is a mostly retired executive of a big pharmaceutical company [...] He and his wife are wonderful friends and lovely people. Ed's portrait was done in my study; and I played it for him in their apartment in Manhattan on his birthday and then we all went out to dinner with the Senchaks, who are friends with them.<sup>149</sup>

Sources: Manuscript – 2019, Scott Wheeler Music

#### 41. Gallery View, a Portrait of Millie Fisher

Example 4.2.41 "Gallery View," mm. 1-4

Quietly gliding forward ♩ = 120



Date: December 3, 2020, North Reading, MA – Marlton, NJ, done via Zoom.

Subject: Millie Fisher.

This piece was for a MacDowell auction. I have never met Millie in person. Some friends of her commissioned me for a portrait for one of their mothers. We met on Zoom; and I did the portrait over Zoom, ... The experience of sketching through Zoom is like doing anything else through Zoom; it's better than nothing but it's not the real thing, ... I don't hate Zoom, but I do get tired of it, in the way that I don't get tired of people when I see them in person, ... The title sounds like you are in an art gallery, which is very reasonable thing for one of my portraits; but the joke is that this one is actually, literally gallery

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<sup>149</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, December 21, 2021.



## CONCLUSION

Scott Wheeler once said that big performing venues are unfortunately still quite hesitant to feature works by living composers due to the uncertainty of ticket sales.<sup>151</sup> The public tends to favor what it already knows, especially when money is involved. People tend to dislike things when they do not understand them, and new music is no exception. This is a common tendency with no one to blame but the lack of formal studies and introduction of living composers to the public. For new music to be featured more often, there must be more demand for it to be heard; and an understanding of new music is the first step to trigger more interest from the public.

For this purpose, this dissertation hopes to attract more attention from music lovers and awareness among piano performers of Scott Wheeler's piano compositions by highlighting the composer's sophisticated technique of using musical elements to capture the essence of human subjects. In general, most of his piano works are relatively neotonal, alternating areas with clear tonal centers with those that are tonally ambiguous. The common color in all his compositions is dissonance, created by constant use of dissonant intervals combined with sustained pedal. Wheeler uses conventional chords, such as major and minor triads and dominant sevenths, in a non-functional manner with no attempt to resolve the musical conflicts but instead to create various colors. His

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<sup>151</sup> Scott Wheeler, interview with the author, November 22, 2021.

melody is rarely singable, appearing in short figures as decorative details on top of dissonant harmony. His rhythm is complex and challenging with highly syncopated rhythmic patterns, emphasis on weak beats and upbeats, and alternation of rests and tied notes. Frequent shifting meter is a common occurrence, as well as a sense of polyrhythm that is the result of simultaneous use of different note groupings, including odd groupings such as quintuplets and septuplets. Wheeler favors the use of tripartite formal structure, writing his piano pieces either in ternary or through-composed form.

Based on the number of musical portraits and tributes written up to date, Wheeler's piano compositions can be discussed in three distinctive periods. Nineteen pieces before 2000 include only six portraits, among which "Cookie Galop with Waltz" is the highlighted composition. This portrait of seven-year-old Elizabeth Cranstoun consists of the finest features of Wheeler's piano works that will develop as the composer's piano writing skills mature, such as the development of short motives, rhythmic patterns to portray physical activities, and distinctive characters in different sections. The six portraits of this period share an ambiguity in formal structure, relatively similar characters, and lack of dramatic elements.

The musical tributes of the first period, on the other hand, include the finest piano compositions by Wheeler. Among these works, "Birthday Card for Tony," "Midnight Bells," and "Epithalamion" represent works that are based on a musical germ described by the composer in the introduction. "Calamity Rag," "F & S Rag," and "Cliff Walk" are the composer's only attempt in writing ragtime pieces. And "Green Geese" is his only attempt to experiment with a different form besides ternary and through-composed form.

These tributes reflect Wheeler's refined piano compositional skills and his most used musical elements such as short melodic figures, highly syncopated rhythmic patterns, frequent meter change, and developing motives from small cells.

The second period include works written between 2000 and 2013. During this period, Wheeler started to compose more portraits with seven pieces in this genre, and only four tributes. The portraits of this period reflect a different approach in the composer's sketching procedure, with more compositions written in through-composed form with highly distinctive characters in sections. "Study in Concord," "Morningside," "Stone South," and "Bleecker Study" are through-composed pieces with very distinctive characters and intense sections. "Arietta" is the only portrait from this period that is in ternary form. Many compositions from this period also have more sections and are significantly more dramatic as Wheeler might have experimented with musical elements to achieve a wider range of effects, such as more ostinatos, pedal points, unison passages, and more use of block chords not seen in the other two periods.

The most recent works include eleven portraits and only one tribute written from 2014, which mark the last and ongoing period in Wheeler's piano writing career. The majority of these portraits follow a similar character progress, starting with a highly improvisatory opening section with short melodic figures against an accompaniment of sustained note figures. The middle sections in these works include steadier rhythmic patterns to establish a clear sense of time, and longer melodic figures. In a few works such as "Skyline," "Quiet Sunday," and "Oracle," the steady beats in the middle section are built on ostinatos. The last sections settle down in terms of energy, using more

sustained notes, ostinatos, and repeated figures to close the pieces, as seen in “Life Study,” “Sunset,” “Park View,” and “Gallery View.” All compositions of the third period have a tripartite formal structure.

Among these compositions, there are significant differences between the musical portraits and tributes. The portraits reflect a growth in the composer’s sketching skills as later pieces show a more unified progress of unveiling characters. Later portraits also include more contrasting sections and drama in comparison to the earlier ones. The formal structure of these later portraits, therefore, is more clearly defined. On the other hand, works in the tribute category maintain their common elements as well as adequate features throughout Wheeler’s career, such as efficient motivic development from small motivic cells, personal details, and well-defined sections. These compositions are also longer than the portraits, with the longest tribute being eleven minutes long (“Flow Chart”).

Last, this dissertation certainly has its limitations. Due to many complications with the legal aspect for a study that involves human subjects, I chose not to include many interviews with the living subjects of Scott Wheeler’s portraits; therefore, the sketching progress of these works described in Chapter Four relies solely on the composer’s memory. The subjective views of each individual described in these portraits regarding their thoughts of the music and their experiences with the sketching procedure remain unshared. Moreover, in the process of conducting this study, I was not aware of any living composers who write musical portraits using “disciplined spontaneity” other than Virgil Thomson and Scott Wheeler. Further studies into musical portraiture as a

genre using this sketching technique can explore and compare the different uses of musical elements to represent human subjects within works by various composers, from which generalize features that exclusively characterize music of this genre.

In conclusion, the piano music by Scott Wheeler is an important part of his compositional repertoire and deserves more attention from the public. The composer's fine skills in using musical elements to represent human subjects deserve more acknowledgment and appreciation from the academia. By adapting the existing musical elements such as ternary form, ostinato, and ragtime bass, in works that belong to a relatively new genre as musical portraits, Scott Wheeler has successfully connected the past and the present, giving ways to extend the piano repertoire in the future. His piano music serves as a significant representation within the history of 21<sup>st</sup> century art music and is a gateway to explore the potential of musical portraiture as a genre for the piano repertoire and warrants further studies.

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## BIOGRAPHY

Linh Trinh An, previous known as Linh Trinh, born in Hanoi, Vietnam, is a current doctoral candidate in the DMA program concentrating in Piano Performance at George Mason University where she is privileged to be working with Dr. Linda Apple Monson. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Music from St. Mary's College of Maryland in 2015, where she worked with Brian Ganz. In 2017, Trinh earned her Master of Music degree in Piano Performance at George Mason University with an Achievement Award under the guidance of Dr. Linda Apple Monson. She has attended masterclasses with world-renowned pianists, including Peabody graduate Awadagin Pratt, and Leon Schelhase, a professor at Curtis Institute of Music.

During her time at George Mason University, she has been chosen to perform in many important occasions, including the Annual Grand Piano Celebrations, Arts by George! Series, the School of Music Honors Recital, as well as the OLLI Series in Fairfax and Reston. In 2018, she won first prize in the George Mason University Concerto Competition and was featured with the Mason Symphony Orchestra as soloist in the School of Music Scholarship Benefit Concert. Trinh is the recipient of the Friends of Music Ruth Jacksier Scholarship Award, CVPA Graduate Scholarship Award, Dr. Linda Apple Monson Music Endowment Award, and Dissertation Completion Grant. She also teaches Keyboard Skills as a Graduate Lecturer at the School of Music at George Mason University and is an active member of the Music Teacher National Association.

As an active pianist, Trinh has performed in various venues around the world. In the summer of 2014, she performed at the Young Artist's Recital of the Alba Music Festival in Alba, Italy, where she was also the pianist in the world premiere of Giacomo Platini's "Le notti di cristallo," a composition for symphonic orchestra, live electronics, and voice. In 2016 and 2017, Trinh premiered two works by composer Edward Knoeckel at George Mason University. Her other highlighted performances include a performance dedicated to the First Lady of Panama, Dr. Castillo de Varela, in summer 2018, and for the German-American Heritage Foundation's Annual Black Tie Gala at the Organization of American States in fall 2018.