EXAMPLES OF PROGRAM MUSIC IN PIANO LITERATURE;
STORM, OCEAN, DEVIL, GHOSTS

By

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EXAMPLES OF PROGRAM MUSIC IN PIANO LITERATURE; STORM, OCEAN, DEVIL, GHOSTS

A

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By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present background information on the author's graduate piano recital program, namely extended program notes on the music performed. It should be mentioned that, although not intended, the whole recital is, in a way or another, program music. It is divided in two parts: the first is about Storms and Water (with “The Tempest” by Beethoven and *Une barque sur l' océan* by Ravel), and the second about Spirits (with *Faust Waltz* by Liszt and the *Three Ghost Rags* by William Bolcom). *Alborada del gracioso* by Ravel falls somehow in between these two parts – a *gracioso* (jester) is a character, thus a spirit; an entertaining one.

In this paper, I will attempt to explain what inspired composers to add titles to their music – this extramusical aspect has always been very intriguing to me. In the case of Beethoven, the title was most probably given by someone else, therefore the “Tempest” is not intended to be programmatic. In the case of Liszt, the piece is a transcription of an opera, which can be considered a programmatic genre. Ravel's and Bolcom's compositions are undoubtedly program music, since the composers gave them descriptive titles and were inspired certainly by extramusical factors.

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Sincerely,

the author

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CHAPTER 1: THE STORM

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in 1770 in Bonn, Germany, and died in 1827 in Vienna, Austria. Detailed discussion on his life and music is not necessary. Few composers became so popular and well-known, even in circles outside classical music. Everyone can recognize the opening motif from the Symphony No. 5 and his “Ode to Joy.” Beethoven's work has inspired many.

His music can be generally divided into three periods. The first suggestion for this division came from an anonymous French author in 1818 (Botstein 2000, 3). Since then, numerous scholars have claimed their own suggestions. Whether his music falls in three or four periods, it is apparent that Beethoven's change of compositional style coincides with turning points in his life. His *32 Piano Sonatas* (from Op. 2 to Op. 111) span all of his periods and are a good example for examining his stylistic changes.[1] They are considered the “new testaments of keyboard music” (Matthews 1967, 5).

The *Piano Sonata no. 17 in D minor, Op. 31, No. 2, “Tempest”* was written between 1801 and 1802 (published 1803) and falls into Beethoven's second period. This period of the composer is characterized by experimentation with form (for example in the Sonatas Op. 27, Nos. 1 & 2, which are both titled “Sonata quasi una fantasia”) and new pedal techniques (for example in the *Piano Sonata Op. 27, No. 2 in C# minor 'Sonata quasi una fantasia' “Moonlight”,*

[1] Beethoven’s opus numbering refers to the order of publication and not completion. In his sonatas, only Op. 49 was composed earlier than published (Matthews 1967, 11).

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where he asks to hold the sustaining pedal for the whole first movement). The second period includes Symphonies No. 3 “Eroica”, No. 4, No. 5, and No. 6 “Pastoral”, as well as the “Razumovsky” string quartets and several sonatas, including the *Piano Sonata Op. 27, No. 2 in C# minor 'Sonata quasi una fantasia' “Moonlight”*, the *Piano Sonata Op. 53 in C major “Waldstein”*, and the *Piano Sonata Op. 57 in F minor “Appassionata”.*

Opus 31 (1802) consists of three piano sonatas: *Piano Sonata no. 16 in G major, Op. 31, No. 1*, the aforementioned *Piano Sonata no. 17 in D minor, Op. 31, No. 2, “Tempest”*, and *Piano Sonata no. 18 in E♭ major, Op. 31, No. 3*. The “Tempest” is the only one in minor key and is obviously much different than the other two.[2] No. 1 can be considered “comic”, No. 2 is the “tragic” one, and No. 3 is “lyric” (Rosen 2002,164). The second sonata is not organically a programmatic work: it is uncertain whether Beethoven gave a title to this work or not. Anton Schindler (1795 – 1864), his associate and early biographer, claimed that Beethoven, when asked about the Sonata, advised him to read William Shakespeare’s (1564 – 1616) play *Tempest* (Taub 2002, 195). This is however deeply questioned, as much information that Schindler provided for Beethoven was inaccurate. It is unlikely that Beethoven even read Shakespeare's play.[3]

[2] Rosen underlines that, although published separately, the sonatas were “clearly considered a set, but Beethoven must have considered it an advantage commercially to have them published separately.” (Rosen 2002, 164).

[3] “He cannot have read anything beyond the title” (Rosen 2002, 168).

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The Shakespearean *Tempest* is, in short, a story about Prospero, the displaced Duke of Milan, who wants to regain his throne. Prospero obtains magical powers after being banished from Italy and abandoned on an island with his daughter, Miranda. Prospero and Ariel, his servant and assistant, cause a tempest that sinks the ship of Prospero's enemies, who are cast away on the island. Among them are his brother Antonio, who stole the throne twelve years ago, and Alonso, King of Naples, with his son, Ferdinand. After some adventures on the island, Miranda and Ferdinand fall in love and Prospero gives forgiveness to his enemies and is restored to his dukedom. Finally, he delivers an epilogue to the audience, asking them to set him free by applauding.

It seems that there is little if no connection between the Sonata and the play. Nevertheless, the "Tempest" serves as a symbol in both works. In Shakespeare's play, it represents the suffering Prospero went through and his will to "inflict" it on his enemies. It also symbolizes the frightening powers of his magic ("SparkNotes on The Tempest" 2002). In Beethoven's Piano Sonata, the "Tempest" reflects the internal turmoil of the human soul and the suffering of the composer. Regarding the first movement, it is "undeniably tempestuous" (Jones 1999, 103).

Beethoven was in the middle of a crisis when writing this Sonata. His hearing problems had gotten worse and thoughts of suicide were existent. This is inferred from the famous *Heiligenstadt Testament* (1802), a letter written by

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Beethoven and addressed to his brothers. No one knew of this letter until its discovery after the composer's death. Beethoven wrote in the *Heiligenstadt Testament*:

> "Ah, how could I possibly admit an infirmity in the one sense which ought to be more perfect in me than others, a sense which I once possessed in the highest perfection, a perfection such as few in my profession enjoy or ever have enjoyed. - Oh I cannot do it; therefore forgive me when you see me draw back when I would have gladly mingled with you… Such incidents drove me almost to despair; a little more of that and I would have ended my life - it was only my art that held me back. Ah, it seemed to me impossible to leave the world until I had brought forth all that I felt was within me. So I endured this wretched existence…" (Beethoven 1802).

Although struggling with insurmountable health problems and suffering from the idea that he wouldn't be able to hear the music he composed, Beethoven decided to dedicate his whole to his art.

The "Tempest" successfully conveys the esoteric battles of the tormented soul and the heroism of surpassing life's obstacles. It consists of three movements: *I. Largo-Allegro, II. Adagio, III. Allegretto.* Beethoven showcased his virtuosity and the "new path" he had taken in composing with this Sonata.[4] As mentioned above, the "Tempest" is the tragic sonata of the three sonatas in Opus 31. According to Rosen, the opening is the most dramatic one Beethoven had yet written (Rosen 2002, 168), with sudden tempo and mood changes. However, Beethoven did the same thing already in *Piano Sonata Op. 13 in C*

[4] The composer realized he was on a turning point and "supposedly expressed dissatisfaction with his previous compositions" (Botstein et al. 2000, 10).

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minor "Pathetique", which belongs to the first period; the tempo indication is *Grave-Allegro di molto e con brio.* The theme in the "Tempest" consists of two motifs, one in *Largo* and one in *Allegro,* that form a question-and-answer section. The starting motif, an arpeggio on A major (the dominant chord in first inversion) will be heard again throughout the whole Sonata. (Figure 1.01).[5]

Figure 1.01 The first theme: question and answer.

The next theme is not a question or an answer, but a clear statement, or an argument between two characters *forte* and *piano* that functions as a bridge (Figure 1.02).

Figure 1.02 The bold statement in the first movement.

[5] The first 21 bars constitute the "fantasy-like" opening theme, but it is an unstable one, with ambiguous tonality and an unclear design, so much so that the following statement feels more like the main theme (Botstein et al. 2000, 80).

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Beethoven uses a novelty with the pedal in the recitativo of the first movement, where he asks the player to hold the sustaining pedal throughout the whole phrase, as he does in the "Moonlight" Sonata but for the whole first movement.[6] This creates a very atmospheric moment; the melody sounds distant, as if it were coming from far away, "a voice from the tomb" (Rosen 2002, 170), or as if it were a whisper or a memory. (Figure 1.03).

Figure 1.03 The recitativo section in the first movement.

The first movement concludes with a 10-bar coda in the lowest register of the piano, and has a fermata on the last chord.

The second movement, the *Adagio,* starts similarly to the first with an arpeggio in B♭ major and has exposition and recapitulation with no repeats and no development, which is commonly known as sonatina form.

[6] In the beginning of the first movement, there is a tempo indication with further directions: "Adagio Sostenuto – Si deve suonare tutto questo pezzo delicatissimamente e senza sordini." There should not be any dampers on the strings for this piece.

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The theme consists of a three-note motif with a characteristic rhythm that reappears throughout the movement (Figure 1.04).

Figure 1.04 The theme and the characteristic dotted rhythm of the *Adagio*.

Then there's the persistent, insidious “soft tympani rolls” (Rosen 2002, 171) that also appear throughout the *Adagio* (Figure 1.05).

Figure 1.05 The 32nd triplets that resemble tympani rolls in the *Adagio*.

Next is a new theme, marked *dolce*, which is more lyrical but still keeps the characteristic rhythm of the first theme (Figure 1.06).

Figure 1.06 The beginning of the second theme in the *Adagio*.

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Afterwards, Beethoven returns to the beginning theme, but this time it is more complicated, with arpeggios on the left hand that cross the right hand and create a multiple voice texture. Next, Beethoven passes through the second theme again and closes the movement in *subito piano* in the highest and lowest registers of the instrument. There is "consolation and repose" in the *Adagio* (Matthews 1967, 30).

The third movement also starts with an arpeggio, but this time it is a fast one, a *perpetuum mobile*, an ever-moving *Allegretto* theme with breaks only in bars 23 and 27. It is a "relentless pursuit of a haunted tragic mood" (Matthews 1967, 31). In the third movement of the "Tempest", the main theme has an ostinato A in the "tenor" which gives a "syncopated impulse" to the rhythm (Rosen 2002, 171) (Figure 1.07).

Figure 1.07 The beginning of the third movement. Notice the ostinato.

This endless motion of sixteenth notes and the multi-layer voicing is also seen in Johann Sebastian Bach's (1685 – 1750) first prelude in C major from the *Wohltemperiertes Klavier I.*

The *Allegretto* is in sonata form; after the exposition is repeated, and after the recapitulation, Beethoven returns to a final appearance of the main theme in

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the tonic. This restatement is different, with *sforzandi* and an extra ostinato A in the right hand (Figure 1.08). The Sonata ends with a downward arpeggio to *pianissimo* in the lower register.

Figure 1.08 Part of the restatement of the theme in the end of the movement.

All three movements of the *Piano Sonata no. 17 in D minor, op. 31 no. 2* end quietly in the lowest register of the piano, sustaining the atmosphere and mood of each movement. The *Largo-Allegro* has dramatic changes of the mood, reflecting the anger towards illness; the *Adagio* represents the heroic acceptance of the malady and the will to keep living; the *Allegretto* could perhaps be the eternal *(perpetuum)* struggle.

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CHAPTER 2:

A BOAT ON THE OCEAN & AUBADE OF THE JESTER

I. The Composer

Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937) was born on March 7 to a Basque mother at Ciboure, near Saint-Jean-de-Luz in France, only a few miles from the Spanish border. The music-loving family moved to Paris the following summer, consequently, Ravel grew up in a huge city, surrounded by art and classical music. It was inevitable that, with his talent and the cultural environment in Paris, he would grow to be one of the most significant French composers.[1] He started piano lessons at seven and harmony lessons at eleven, later entering the Conservatoire de Paris (1889), where he felt restricted by its conservatism to the extent that he was expelled. It was believed that Ravel was "only teachable in his own terms" (Kelly 2000, 7). Outside the Conservatoire de Paris, Ravel found his own compositional style, but wrote only a small amount of music, compared to his contemporaries: piano and chamber music, two piano concertos and two operas, ballet music, and eight song cycles. Additionally, he orchestrated works written by others (such as Modest Mussorgsky's (1839 – 1881) famous orchestration of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, dating 1922), and piano pieces he had written earlier.

Unfortunately, the composer's health was struck by a neurological upset; the first signs came in 1927. His situation was gradually worsening and in

[1] In 1918, he was regarded as France's leading composer (Kelly).

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1937 doctors attempted a brain operation; Maurice Ravel died ten days later at the age of 62, on December 28, 1937.

Ravel was strongly influenced by his mother's Basque-Spanish heritage and traits of this tradition are obvious in his more exotic works, such as the *Boléro* (1928) and the *Rapsodie espagnole* (1907 – 1908). Naturally, the composer was more or less aware of other musicians' influences and felt indebted to his predecessors. Among the composers that inspired Ravel were his contemporary Claude Debussy (1862 – 1918), who was his idol during his student years;[2] Gabriel Fauré (1845 – 1924), who taught him composition after his readmission to the Conservatoire;[3] Erik Satie (1866 – 1925), whom he appreciated but they came to a rift (Kelly 2000, 15); Emmanuel Chabrier (1841 – 1894);[4] Charles Gounod (1818 – 1893), whom he considered as one of the most French of modern composers (Kelly 2000, 14); Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 – 1921); the classical Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 – 1791), to whom he felt particularly close (Kelly 2000, 22); and finally the Russian "Five": Mily Balakirev (1837 – 1910), César Cui (1835 – 1918), Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844 – 1908), Alexander Borodin (1833 - 1887). Furthermore, Ravel was interested in baroque music, neoclassicism, and jazz. It is worth mentioning that he was intrigued when he heard the Javanese

[2] Ravel claimed to be an anti-Debussyist later but never underestimated his importance in French music, despite his "complex association with him." (Kelly 2000, 14 – 15).

[3] Fauré was one of the few who supported Ravel. In exchange, he showed his appreciation with dedicating the String Quartet and *Jeux d'eau* to Fauré, and with composing *Berceuse sur le nom de Gabriel Fauré*.

[4] There are traces of this influence in Ravel's early piano music. He also acknowledged Chabrier's clear influence in *Pavane pour une Infante défunte* and *Sérénade grotesque* (Kelly 2000, 13 - 14).

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gamelan in the Paris Exhibition of 1889. In addition, the composer also acknowledged the influence of Symbolist writers such as Edgar Allan Poe (1809 – 1849), Charles Baudelaire (1821 – 1867), Stéphane Mallarmé (1842 – 1898), and Paul Verlaine (1844 – 1896), and set some of their poems to music.[5]

II. Impressionism

Maurice Ravel is considered to be, along with Claude Debussy, one of the most significant Impressionist composers. However, Debussy is often associated with Symbolism, and his melodies were sometimes derived from folksongs, which puts him closer to neo-Impressionism.[6] Likewise, Ravel's use or imitation of Spanish songs and "the strongly melodic character" of his music also places him outside the "purely Impressionist style". Although his compositional style changed around 1908, he continued to use Impressionist techniques (Pasler). Ravel desired constant change and experimentation in his style and considered repetition and schools of composers "stagnant" (Kelly 2000, 10).

Impressionism started as a movement in Paris with a group of independent artists called "the Anonymous Society of Painters, Sculptors, Printmakers, etc.", who launched an exhibition in 1874. The artists wanted to differentiate themselves from the Salons, and each one had their own diverse

[5] For example, the *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*, a song cycle for voice and piccolo, two flutes, clarinets, basset clarinet, two violins, viola, cello, and piano (1913), also transcribed for voice and piano (1913).

[6] Neo- or post-Impressionism resembles Paul Gauguin and Henri Matisse in painting, and Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in music: "larger-scale juxtapositions of violent emotions, brutal rhythms, robust colours and a more advanced harmonic language that includes polytonality." (Pasler).

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style. Therefore, as there was no unified style in their exhibitions, they avoided choosing a title "that would imply a unified movement or school, although some of them subsequently adopted the name by which they would eventually be known, the Impressionists." (Samu 2004). Claude Monet's (1840 – 1926) painting *Impression, soleil levant (Impression, sunrise)* is widely regarded as the work that gave Impressionism its name.[7] The outlines of the objects are blurry, the colors are unblended, and the short brushstrokes are strikingly visible, while the light effects are being emphasized (see Figure 2.01). These techniques were all used by the independent artists representing Impressionism.[8] The Impressionist painters depicted scenery and modern life in Paris, avoiding dramatic portrayals of stories or characters. The artists "abandoned sentimental depictions and explicit narratives, adopting instead a detached, objective view that merely suggests what is going on" (Samu 2004).

Likewise, Impressionist composers conveyed the moods and emotions aroused by their subjects, by using pedal effects, glissandi, and ambiguous tonalities with modes and whole-tone or pentatonic scales. Their music is more detached and atmospheric, focusing on color and effects, similar in approach to Impressionist painting. These works usually have descriptive titles and therefore are programmatic. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Music,* some of the novelties used by Impressionist composers were "new chord

[7] In the exhibition of 1874, the critic Louis Leroy accused the painting of being "a sketch or impression" (Samu 2004).

[8] The central figures in the development of Impressionism in France, apart from Monet, were Frédéric Bazille, Gustave Caillebotte, Mary Cassatt, Paul Cézanne, Edgar Degas, Armand Guillaumin, Édouard Manet, Berthe Morisot, Camille Pissarro, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley.

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combinations, often ambiguous as to tonality, chords of the 9th, 11th, and 13th being used instead of triads and chords of the 7th; appoggiatura used as part of the chord, with full chord included; parallel movement in a group of chords of triads, 7^{ths}, and 9^{ths}, etc.; whole-tone chords; exotic scales; use of the modes; and extreme chromaticism."

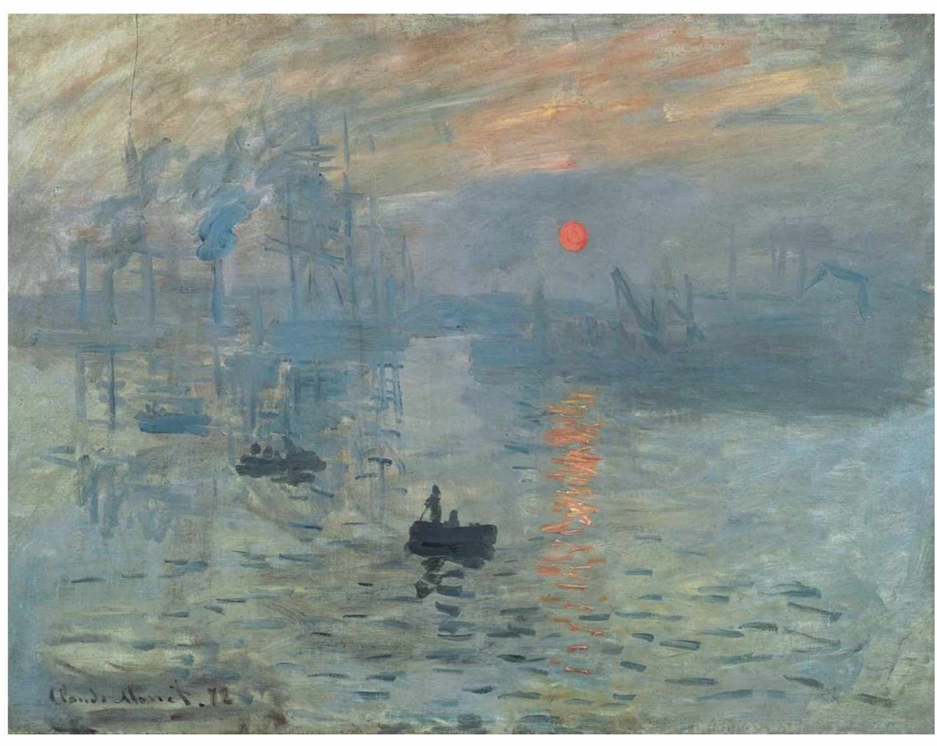

Figure 2.01 Claude Monet, *Impression, soleil levant.* Oil on canvas, 1872 (Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris).

III. Mirrors

Ravel's *Miroirs* suite for piano, translated as *Mirrors*, was written between 1904 and 1905. It is representative of the Impressionist style, first and foremost because of the title: anything portrayed in mirrors is not real, but a reflection of reality, an impression. According to the ancient Greek philosopher

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Plato (428/427 or 424/423 – 348/347 BC), a painting of, say, a chair (or a reflection of a chair in a mirror) is far away from the truth: it is not the chair itself but an image, an impression of it. Additionally, each piece of the suite is highly descriptive and programmatic.

Miroirs is a set of five pieces, but frequently these pieces are played independently – especially *Une barque sur l' océan* and *Alborada del gracioso,* which Ravel later orchestrated.[9] The composer was a founding member of a group of artists called “Les Apaches”, which was formed in 1902, connected by “their progressive mindset, their pride in being 'avant-garde,' and a fascination with Debussy’s new opera *Pelleas and Melisande*” (Huscher 2014). Ravel dedicated *Miroirs* to them, and the suite is as follows:

1. *Noctuelles (Night Moths),* for Léon-Paul Fargue, poet;

2. *Oiseaux tristes (Sad Birds),* for Ricardo Viñes, a close friend of Ravel and the pianist who premiered *Miroirs* in 1906; [10]

3. *Une barque sur l' océan (A Boat on the Ocean),* for Paul Sordes, painter;

4. *Alborada del gracioso (Aubade of the Jester),* for Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi, music critic;

5. *La vallée des cloches (The Valley of Bells),* for Maurice Delage, composer and pianist, student of Ravel.

[9] Composers Percy Grainger and Ernesto Halffter orchestrated *La vallée des cloches.*

[10] On this premiere, *Alborada del gracioso* was so successful that had to be encored (Huscher 2014).

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a. The Boat

Une barque sur l' océan is the third piece of the set, translated as *A Boat on the Ocean.* The element of inspiration for Ravel was water – a common theme in Impressionistic art, whether music (e.g. Debussy's *La Mer* which was composed around the same time) or painting (e.g. Monet's *Water Lilies*). The story is conveyed not only by the descriptive title, but also by the music: the waves of the ocean can be heard in the fast passages from lower to upper register and back again (see Figure 2.02), and the depth of the sea is echoed in the bass notes which should be sustained with the pedal (see Figure 2.03). Moreover, the "choreography" in the opening theme of the piece, split between the two hands, helps evoke the story with mechanical and dance-like motion (Leong and Korevaar 2011, 117 – 118). Phillip Huscher, the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, wrote that "a few pages of keyboard arpeggios and black-key glissandos have become sea and air, light and wind."

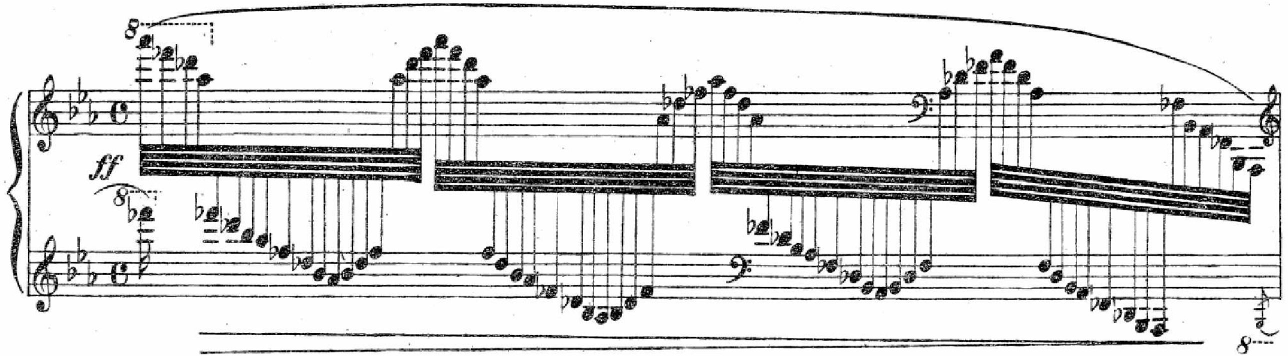

Figure 2.02 Arpeggios from upper to lower register depicting ocean waves in *Une barque sur l' ocean.* The way in which the line of the arpeggios is written also resembles waves.

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The piece convincingly gives the impression of a little boat on the ocean. At times, the boat stands still, only slightly moving by subtle waves with flashes of sunlight on the water surface. At other times, the boat is fighting with turbulent waters and tremendous waves. In 1907, Gaston Carraud, a critic in *La Liberté*, wrote that “one never knows what the weather will be on this ocean” 1907 (Long 1973, 86).

Figure 2.03 Bass notes depicting the depth of the ocean in *Une barque sur l' ocean.*

Only a few months after the premiere of *Miroirs,* Ravel decided to orchestrate *Une barque*, but revised it in 1926. The instrumentation is as follows: 3 flutes, 2 piccolos; 2 oboes, 1 english horn; 2 clarinets, 1 bass clarinet; 2 bassoons; 4 horns; 2 trumpets; 3 trombones, 1 tuba; timpani, triangle, cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, glockenspiel, celesta; 2 harps; strings. The first performance of the orchestrated *Une barque* took place in Paris on February 3, 1907.

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b. The Aubade

Alborada del gracioso was written in 1905 and is, for some, the most challenging piece of the set,[11] with incredibly fast repeated notes (see Figure 2.04), and double glissandi (see Figure 2.05). Of course, the technical difficulties of the other pieces of the set should not be undermined. The title is in Spanish, unlike most of Ravel's opus which has titles in French.

Figure 2.04 Fast repeated notes on the right hand in *Alborada del gracioso,* resembling the strumming of the Spanish guitar.

Alborada can be roughly translated as *aubade*, meaning *morning music*, as opposed to s*erenade*, which is *night music*. *Aubade* is the dawn song[12] and can be traced back to the French troubadours. Their *alba* (12th - 13th century) was a warning to lovers who had to part because of the approaching dawn, and required a watchman-commentator. The *alba* could also be of religious content and refer to the awakening from sin (Haynes). In Spanish tradition, the *alborada* is a morning serenade or song, in honor of a person or to celebrate

[11] The pianist Vlado Perlemuter, who was coached by Ravel in all his piano music, stated in an interview that "It's quite a unique piece in Ravel's works and perhaps the most difficult because of its precision and its technical demands" (Keller 2013).

[12] A more precise definition of the *aubade* is offered in Grove Music Online: "In the 17th and 18th centuries, *aubades* were played at court by military bands in honour of French sovereigns, and in provincial towns to celebrate the election of municipal officials."

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events and festivals. Ravel's *Alborada,* although borrowing the title, shows no resemblance to the Spanish song, according to Gómez in *Grove Music Online.*

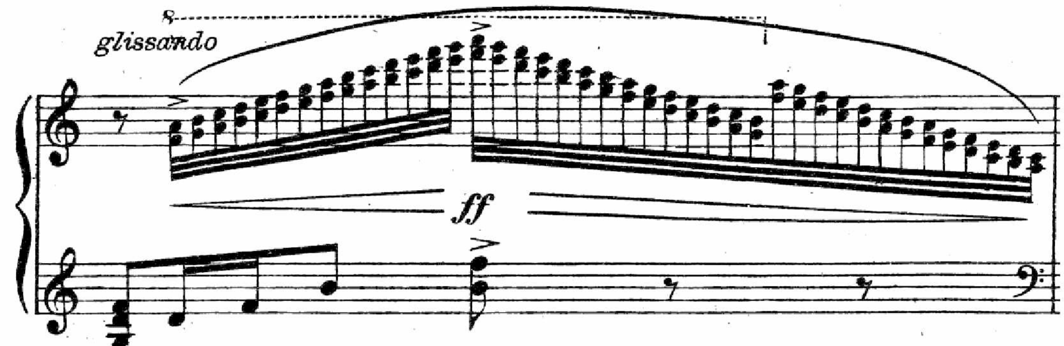

Figure 2.05 Double-note glissandos in *Alborada del gracioso.*

But Ravel's composition is not just an *alborada*; it is sung by the buffoon, or the jester (the *gracioso*).[13] This humorous, entertaining character is perhaps a reference to the "standard grotesque lover, akin to Don Quixote of ancient Castillian comedy" (Huscher 2014). The jester sings his *alborada* in the middle section of the piece, where a Spanish-like recitative, almost an improvisation, is played by the bassoon in the orchestrated version. In the original piano version, the grace notes imitate the human voice (see Figure 2.06).

Figure 2.06 The recitativo section with the grace notes imitating the human voice in *Alborada del gracioso.*

[13] There is no exact translation in English or French. The *gracioso* is a national character in the classical popular comedy of Spain, an "anti-hero" who makes people laugh (Long 1973, 86). "The musicologist and philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch spoke of Ravel's *gracioso* as a sort of 'Andalusian Petrushka' " (Keller 2013).

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Alborada immediately became one of Ravel's most popular works. Sergei Diaghilev (1872 – 1929), the impresario of the Ballets Russes, commissioned Ravel to orchestrate *Alborada* in 1918, more than ten years after he composed the piano suite. The first performance of the orchestrated version took place in Paris on May 17, 1919. The instrumentation asks for 3 flutes, piccolo; 2 oboes, 1 english horn; 2 clarinets; 2 bassoons, 1 contrabassoon; 4 french horns; 2 trumpets; 3 trombones, 1 tuba; timpani, crotales, triangle, tambourine, castanets, side drum, cymbals, bass drum, xylophone; 2 harps; strings. Undoubtedly, Ravel had a great ear for color and timbre. Phillip Huscher wrote, "the newly redecorated *Alborada* is one of his [Ravel's] greatest sonic achievements."

The exoticism, translated mostly as "Spanishness" for Ravel, is apparent in *Alborada.* From the beginning, the piano imitates the strumming of the Spanish guitar, which is translated in the orchestrated version with a harp and pizzicato strings. The song of the jester, mentioned earlier, strikes as an arabo-spanish and gypsy tune, with the grace notes imitating a gypsy singer's embellishments. The phrases of the bassoon are answered by divided strings in a Spanish-like rhythm.

As mentioned earlier, Ravel dedicated *Alborada* to the music critic Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi, who desctibed it as "a big independent scherzo in the manner of Chopin [1810 – 1849] and Balakirev" (Keller 2013).

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To conclude, Maurice Ravel was charmed by the Spanish tradition and therefore included Spanish traits in some of his works. He was also a man of his time, and experimented with the new trends like Impressionism, neo-classicism and jazz music. His musical work is almost in its entirety programmatic – a great amount of his opus has an extra-musical title.

The fact that Ravel orchestrated his own piano pieces can give us much insight on how he wanted them to be interpreted. The piano is an instrument that can imitate the orchestra and many different timbres, therefore a study and comparison of the two versions of *Une barque sur l' ocean* and *Alborada del gracioso* can prove to be very beneficial to the performer.

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CHAPTER 3: FAUST WALTZ

The Hungarian composer and pianist Franz (or Ferenc) Liszt was born in Raiding, Austria on 1811 and died in Bayreuth, Germany in 1886. Liszt was the first to give shape to the idea of the concert pianist and is considered to be the "supreme piano virtuoso" of the 19th century (Hamilton). Fascinated by the master violinist Niccolò Paganini (1782 – 1840), Liszt decided to become his equivalent on the piano. Liszt's compositions include orchestral, choral, vocal, organ, and piano works, and some chamber music. Liszt was also known for transcribing or paraphrasing musical works from other composers, predominantly on the piano. The number of the composers whose music he has transcribed is incredibly large. Some of his transcriptions, paraphrases, and arrangements for the piano include all nine Symphonies by Ludwig van Beethoven, selections from the opera *Don Giovanni* (1787) by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the *Symphonie fantastique* (1830) by Hector Berlioz (1803 – 1869), and the *24 Caprices for Solo Violin* (1802 – 1817) by Niccolò Paganini.

Liszt was an advocate of program music, and therefore, the majority of his works are programmatic. The *Faust Waltz, S.407* is not exactly a programmatic work, but a transcription from the opera *Faust* by the French composer Charles Gounod (1818 – 1893).[1] The opera first premiered in 1859 but was not initially well-received. It was revived in 1862 and became a

[1] The title appears as *Valse de l'opéra FAUST de Gounod* in the first edition. There is also a dedication: "A Monsieur le Baron Alexis des Michels".

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success.[2] Liszt decided to transcribe the opera for solo piano a year before, in 1861. More precisely, he was based on the famous waltz scene from Act II and the love duet "O nuit d' amour" from Act III.

The opera was adapted from the play *Faust et Marguerite* by Michel Carré (1821 – 1872), who was the librettist in Gounod's opera, along with Jules Barbier (1825 – 1901). Carré was loosely based on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's (1749 – 1832) epic drama *Faust.*[3] It dealt only with the first part; therefore the original's "vast philosophical spread" was not fully included in the play and the opera (San Diego Opera). Furthermore:

> "Rather than an all-encompassing rumination on the human condition, we have a simple, affecting love story: man seduces woman, abandons her, realizes too late that he is truly in love, and attempts to rescue her from tragic circumstances of his own making. That there is a demonic bargain thrown into the mix seems almost an afterthought." (Goodwin 2011).

Despite this deviation, or perhaps because of it, Gounod's opera became very successful.[4]

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[2] "Fifty years ago, Charles Gounod's opera *Faust* was the singularly most popular opera in the world… The opera almost disappeared from the repertory until just recently, and it seems that the opera (like many seemingly outdated 19th century works) is undergoing a renewed interest by singers, impresarios and audiences around the world." (San Diego Opera, no date).

[3] Goethe's enormous project *Faust* took him more than 50 years to finish. The author wanted it to be set to music eventually, and had approached Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 – 1791) for collaboration. Unfortunately, the composer died before the play was finished. Goethe then had "no faith in the young Romantics," believing that "Mozart was still the only composer worthy of setting *Faust* to music." (Goodwin 2011).

[4] It is interesting that in Germany, the opera is still often performed under the title *Margarethe*, to distance it from the original (Goodwin 2011). Another author explains that the librettists of the opera "never intended to do more than a loose paraphrase" and that Gounod and his associates "mutilated one of Western civilization's greatest works of literature" (Grim 1988, 18-19).

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The Faust legend has inspired many, both before and after Goethe. Franz Liszt was fascinated with Faust, and consequently composed many programmatic works inspired by that tale – for example, his grand *Faust Symphony,* consisting of three parts, and his four *Mephisto Waltzes* for solo piano.[5] It was perhaps inevitable that he would touch upon Gounod's opera, too. Liszt stayed rather faithful to the original melodies.[6] The opening of *Faust Waltz* is similar to the opera's opening of the waltz scene, but with a more ominous harmony (Figure 3.01).

a.

b.

Figure 3.01 **a.** Gounod's *Faust;* beginning of the waltz scene.
b. Liszt's *Faust Waltz;* opening bars.

[5] It should be mentioned that Liszt was not only familiar with Goethe's work, but also with Hungarian poet Nikolaus Lenau (1802 – 1850), who gave a different adaptation of the legend. Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz* was based on Lenau's *Faust* (Grim 1988, 1).

[6] Some have claimed that Liszt only wanted to showcase his virtuosity using Gounod's hit opera. But Liszt's career as a concert pianist had ended, and in this transcription "his music never actually strays from the moods and expressive range in Gounod's score." (Cummings).

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Following is the part when the chorus starts to sing, but Liszt used the orchestral melody in his transcription, instead of the chorus one (Figure 3.02).[7]

Figure 3.02 **a.** the chorus in the waltz scene.
b. Liszt's *Faust Waltz*. Notice the melody here and in the above piano rendition.

[7] The chorus here sings:

Ainsi que la brise légère	*Just as the light breeze*
Soulève en épais tourbillons	*In dense whirling clouds*
La poussière	*Raises the dust*
Des sillons,	*From the fields,*
Que la valse nous entraîne!	*So let us fling ourselves into the waltz!*
Faites retenir la plaine	*Make the countryside resound*
De l'éclat de vos chansons!	*With an outburst of song!* (Barbier and Carré, 1859)

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He did the same thing in the next recitative section, when Siébel enters the scene and announces that Marguerite will be passing this way (Figure 3.03).

a.

b.

Figure 3.03 **a.** Siébel's entrance in the opera.
b. Liszt's *Faust Waltz*. Notice the melody here and in the above piano rendition. Liszt transposed the melody but kept it intact.

Next is the part where Marguerite kindly declines embracing Faust's arm; Liszt included the libretto in the score to show the actual part of the opera that he drew from, and perhaps to direct the performer towards a particular mood (Figure 3.04).[8]

[8] Translation:
Faust: Will you permit me, fair lady, to offer you my arm on the way?
Marguerite: No, sir! I am not a lady, neither am I fair, and I do not need the offer of a hand.
(Barbier and Carré, 1859)

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Figure 3.04 **a.** Faust welcoming Marguerite in the opera.
b. Liszt added the dialogue above the melody.

From here Liszt jumps to the famous love duet of the second scene, where Faust and Marguerite sing for the "night of love ("O nuit d'amour"). Liszt totally remakes this part, moving it to the upper register of the piano and adding the texture of a constant trill (Figure 3.05).

Figure 3.05 Liszt's *Faust Waltz;* the melody that Faust sings in the opera is in the soprano voice of the left hand.

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The coda of the piece is three pages long, starting from the *Stretta* section, and resembles the closing section of the waltz scene, while the ending is also similar.

Indeed, Franz Liszt did not deviate tremendously from the opera. The *Faust Waltz* is “a mixture of literal quotations” with Liszt’s “takeoffs on the music” (Cummings). Of course, the composer added his own touch; very virtuosic and pianistic passages, and chromatic harmony. But the famous waltz and the duet from Gounod’s opera can be clearly heard in Liszt’s *Faust Waltz.* This transcription did not only serve as a tribute to Gounod, but it was also the only way for the audience to have multiple hearings of the work. Liszt’s transcriptions, paraphrases and arrangements all contributed to making massive works, such as operas and symphonies, more accessible to the audience of his time.

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CHAPTER 4: THREE GHOST RAGS

I. The Composer

William Bolcom (b. 1938) is an award-winning American composer whose style is an intermingling of different musical genres, including chamber, operatic, vocal, choral, cabaret, ragtime, and symphonic music. He won the Pulitzer Prize in Music (1988) for his *Twelve New Etudes* for piano,[1] was named Composer of the Year (2007) by *Musical America* – the oldest American magazine on classical music – and won four Grammy Awards (2005) for his massive song cycle *Songs of Innocence and of Experience.*[2]

William Bolcom was born in Seattle, Washington, and as a piano prodigy began composition studies at an early age, later studying with Darius Milhaud (1892 – 1974) and Olivier Messiaen (1908 – 1992). He taught composition at the University of Michigan from 1973 until his retirement in 2008. He has been actively concertizing with his wife, mezzo-soprano Joan Morris and together they have recorded over two dozen albums.

[1] Composed in 1977 – 1986, preceded by his Twelve Etudes for piano.

[2] Originally a poem collection by English poet and painter William Blake (1757 – 1827) which was written in the 18th century, Songs of Innocence was printed in 1789 and Songs of Experience in 1794. Bolcom started composing the collection in 1956 and finished in 1984. The recording that won four Grammys (Best Choral Performance, Best Classical Contemporary Composition, Best Classical Album, and Best Producer of the Year, Classical) was a live recording of the concert in Ann Arbor Hill Auditorium (2004), released on the Naxos label, with conductor Leonard Slatkin and the participation of the University Musical Society and the University of Michigan School of Music.

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Bolcom was one of the big contributors in the revival of ragtime music in the late 1960s – early 1970s and has since published more than 20 rags. The revised edition of his *Complete Rags for Piano* by Hal Leonard includes three previously unpublished piano rags, which sums up to 25. Some of those rags are parts of a set, such as the renowned *Garden of Eden* which consists of four "movements" (*Old Adam, The Eternal Feminine, The Serpent's Kiss, Through Eden's Gates),* and has also been arranged by the composer for two pianos. The *Three Ghost Rags* came afterwards. William Bolcom's peak period for producing rags was 1969 – 1971, and the *Garden of Eden* and the *Three Ghost Rags* were written during that time. The composer wrote more rags than the 25 published ones, but he didn't include them in the collections – he kept only "the best ones" (Yu 2007, 36).

II. The Definition of Ragtime

Ragtime music was an extremely popular musical genre during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is strongly connected to American tradition, deriving from "coon songs" (Negro dialect songs with vulgar lyrics),[3] plantation spirituals and other work songs. Furthermore, ragtime was closely related to the march, old dances such as cakewalk and two-step,[4] and of course jazz and blues.

[3] The coon song acquired the additional label of "ragtime" in the 1890s (Berlin 1980, 5).

[4] "[Ragtime] moved to the ballroom and it enjoyed big popularity. More often than not, dances were simply associated with ragtime music without appropriating the name" (Berlin 1980, 13).

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But what is ragtime? In *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History,* Edward Berlin presents various definitions from musicians of that era. The one thing that almost every contemporary agreed on was syncopation. "Ragging" a melody meant to syncopate it; therefore, rag-time music is syncopated music (Berlin 1908, 13). Most commentators defined ragtime as syncopated music with strict accompaniment and a strong sense of rhythm.[5]

In contrast to the modern belief that ragtime is almost exclusively piano music, piano rags constituted only a small portion of the ragtime literature. More specifically, ragtime started as a vocal genre and arrangements for bands and various ensembles were very common. The role of piano in ragtime, with such abundance and variety of instrumental and vocal rags, was not as important and prominent as it appears today. Nevertheless, piano rags started to be published a year after vocal rags and almost immediately became a trend. The vast publishing industry and the new technological innovations (upright pianos, recordings and piano rolls of ragtime music) contributed heavily to the proliferation of ragtime. The demand was such that composers or publishers would simplify versions so that common people wouldn't get discouraged and sales would keep growing.

[5] It should be mentioned that not all rag music was syncopated. In addition, ragtime also refers to the common practice of "ragging" preexisting songs or musical pieces, even by classical composers such as Mendelssohn and Rachmaninoff (e.g. Russian Rag by George L. Cobb).

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Some classical music supporters strongly opposed ragtime, as they considered it a threat to the "serious" European tradition.[6] On the other side, proponents of the new style saw ragtime music as "the long-awaited symbol of American cultural independence" (Berlin 1980, 32), the only true American music.[7] Europeans actually favored ragtime; composer Antonin Dvořák (1841 – 1904) advised the Americans to create a national style based on Negroes and Indians (Berlin 1980, 53), and composer Igor Stravinsky (1882 – 1971) expressed in an article by Stanley Wise in *New York Tribune* in 16 January 1916:

> "I know little about American music, except that of the music halls, but I consider that unrivaled. It is veritable art, and I never can get enough of it to satisfy me. I am convinced of the absolute truth of utterance in that form of American art." (Berlin 1980, 45)

Additionally, Stravinsky composed *Ragtime* for eleven instruments in 1918, and the finale of his Octet for wind instruments (1923) was rhythmically influenced by the foxtrot. But the trend did not last long. Rag production was fading by 1917, while jazz music was emerging and absorbing characteristics of the older style. Ragtime music lost its distinctive character as it got mixed with other popular genres; thus, it slowly fell into oblivion for more than 50 years.

The 1973 film *The Sting* was strongly beneficial for the revival of ragtime. The soundtrack included original rags of Scott Joplin (1867/1868 – 1917),

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[6] Bolcom commented on the term "serious": "I hate it, as it implies that everyone not in it is not serious – popism, I suppose; it's almost racist." (Bolcom 1998, 482).

[7] Among the proponents of ragtime were the Gershwin brothers, for example, who wrote a song entitled The Real American Folk Song (Is a Rag) in 1918.

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adapted by Marvin Hamlisch (1944 – 2012). Scott Joplin is considered the most important figure in ragtime music. His first rag was published in 1899, and numerous others followed. His *Maple Leaf Rag,* published in the same year, immediately became popular and would provide him with a steady income and justify Joplin's title: The King of Ragtime Writers (Berlin, 2013).

The soundtrack of the film *The Sting* included some of Joplin's rags such as *Solace, Easy Winners, Maple Leaf Rag,* and the *Entertainer* which became a "hit".[8] As mentioned earlier, this success lead to the revival of ragtime. Another reason was Joshua Rifkin's (b. 1944) recording of Scott Joplin's rags on Nonesuch Records (1970), which became a best seller among classical discs. In addition, the New York Public Library had recently issued *The Collected Works of Scott Joplin.* Henceforth, classically trained musicians and musicologists started showing more interest on this forgotten American tradition, and composers wrote their own piano rags, both following the style of the masters – e.g. Scott Joplin, Joseph Lamb (1887 – 1960), James Scott (1885 – 1938), Louis Chauvin (1881 - 1908)– and adding their own touch to the music. Musicians William Bolcom, Joshua Rifkin, Vera Brodsky Lawrence (1909 – 1996), Gunther Schuller (1925 – 2015), Max Morath (b. 1926) and Rudi Blesh (1899 – 1985) were among those whose compositions and performances brought back ragtime music (Berlin 1980, Preface xvii).

[8] *The Entertainer* hit no. 3 on the "Billboard Hot 100" and the "American Top 40" in 1974, but *Maple Leaf Rag* was the one piece that made Scott Joplin famous and remained the most successful piano rag during his time.

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William Bolcom came across ragtime while searching for Scott Joplin's opera *Treemonisha*. He obtained the score from the Ragtime Society and that's when he got involved with ragtime music.[9] His first rag, *Glad Rag*, written in 1967, was inspired by *Treemonisha* and includes a passage recalling Joplin's opera. Bolcom continued writing rags every now and then, in a non-consistent time frame.

III. The Set

The *Three Ghost Rags* are among William Bolcom's well-known piano pieces. The rags are presented in the order they were composed and they were intended to be a set. The title *Three Ghost Rags* was given by pianist Paul Jacobs.

Graceful Ghost Rag, the first of the set, is Bolcom's most celebrated piano rag. It was composed in 1970 and premiered by William Bolcom, who later transcribed it for violin and piano, and string quartet. *Graceful Ghost* was written in memory of his father, who was, like the music, a gentle soul. In an interview in 2011, when asked if the melody reflects his father, Bolcom answered:

> "It kind of does – I mean, he was a very gentle man. I used the title *Graceful Ghost* with the ghost being a sense of the Miltonic use for spirit […] The *Graceful Ghost* is an elegiac rag, in memory of my

[9] In an interview in 2009, Bolcom mentioned that Rudi Blesh gave him a copy of *Treemonisha* and the piano rags by Joplin. Bolcom talked about it to Joshua Rifkin, who soon made the "classical" recording of Scott Joplin's complete rags for piano. This recording helped in the proliferation of ragtime in the 1970's. In the process, Bolcom wrote his own rags "and the next thing I knew there was a recording of all 22 [rags] by a young pianist named John Murphy." (Bolcom, 2009).

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father, whom I really adored. He was anything but a "mucho" man. He was very gentle, had many, many friends, and he was a very good dancer."

Indeed, the rag sounds like a memory; reminiscent of the old ragtime, with an elegant, versatile sound which haunts the audience's mind. This noble and delightful melody, which reminds of the paternal figure, is the main theme (Figure 4.01).

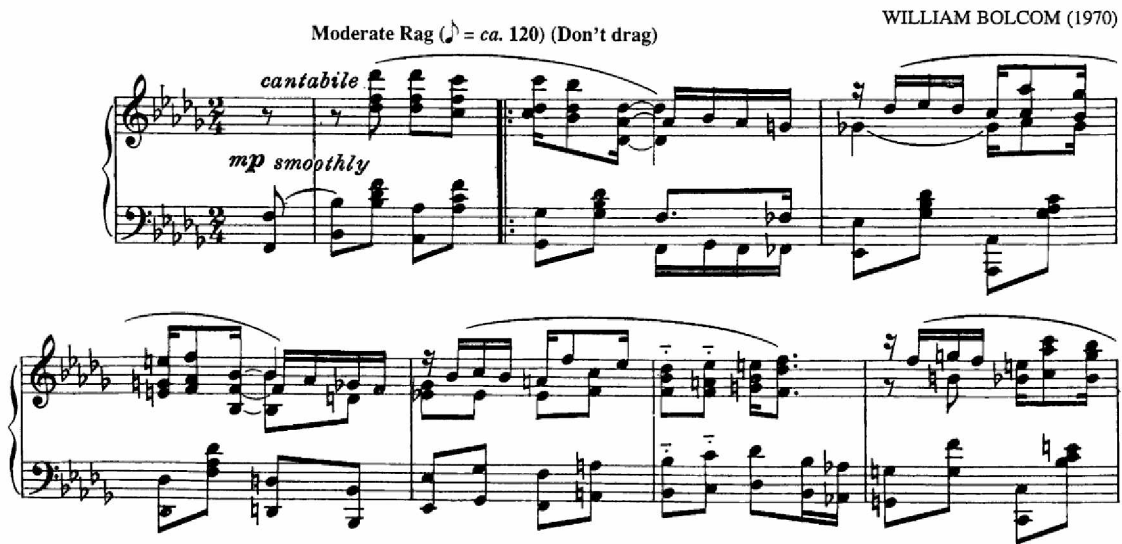

Figure 4.01 The first seven bars of the *Graceful Ghost.*

Thus, the whole rag is very nostalgic. The tempo indication is "Moderate Rag (Don't drag)", showing that the piece should be played slower than the general idea of what a rag should sound like.[10] On the other hand, performers should not forget that, although melancholic, this rag is still "first and foremost a dance!" "DON'T GO TOO SLOW!" (Bolcom in Yu 2007, 39).

[10] In a 2011 interview, Bolcom explained that Scott Joplin should be played much slower – only later were rags speeded up: "Rubato is in the choice of the performer. It should basically still be danceable. But the fact is it was a slow dance! Joplin should be played not in a great hurry."

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Tempo and rhythm are of course very important features, but performers should not neglect the vocal origins of ragtime. This means that slight rubato can be used by the performer. Regarding the question of "swinging it" or not, *Ghost Rag* should be played "straight" for a few of reasons: it is not jazz music; original rags were not "swung"; the composer prefers so. In an interview in 2011, he commented "it takes all the stuffing out of it. It should be almost straight eighths… So you want to keep that straightness. I think the whole melody should be played songfully… Don't "doctor it up", just let the piece do itself." I communicated personally with the composer and asked him why he is opposed to pianists swinging rags. He answered: "What I hate is triplets when people try to swing. Real ragtime has a slight *notes inégales* feel to it, with a miniscule amount of difference between two 16ths. But most people can't do that so I prefer people playing it straight." (Bolcom, email to the author, May 11, 2016).

The *Graceful Ghost* follows a common form of ragtime: ABCA. It is important to mention common practices here. The majority of the original rags were following the formal principle of the march, with 16-bar sections and usually three to four themes. The key signature was always either 2/4, common time, or cut-time. The 16-measure sections, or "strains", were usually divided in four 4-bar phrases, forming a symmetrical double period. Interludes, introductions and breaks were also common. There's a great variety of form patterns but the most frequent started with two themes in the tonic key, forming two or three sections. These were followed by one or two themes in the

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subdominant. A tonic ending could be next. Thus, common forms were for example: ABAC, ABCD, ABCDAB, ABACB, ABACA, ABCA (Berlin 19810, 89-90). In almost all rags, each section is typically repeated.

In *Graceful Ghost,* the first section (A) is the aforementioned nostalgic melody in Bb minor, a double period 16 bars long, with the last bar being a transition. It consists of one theme but four phrases (mm. 1 – 4, 5 – 8 and mm. 9 – 12, 13 – 15). Bar 16 serves as the transition back to the beginning and cannot be considered part of the last phrase. Following the "haunting" theme is a new, more syncopated melody (B), which is also a double period 16 bars long: mm. 18 – 21 and 22 – 25 form the first period and mm. 26 – 29 and 30 – 33 form the second one. This section (B) is also repeated. Bar 35 serves as a transition from the key of Bb minor to that of Gb Major (submediant). This section (C), marked "Grazioso", is in a slightly different mood – more joyful than the other parts, but still nostalgic (Figure 4.02).

Figure 4.02 Beginning of section C in the *Graceful Ghost.*

The aforementioned section is divided in two double periods, or better one double period with two themes which are repeated in variation. The first double period consists of four little phrases (mm. 36 – 39, 40 – 43 first theme, 44 – 47,

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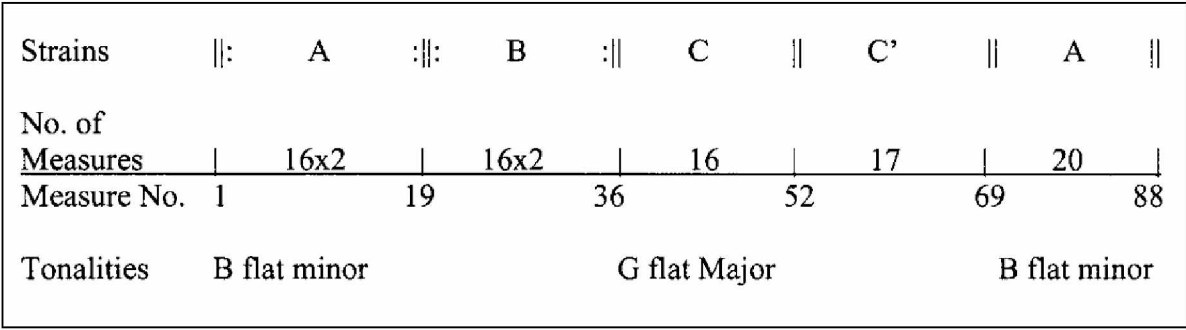
48 – 51 second theme) and the second double period of another four (mm. 52 – 55, 56 – 59, first theme changed, 60 – 63, 64 – 67 second theme changed). Bar 68 is an extension of the last phrase which leads back to the first theme (A). Now the indication is “Tempo I (a little slower)” as though the recurring melody is a distant memory, a ghost. The structure is the same as the first section (A) but there is a 5-bar coda in the end, which is actually a prolongation of the last bar of the period (m. 83).

In conclusion, *Graceful Ghost* has a fairly symmetrical form. The whole rag is 88 bars long, with each section being a 16-bar double period – except section C which is 32 bars, since the composer decided to write down the repeat for the sake of variation (see Figure 4.03). It is a portrait of William Bolcom's father and follows the original ragtime tradition.



<table>
<tr><td>Strains</td><td>||:</td><td>A</td><td>:||:</td><td>B</td><td>:||</td><td>C</td><td>||</td><td>C’</td><td>||</td><td>A</td><td>||</td></tr>
<tr><td>No. of Measures</td><td>|</td><td>16x2</td><td>|</td><td>16x2</td><td>|</td><td>16</td><td>|</td><td>17</td><td>|</td><td>20</td><td>|</td></tr>
<tr><td>Measure No.</td><td>1</td><td></td><td>19</td><td></td><td>36</td><td></td><td>52</td><td></td><td>69</td><td></td><td>88</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tonalities</td><td colspan="3">B flat minor</td><td></td><td></td><td colspan="3">G flat Major</td><td></td><td colspan="2">B flat minor</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 4.03 The formal diagram of *Graceful Ghost Rag* (Yu 2007, 117). Yu separates sections (or “strains”) C and C'. The author of this paper named both sections as C.

The second rag of the set is *The Poltergeist,* which is subtitled “Rag Fantasy” like *The Serpent’s Kiss* in the suite *The Garden of Eden.* It was composed one year after *Graceful Ghost*, in 1971. Unlike the “old-school”

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Graceful Ghost, this one is more modern. It has some extended techniques and more complicated harmonies – perhaps that is why it's called a "Rag Fantasy". On our e-mail correspondence, Bolcom admitted "I have no idea why Poltergeist is a Rag Fantasy. It felt fantasia-like though it is basically in rag form." (Bolcom, email to the author, May 11, 2016).

The Poltergeist is literally translated as "knocking spirit" from German, according to Merriam Webster Online. In folklore, this mischievous ghost is known for making "knocking" noises, smashing doors and objects, and generally causing physical disturbance. This rag definitely deserves the title *Poltergeist*: big contrasts, alterations on articulation, sudden jumps and moments of silence make this a very playful rag.

The form of *The Poltergeist* is ABCB'C'. The first section (A) is in Eb minor and consists of 16 bars. The main theme, stated in the opening 4 bars (mm. 1 – 4), is in *pianissimo* with sudden accents (>) and syncopations. The theme is repeated as a digression (mm. 5 – 13), and is followed by a little coda (mm. 14 – 17) which leads back to the beginning. The section (A) is repeated but the little coda is now 3-bars long and ends on a rest. The next section (B) is a surprise: a total contrast from silence to *forte,* with bigger chords and a new theme in Gb Major and whole-tone passage (mm. 19 – 22). Right after there is a calm 4-bar phrase (mm. 23 – 26) in *pianissimo* which leads back to the first theme of the section (B), this time a bit changed (mm. 27 – 30). The next bars (31 – 33) serve as a closure – specifically bar 33 functions as a moment of silence. As already

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mentioned, break time was common practice in ragtime music. This part of section (B) forms a double period (mm. 19 – 33). After the brief break, there is a new theme which resembles the beginning and consists of two 4-bar phrases (mm. 34 – 37, 38 – 41). Bars 42 – 67 are actually a written-down repeat of the analyzed part of the section (B).

To sum up, section (B) has three new themes and is contrasting in itself, like a moody ghost. The next four bars (mm. 68 – 71) are a typical ragtime break, or a transition, with new material, and don't belong to a section. Bar 71 leads back to section (C) in Ab minor. The indication "Insouciantly" is a written description of what the performer should imagine: a playful ghost, not caring about anything else except planning the next mischief. This is a more symmetrical section, with 4-bar phrases forming two double periods, which are both 16 bars long (mm. 72 – 87 and mm. 88 – 103). There are two new themes in this section (C), stated in the first double period and presented again, differently, in the second. The section (C) ends rather suddenly, as if the ghost abruptly decided to stop playing. Next section (B') is more entertaining and contrasting. The material is taken from section (B) but there are breaks and a sudden "cluster". When section (B') is repeated one octave higher, as a whisper, there are "Stop times" asked by the composer. These sudden silences are very dramatic and performers usually stay still and "act" scared or surprised on stage. It might be the ghost trying to sneak out without being noticed (Figure 4.04).

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Figure 4.04 The "Stop times" in section B' from *The Poltergeist.*

The last section (C') is a variation of section (C). William Bolcom asks from the performer to "Swing out!" in bar 140.[11] This part (mm. 140 – 154) is the peak of the whole rag.

The piece ends in *pianissississimo (ppp)* and a fermata on the last rest. It reflects the funny, entertaining character of this rag, which possesses an extended rag form (Figures 4.05 and 4.06).

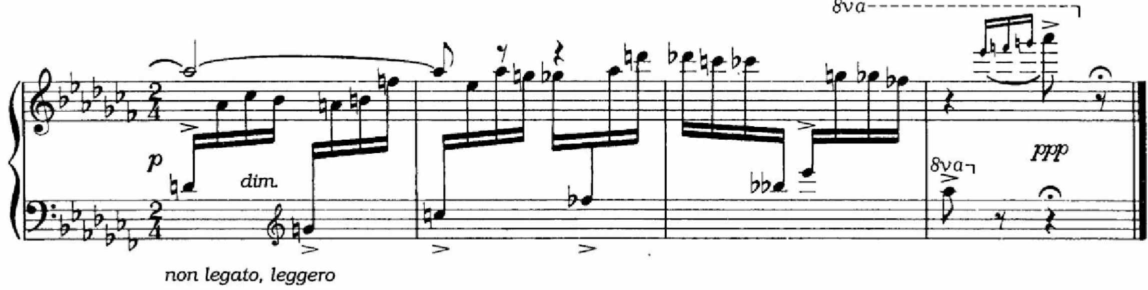

Figure 4.05 The ending bars of *The Poltergeist.*

[11] As mentioned before, original ragtime music was never "swung" - swing was a characteristic of jazz music and came later. Therefore, rags should not be "swung". But Bolcom asks for it here, partly because the piece is a "Rag Fantasy".

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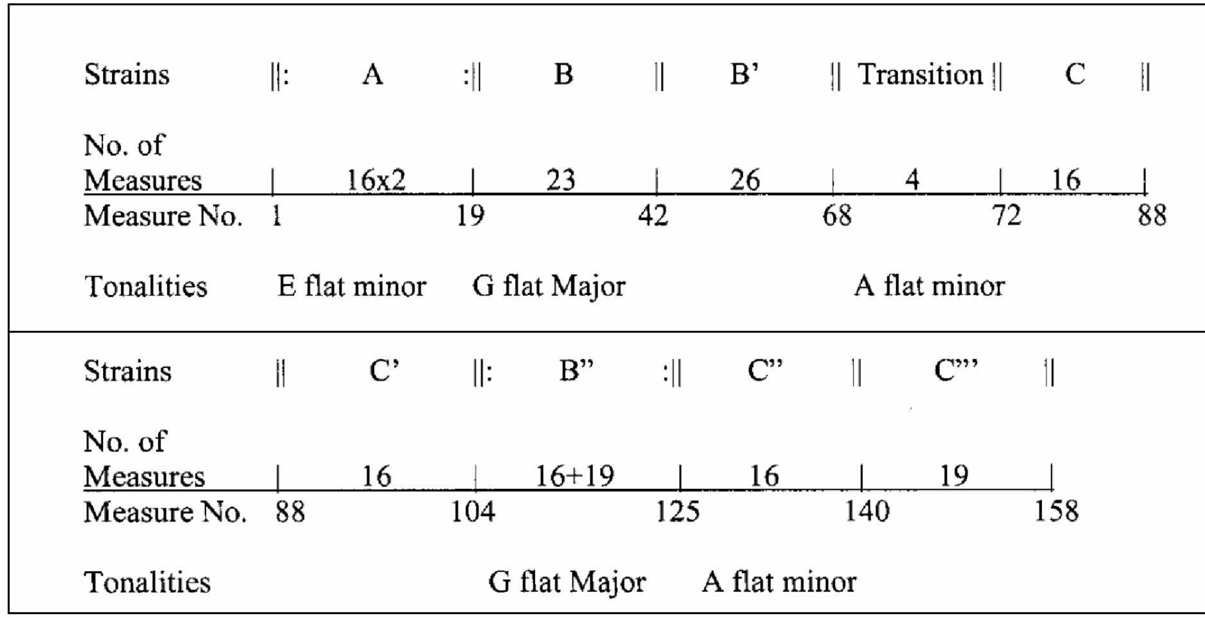

Figure 4.06 Formal diagram of *The Poltergeist* (Yu 2007, 121). Yu separates sections (or "strains") C and C'. The author of this paper named both sections as C. The same goes for sections C'' and C''' – the author named them as C'.

Dream Shadows is the last of the *Three Ghost Rags,* composed at the same time as *The Poltergeist,* in 1971. It is slower and considerably longer than the other two. This rag has a strong influence from jazz and blues, as it uses "blue notes"[12] and more complex harmonies. Notice that blues influence on ragtime increased markedly since the publication of blues pieces in 1912 (Berlin 1980, 154).[13] In *Dream Shadows,* one can easily imagine a woman singing this languid melody in an old-fashioned bar. The tempo indication is "Caressingly", which helps the performer set the mood for this rag. The "swing"

[12] *Grove Music Online* gives the following definition for blue note: "A concept used by jazz critics and musicians from the early decades of the 20th century onwards to theorize African American music, notably in blues and jazz, to characterize pitch values perceived as deviating from the western diatonic scale." The 3rd, 5th, and 7th degree were usually a semitone lower, often with "microtonal fluctuations." (Kubik, 2013).

[13] W.C.Handy's *Memphis Blues* for example, was accepted as ragtime – the cover of the piano says "A Southern Rag". Blues were considered to be rags.

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choice is up to the performer.[14] The form of *Dream Shadows* is ABCB'D. The first section (A) is 16 bars long, consisting of two 8-bar phrases (mm. 1 – 8, 9 – 16). The theme begins in C major, but modulates throughout the section (A). Bar 16 leads back to the beginning, and the section (A) is repeated. Afterwards, bar 17 is the pickup measure for section (B), which is a form of question & answer between upper and lower voices. The four phrases form a double period 16 bars long(Figure 4.07).

Figure 4.07 Beginning of section B of *Dream Shadows*.

The first period of section (B) is mm. 18 – 21, 22 – 25 and the second is mm. 26 – 29, 30 – 33. The section (B) is repeated, but the composer wants it played differently: *piano* instead of *mezzo-piano.* The direction "tenderly" is now more necessary.

[14] Bolcom suggests that the rhythm of section (B) can be played in swing like a traditional stride piece, though he also wants to leave the decision to the performer: "*Dream Shadows* is more swinging I think, because of the style which it is a little bit closer to. But you can also do it straight; it is up to you. And that is what's nice about these things, it depends on, sometimes . . . there are parts you want to swing a little more and there are parts you can do straight; one should be flexible with these things." (Yu 2007, 42).

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Next is section (C), in F Major, and consequently in a different mood – to me more carefree and playful. Bolcom wants this part "a shade faster perhaps", to make the change of the character more apparent. There is another double period here (mm. 36 – 39, 40 – 43 and mm. 44 – 47, 48 – 51), followed by two phrases with new material (mm. 52 – 55, 56 – 59). The latter have an interesting counter-melody in the left hand, which needs to be brought out. It intermingles with the melody of the right hand creating a kind of counterpoint (see Figure 4.08).

Figure 4.08 The two simultaneous melodies in bars 52 – 55 in *Dream Shadows.*

In bars 60 – 67, the melody from the previous double period is repeated slightly changed and bars 68 – 70 are a "break" which leads back to section (B). This part should again be played *piano*, but this time it is not repeated; instead, the composer changes the last few measures so that he can lead it to the last section of the rag. Section (D), mm. 75 – 101, is not as symmetrical as the other sections and can be called a *Coda* (Figure 4.09).

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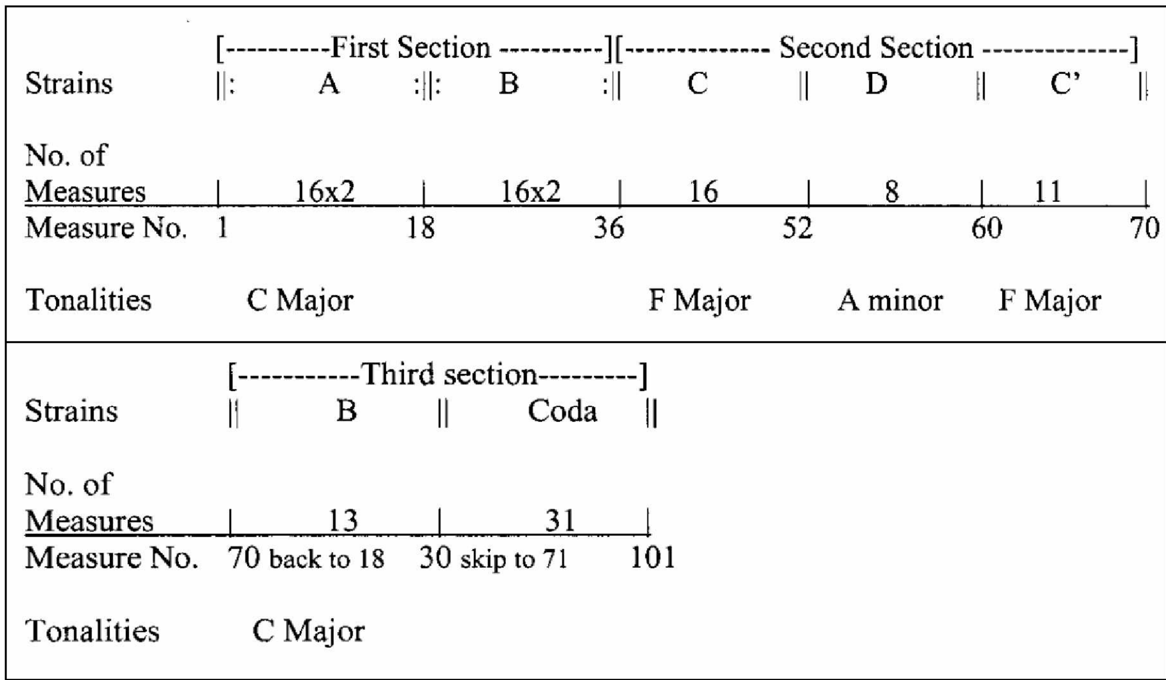

Figure 4.09 Formal diagram of *Dream Shadows* (Yu 2007, 128). The two C sections are separated by an eight-measure section which can be called the D strain. The D strain functions as the trio to the C strains. The author of this paper names sections C, D, C' as C, and the Coda as section D.

The motivic melody forms little phrases (mm. 75 – 88) which are "swung". The "swing feel" here is made clear by the rhythm: dotted 16ths and 32nds. From here until the end of the rag, the dynamic does not change significantly. In bars 91 – 94 and 95 – 98, the theme from section (A) returns quite changed and closes with a little codetta (mm. 99 – 100). The rag ends very atmospherically and softly *(pppp),* with a motif (m. 101) left to vibrate until the sound of the piano fades (Figure 4.11). Section (D) is marked "misterioso", "leggiero", and "legato", which is evidence of Bolcom's intention that it should be played like a languorous song, and also evidence of the vocal roots of ragtime music (Figure 4.10).

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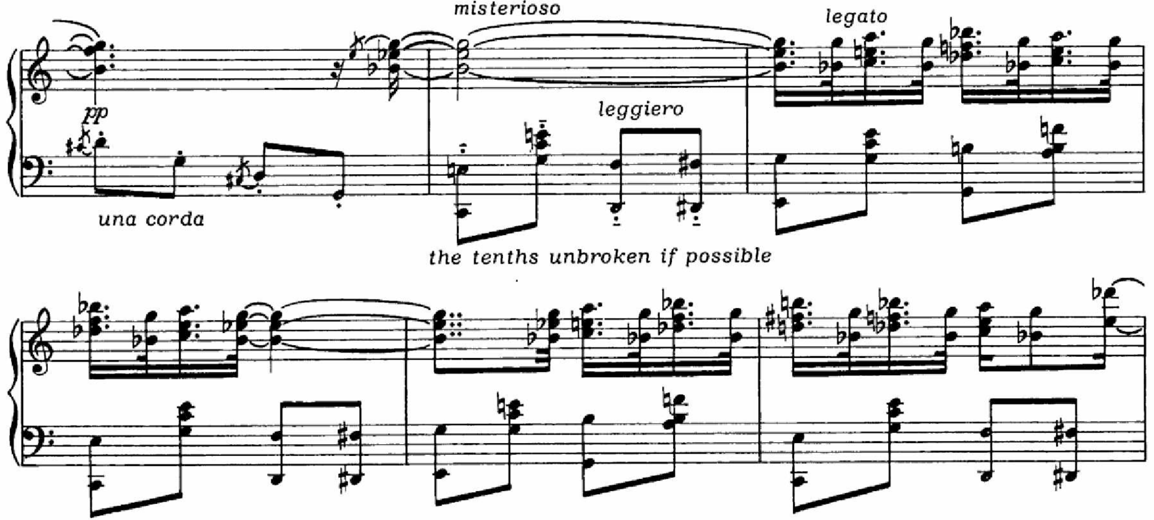

Figure 4.10 The beginning of the “swung” section in *Dream Shadows.*

Figure 4.11 The last bars in Dream Shadows. Notice the composer’s indication “l.v.” (let vibrate).

To conclude, William Bolcom's *Three Ghost Rags* are a significant part of the musical work he has composed. Bolcom sees his rags as Chopin's mazurkas (Bolcom 2009) – something between classical and popular, dance-like music, and they are loved by pianists worldwide, thus recorded frequently. The *Three Ghost Rags* are definitely considered program music because of their descriptive titles. The name of the set and the titles of each piece (*Graceful Ghost Rag, The Poltergeist, Dream Shadows*) are all related to the supernatural and have the same theme. The titles match the mood of the rags, and one

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could say that they are character pieces (the melancholic, the mischievous and the dreamy ghost). In my opinion, program notes might not even be necessary for the audience to grab the essence of the pieces. Regarding performance practices, pianists should consult the sound of the old ragtime recordings and follow the indications of the composers, but also experiment on their own. Tempi are relative too – “NEVER take composer's metronome marks as gospel.” (Bolcom, email to the author, May 11, 2016). Consequently, pianists should aim for the sonorities that sound original and try to master the character of the pieces as convincing as possible. Using the composer’s words, “there is no formula for perfect ragtime. You need to get it in your ear.” (ibid).

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