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Three sonatas for piano by Emma Lou Diemer

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**THREE SONATAS FOR PIANO
BY
EMMA LOU DIEMER**

A Written Document

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts**

In

The School of Music

**by
Chin-Ming Lin
B.F.A., Tunghai University, Taiwan, 2000
M.M., Carnegie Mellon University, 2003
December, 2007**

To my parents

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ABSTRACT

Emma Lou Diemer (1927-), an eclectic, still active American composer, has composed in many different musical genres for both professional and amateur groups. She is well-known for her vocal music *Three Madrigals* (1962) and her *Concerto in One Movement for Piano* (1991), which won Kennedy Center Friedheim Awards in 1992. Diemer's piano music includes pedagogical works as well as concert pieces. Her piano sonatas are sophisticated compositions for piano which combine both advanced technical elements and musical complexities. Of her three piano sonatas, *Piano Sonata No.3* is particularly accessible to listeners. The *Sonata for Piano in One Movement* was submitted successfully for a Fulbright Scholarship for study in Belgium (1952-53) and the *Second Sonata for Piano* won the Missouri Federation of Music Clubs Award (1955). *Piano Sonata No. 3* (2000) is her most recent publication.

The purpose of this project is to provide a stylistic and analytic guide helpful to the preparation and performance of the three sonatas by Diemer. The opening chapter provides a biography of the composer, the following chapter centers on various influences on her compositional style, and her transformation from early Romanticism and Neo-Classicism to her later use of electronic and pop music. The subsequent chapter is an analytical observation of the three sonatas in addition to the particular characteristics of each sonata. The last chapter focuses on performance and interpretive issues.

CHAPTER ONE

EMMA LOU DIEMER: BIOGRAPHY AND MUSIC FOR SOLO PIANO

American composer Emma Lou Diemer was born on November 24, 1927 in Kansas City, Missouri. Her father, George Willis Diemer, was an educator and served as President of Central Missouri State University from 1937 to 1956. Her mother worked for a while as the Director of Christian Education in different churches in Kansas City. Diemer's sister, Dorothy Diemer, was a teacher and writer (Dorothy's texts were often used by Diemer in her vocal music). Her two brothers, George Willis Diemer, Jr. and John Irving Diemer, also chose to become teachers and musicians. They all played the piano some as well as another instrument: Dorothy played flute, George played trumpet, and John played cello. They often played their instruments with their mother at the piano and often sang in the church choir or played in the school orchestra. Diemer grew up in this musical environment, and people discovered her ability to pick up a tune by ear at an early age: at five, she reproduced Paderewski's *Minuet* after several hearings.¹

Before the age of six, Diemer had already started to compose. Her first piano teacher was Mrs. Mabel Payton. Before Diemer learned musical notation, Mrs. Payton transcribed the music onto paper while Diemer played the piano.² Mrs. Payton also provided the earliest opportunities for Diemer to perform as a pianist in public. She had student recitals twice a year and Diemer often participated. When Diemer's father was appointed to the presidency of Central Missouri State Teachers' College in August 1937 (later called Central Missouri State University at Warrensburg, Missouri), she played in a farewell concert for him. The *Kansas City Star* described young Diemer's talent piano and composition activities:

¹ Ellen Grolman Schlegel, *Emma Lou Diemer: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001): 3.

² Schlegel, 3.

Emma Lou, in a pink embroidered dress and with brown curls brushed until they gleamed, could hardly reach the pedals with her small, white-slippered feet on a piano designed for grownups. But the Paderewski came to life with clarity and precision under her small, flying fingers, and McDowell's Shadow Dance was even better. "I like that piece best of all," she confided afterwards. "In fact, I like all music that goes fast."

Emma Lou has been taking piano lessons more than two years. She composed five pieces before she was 7 years old, one of which, called "Church Bells," was used in the Sunday School at the Country Club Christian Church. She desires to play piano all the time when she grows up, and, unlike many children of despairing mothers, does not mind practicing. "I even like scales," she said. "And I don't really mind playing exercises, but I'd rather play real pieces."³

Diemer studied piano and composition continuously throughout her teenage years. In high school she studied piano with Wiktor Labunski, who was the director of the Kansas City Conservatory. She studied organ with Edna Scotten Billings at Central Missouri State University and started to play the organ at church from the age of fourteen. Diemer had her first experience discovering and experimenting with serial music while studying piano with Gardner Read from 1942 to 1943. "During that time I decided to write music that avoided tonality, although I was not familiar with twelve-tone music. So, I wrote my first piece and didn't repeat notes and it sounded very dissonant."⁴ Read also admired Diemer's compositions during that time.

After graduation from high school in 1945, Diemer enrolled at the Eastman School of Music to begin her undergraduate study. Her concentrations included music theory, composition and piano. Although many early compositions have been lost, her first existing solo piano work, *Preludes*, comes from that year. She transferred to Central Missouri State Teachers' College during her sophomore year because her father had developed a new Bachelor of Music program there. However, she did not feel she was receiving the composition training she needed, and the following year went to the Yale School of Music to complete her undergraduate study.

³ Schlegel, 4.

⁴ Jane Weiner LePage, *Women Composers, Conductors, and Musicians of the Twentieth Century Selected Biographies* (NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1980): 55.

As a composition student at Yale, Diemer took piano lessons and purposely chose to study composition with Richard Donovan (1891-1970) even though Paul Hindemith (1895-1963) was also teaching there.⁵ She remembered that “the consensus was that everyone at Yale was writing like Hindemith, and I didn’t want to do that.”⁶ However, Diemer admired Hindemith as a composer and was inspired by his idea of “*Gebrauchsmusik*.”⁷

[Hindemith] had the philosophy of writing music for all kinds of ensembles. And also he had written music for children as well as for professional orchestras. Those two philosophies have followed me all my life – writing a lot of different kinds of music for different [media] on different levels of difficulty.⁸

Hindemith’s other influence on Diemer was his use of counterpoint and Neo-Classicism. Diemer took a theory class in two-part and three-part counterpoint with Hindemith. She stated, “I’ve always been a lover of counterpoint in music, although we don’t really use fugues in the formal sense anymore.”⁹

Diemer’s first piano sonata, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement* (1949), was written during her study at Yale, as along with the *Chromatic Fantasy* (1946), *Piano Suite No. 1* (1947) and the *Second Suite for Piano* (1948). Diemer received both her Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees in composition from Yale in 1949 and 1950 respectively, and soon returned to Warrensburg to teach piano, organ and counterpoint at Northeast Missouri State Teachers’ College in Kirksville, Missouri. She also played organ at the Wornall Road Baptist Church in Kansas City and frequently gave recitals. Thus, she took up the roles of composer, performer (both as pianist

⁵ Emma Lou Diemer, composer’s notes, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*.

⁶ JoAnn Kinghorn Rediger, *Videotaped Interviews with Emma Lou Diemer: Her Compositional and Personal Perspectives*, D.A. diss., Ball State University, 1994, 41.

⁷ Joyanne Jones Outland, *Emma Lou Diemer: Solo and Chamber works for piano through 1986*, D.A. diss., Ball State University, 1986, 4.

⁸ JoAnn Kinghorn Rediger, *Videotaped Interviews with Emma Lou Diemer: Her Compositional and Personal Perspectives*, D.A. diss., Ball State University, 1994, 41.

⁹ Rediger, 42.

and organist), and teacher all at the same time. In Missouri Diemer wrote *Suite No. 1 for Children* and *Suite No. 2 for Children: "At the Zoo;"* both were written in 1952.

The same year Diemer received a Fulbright Scholarship to study piano and composition at the Royal Conservatory in Brussels, Belgium. The *Piano Sonata in One Movement* (1949) was part of her submission for this scholarship.¹⁰ At the Royal Conservatory her piano instructor was André Dumortier, and for composition it was Jean Absil. Diemer's musical mind was stimulated by the high quality of instruction from both of these teachers and also by the cultural atmosphere in Brussels. Her three-movement *Symphony No. 1* was written during this period. After returning to the U.S., she continued her career as composer, teacher and performer. She taught at Annie Wright Seminary/Episcopal Girls School in Tacoma, Washington, where she composed her *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* (1953).

Diemer went back to Warrensburg in 1954 after becoming "tired of living and teaching in private school."¹¹ Between 1954 and 1957, she was a part-time teacher of various subjects in schools around that region. Her *Suite for Orchestra* was written in 1954, and won the Louisville Symphony Orchestra Student's Award in the following year. During those two years, Diemer spent her summers in the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood Institute studying composition with Roger Sessions (1896-1985) and Ernst Toch (1887-1955). She was influenced by Sessions' concept of structure, "using a few ideas to their 'limit,' being able to make the form develop naturally and without any lessening of tension and interest."¹² 1955 was also the year of her first publication, *Toccata for Marimba*. That same year, she also wrote her *Second Sonata for Piano*, which won the Missouri Federation of Music Clubs Award.

¹⁰ Emma Lou Diemer, composer's note, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*.

¹¹ Ellen Grolman Schlegel, *Emma Lou Diemer: a bio-bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001): 10.

¹² Jane Weiner LePage, *Women Composers, Conductors, and Musicians of the Twentieth Century Selected Biographies* (NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1980): A-2.

In 1957, Diemer enrolled in the Ph.D. program at Eastman School of Music to continue her studies in composition. Her teachers were Bernard Rogers (1893-1968) and Howard Hanson (1896-1981). Rogers had a “neoclassical bent”, and she wrote her *Harpsichord Concerto* (1958) under his instruction.¹³ Concurrently, she kept up with her playing of keyboard instruments. While she studied organ with David Craighead, she wrote *Fantasie* for organ (1958). Diemer’s compositions in this period were mostly ensemble works. Her dissertation project was the *Symphony on American Indian Themes*, and its second movement won the 1959 Arthur Benjamin Award for Orchestral Music. Diemer received her Ph.D. in composition from Eastman in 1960.

A year before Diemer’s graduation, she was appointed as Composer-in-Residence for secondary schools in Arlington, Virginia. (The Young Composers’ Program Grant was established by the Ford Foundation and the National Music Council in 1959, and continued until 1973.) She was very prolific in the Young Composers’ Program and her works were highly regarded by the superintendent of the Arlington Public Schools.

We have absorbed Miss Diemer into our system in a very comfortable way. She is definitely part of our staff, as she visits rehearsals, accompanies in rehearsal and performance, talks to students and participates in staff meetings. The teachers and students accept her and appreciate her and have enjoyed playing and singing her compositions. Her acceptance has been...so complete I find it difficult to think of us without her. She is so very competent and so accommodating that she fits into any situation in which we place her.¹⁴

Her pedagogical piano piece, *Time Pictures* (1961), was also written during her Arlington residency.

After the Ford Foundation Young Composers’ Program, Diemer was asked to serve for a year as composer-consultant for two projects were sponsored by the Contemporary Music Project as part of the Music Educators National Conference. Having written for school groups in the previous

¹³ Alexandra Pierce, “Emma Lou Diemer and The Reason for Being,” *American Women Composers News/Forum* 6/1-2 (1986): 5.

¹⁴ Ellen Grolman Schlegel, *Emma Lou Diemer: a bio-bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001): 14-15.

few years, she resumed writing more advanced, lengthy and complex works. *Seven Etudes for Piano* (1965) was one of her post-Arlington works. This set of pieces was written for Stewart Gordon while Diemer served as a part-time piano teacher at the University Of Maryland, College Park. For two years Diemer substituted as a professor of theory and composition at the University Of Maryland, where she became a full-time faculty member in 1967. She taught courses in composition, theory, 18th century counterpoint, contemporary analytical techniques, and orchestration.

In 1971, Diemer took a position as Professor of Theory and Composition at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). During that year she wrote two piano works of intermediate difficulty: *Sound Pictures* and *Four on a Row*. However, her curiosity about and interest in electronic music was the most compelling reason for her acceptance of the position at UCSB, which offered a new opportunity to change her way of creating music. She started to utilize electronic elements as well as other twentieth century piano techniques in her traditional piano works, including the *Toccata for Piano* (1979), *Encore* (1982), *Seven Pieces for Marilyn* (1982), *Space Suite* (1988), and *Adventures in Sound* (1989). At around the same time, she gathered several grants for research in electronic music from UCSB (1973-88) and from the National Endowment for the Arts Composer Fellowship (1980). Her more important contribution was founding the UCSB Electronic Studio, where she served as Associate Director from 1973 to 1983.¹⁵ Today, this lab is called The Center for Research in Electronic Art Technology. Its numerous media and equipment provided a great opportunity for “teaching, artistic production, and research/development activities in the field of electroacoustic music and multimedia arts.” Her important electronic keyboard work from the early part of this period was *Pianoharpsichordorgan*

¹⁵ Cynthia Clark Brown, *Lou Diemer, Composer, Performer, Educator, Church Musician*, D.M.A. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1985, 13.

(1974). Other pieces utilizing electronic devices were *Funfest for Piano and Tape* (1984), *Rite Summer for Piano and Tape* (1986), and *Church Rock for Organ and Tape* (1986).

Diemer was awarded a Certificate of Merit in 1977 from the Yale School of Music Alumni Association for her distinguished contribution to music. Other compositions from roughly the same period were *La Rag* (1981) and *String Quartet No. 1* (1987). *La Rag* was the prize-winning composition in Symposium VII for New Band Music in 1982, sponsored by the Virginia Band Directors National Association. *String Quartet No. 1* was a semi-finalist in the Kennedy Center Friedheim Awards in 1989. From 1990 to 1992, Diemer was the Composer-in-Residence for the Santa Barbara Symphony Orchestra. Her *Concerto in One Movement for Piano* (1991) was premiered by that organization, and won a Kennedy Center Friedheim Award in 1992. The critic Gerald Carpenter wrote:

Diemer's concerto is a substantial and exciting piece of work. I am always startled by the strength and energy of her composition.....her music is unmistakably the work of a decisive and very confident creative mind..... The piece is as full of cross-reference---Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff, Gershwin---as a poem by Pound or Eliot. Yet it is also a true original.¹⁶

Diemer was named "Composer of the Year" by the American Guild of Organists in 1995, and she also received the Mu Phi Award of Merit that same year. Diemer retired as Professor Emeritus from UCSB in 1991. After her retirement she wrote *Three Pieces for Piano* (1991) and *Fantasy for Piano* (1993). Her *Piano Sonata No. 3* was completed in 2000. Diemer considered the third sonata her best among the three.¹⁷ Her latest solo piano works are *Spirituals* (2003) and *Reaching Out* (2004), both designed for intermediate players.

¹⁶ Gerald Carpenter, "The Days Grow Short," *The Santa Barbara Independent*, 5 September 1991, 23.

¹⁷ Diemer Lou Diemer, electronic mail to the writer, February 1, 2007.

Diemer mentioned once that “For better or worse, I want to be like Verdi who wrote into his eighties and was still writing hit operas.”¹⁸ As of this writing, Diemer is working on newly commissioned works, one for choir and one for organ, as well as making a symphonic band version of her marimba concerto. Apparently she is practicing her ideal. Her other project this year (2007) is to edit for publication her sister's late novel and a collection of her poetry.¹⁹

¹⁸ JoAnn Kinghorn Rediger, *Videotaped Interviews with Emma Lou Diemer: Her Compositional and Personal Perspectives*, D.A. diss., Ball State University, 1994, 22.

¹⁹ Diemer, electronic mail to the writer, May 12, 2007.

CHAPTER TWO

COMPOSITIONAL STYLE AND MUSICAL INFLUENCE OF THREE PIANO SONATAS

From the time Diemer decided she wanted to become a composer, at about the age of twelve, she realized that she “didn’t want to be like everyone else”. She said, “I felt that in the music field many musicians were pianists—concert pianists, and although I was a pianist,...I felt I would like to write music as my main interest, rather than playing somebody else’s music all the time.”²⁰ That choice not only made Diemer want to be a composer, but also fostered a unique personal style in her music.

Diemer’s piano sonatas consist of various compositional styles which could be termed early, middle, and late. In each period Diemer had particular interests and influences in terms of compositional devices and musical mediums. In her early style, she adopted characteristics of Romanticism and Neo-classicism; composers such as Brahms, Prokofiev, Stravinsky and Hindemith were important influences. Contact with electronic music infused her musical style with 20th century techniques in the middle period, and the most recent influences have embodied aspects of folk and jazz music. Even so, Diemer’s compositions have never settled into just one technique or one style. She stated:

I like the element of chance in composing. I like to feel I’m not bound by a certain set of rules. I can make my own rules and I always do—sometimes having to do with certain intervals that I’m going to use—certain chord structures. I guess I don’t have a system.²¹

Therefore, her approach to composition can be summed up as a “curiosity about new techniques and ideas, always in the service of creative expressiveness.”²²

²⁰ JoAnn Kinghorn Rediger, *Videotaped Interviews with Emma Lou Diemer: Her Compositional and Personal Perspectives*, D.A. diss., Ball State University, 1994, 24.

²¹ Rediger, 27.

²² Joyanne Jones Outland, *Emma Lou Diemer: Solo and Chamber works for piano through 1986*, D.A. diss., Ball State University, 1986, 7.

Diemer often feels that her composition style “bounced back and forth between the neo-Classic ideal, believing it is the most durable, and the neo-Romantic, believing it is the most personal.”²³ Neo-Classicism and neo-Romanticism are equally important components in her three piano sonatas. However, each of them is presented in its own way. Diemer has mentioned that her favorite composers included Bach, Brahms and Prokofiev. She likes Bach “for his complexity of writing” and Brahms “for his rich harmony.”²⁴ She also has said:

I’ve always liked the music of Prokofiev because he’ll start off in one key and then almost immediately changes key.²⁵ He just changes key all of a sudden and there’s no long modulation.²⁶

When she composed the first piano sonata, she was playing Prokofiev’s 7th sonata for piano. She described her first sonata as “dramatic and bold, with a Brahmsian sweep of range and texture” (Example 2.1).²⁷ Thus, elements featured in the first sonata are chordal textures, expansive keyboard range, and tonal sonority, all incased in a clear ternary form.



Example 2.1. Diemer, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm. 49-54

Prokofiev’s influence on Diemer’s harmonic language is noticeable in the harmonic shifts without modulation between phrases (Example 2.2) and nearly pervasive bi-tonality between

²³ Jan Durant, *Five Twentieth-Century Women Composers*, M.M. diss., University of Texas at San Antonio, 1988, 27.

²⁴ JoAnn Kinghorn Rediger, *Videotaped Interviews with Emma Lou Diemer: Her Compositional and Personal Perspectives*, D.A. diss., Ball State University, 1994, 42.

²⁵ Rediger, 58.

²⁶ Rediger, 91.

²⁷ Emma Lou Diemer, composer’s note, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*.

hands (Example 2.3). Example 2.3 also demonstrates the use of thirds again influenced by Prokofiev. Pianistically speaking, Diemer imported a percussive approach, and uses *staccato* and motoric gestures taken from Prokofiev's style.



Example 2.2. Diemer, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm. 224-229

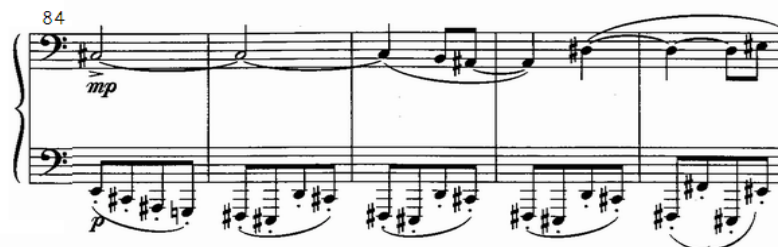


Example 2.3. Diemer, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm. 151-155

Formally, this sonata is logically constructed using two main ideas, an ascending first theme (Example 2.4) and a march-like second theme (Example 2.5).



Example 2.4. Diemer, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm. 1-6, first theme



Example 2.5. Diemer, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm. 84-88, second theme

These two ideas are developed in all of the subsequent material.²⁸ The sonority, texture and chromaticism are representative of Diemer's mixture of Neo- Classicism and Neo-Romanticism.

As mentioned in the first chapter, Diemer did not want to be under that spell of Hindemith at Yale, however, she admitted:

After two years at Yale elements of that style crept into certain aspect of my writing and are there to this day—since I do like logic and clarity along with a certain amount of spontaneity.²⁹

The opening of the second piano sonata proves the above statement and shows the “clarity” of her classical sound. It starts with a two-part homophonic texture with an *alberti bass* in the accompaniment, which is reminiscent of so much classical music (Example 2.6a), and adopts the idea of the *Second Piano Sonata* by Paul Hindemith (Example 2.6b).



Example 2.6a. Diemer, *Second Sonata for Piano*, I, mm. 1-4



Example 2.6b. Hindemith, *Sonata No. 2 for Piano*, I, mm. 1-6

This sonata displays an arched sonata form in the first movement and a variation form in the second movement. The *Second Sonata for Piano* is a model of Neo-Classicism with its significant

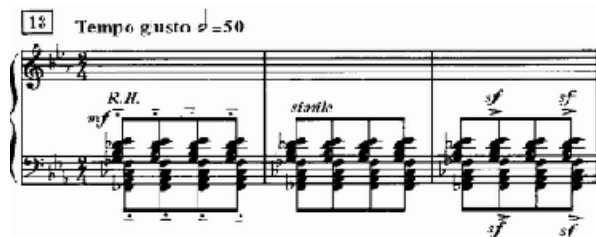
²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

references to traditional genres and forms, in particular the inclusion of a movement in the form of a fugue. Besides the influence of the Neo-Classicism of Hindemith, the repetitive chordal texture in the second variation evokes other twentieth century composers, especially Bartok and Stravinsky, whom Diemer acknowledged explicitly. Example 2.7 demonstrates dissonant chordal gestures and a general percussiveness often seen in Stravinsky's Music (Example 2.8).



Example 2.7. Diemer, *Second Sonata for Piano*, II, mm. 57-61, second variation



Example 2.8. Stravinsky, *Rite of Spring*

When Diemer participated in an interview with Michael Barone on the Minnesota Public Radio program “Pipedreams” she commented that she “tends to include in her own compositions those elements that she greatly admires in the music of others; that is, creative use of rhythm and melody.”³⁰ Diemer likes Stravinsky’s “musical freshness” and remarked that:

The most important element in his [Stravinsky’s] music is rhythm, even in his twelve-tone music. I would hope that running through my music is this interest in melody, rhythm, and structure.³¹

³⁰ Ellen Grolman Schlegel, “Emma Lou Diemer: A Consummate Musician,” IAWM. Accessed 30 April. Available at http://www.iawm.org/articles_html/schlegel_diemer.html.

³¹ JoAnn Kinghorn Rediger, *Videotaped Interviews with Emma Lou Diemer: Her Compositional and Personal Perspectives*, D.A. diss., Ball State University, 1994, 71.

The other composer that should be mentioned here is Khachaturian, who provided Diemer's first attraction to music.

I remember the first music that really caught my fancy in high school was Russian music. It was a piece by Khachaturian [1903-1978], a Toccata that I learned to play and that appealed to me because of its color and its idiomatic use of the piano and just the general drive and intensity of the music. . . . Other music I have liked has been music by Poulenc [1899-1963] and Shostakovich [1906-1975], and some of the more contemporary composers that have color, melody, rhythm and that is immediately accessible and yet [a] bit banal. I think that banality is something that one tries to avoid.³²

Diemer's favorite composers are similar in that they are all "spontaneous in the sense that it immediately gives you something to remember as far as the melody goes—the melodic line—sometimes the rhythm of the music."³³ This element of spontaneity will especially influence her last sonata for piano.

In the 1970's Diemer's compositional style switched direction by moving towards electronic music; that development categorized much of her middle period and is also a feature of her last piano sonata. Her most famous piece, the *Toccata* (1979) for solo piano, as well as being the most often performed, is based on this new medium. It combines Minimalism from electronic music as well as experimental twentieth-century piano techniques. Harmonically, the *Toccata* is one of Diemer's few atonal works. She couples repetitive patterns and non-traditional piano techniques from the 20th century in this piece, for example: placing hand on the strings, depressing the key with the arm, patting the strings, and glissando on the strings with fingernails. Prior to her last piano sonata, she had written two concert pieces applying these devices, *Encore* (1982) and *Fantasy* (1993), both of which are highly chromatic and virtuosic. Here follow two examples which demonstrate this style in Diemer's third sonata for piano. Example 2.9 is an

³² Rediger, 42.

³³ Ibid.

imitation of digital sound while Example 2.10 is more reminiscent of new age music.

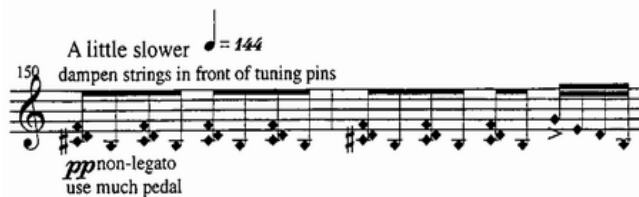


Example 2.9. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, I, mm. 30-33



Example 2.10. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, I, mm. 112-115

The experimental twentieth-century piano technique applied here is to “dampen strings in front of pins” (Example 2.11).



Example 2.11. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, III, mm. 150-151

In spite of Diemer’s fondness for Bach’s complexity, she is also capable of using a simple Bach-derived subject in her composition. The opening theme from the *Serenade/ Toccata* movement resembles the *C major Two-part Invention* by Bach (Example 2.12a and 2.12b).



Example 2.12a. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, I, mm. 1-2



Example 2.12b. Bach, *Two-part Invention in C major*, mm1-2

Diemer's preference for older music can also be seen in other pieces with titles such as "Suite," "Toccata," "Fantasy," "Preludes," as well as her most well-known vocal pieces, "Madrigals."

Another important tenet that influenced Diemer's third sonata was a philosophy taken from Hindemith that a composer "should be able to write for the non-professional as well as professional, to write easy as well as difficult music, and should be able to make all of it interesting to the performer and the listener."³⁴ She admired people who could write quality music for professional groups as well as quality music for beginners. She cited Mozart and Beethoven as being this type of composer and encouraged current composers to take up the challenge. In addition, among all the great composers, she found that "composers like Bach, Britten, Copland, Stravinsky and Debussy all had influences from many styles, even nationalities. Most of them have elements of folk music in their music. In America, that often means jazz".³⁵

This illustrates the musical thinking in Diemer's late period – a combination of styles or "eclecticism". Diemer listens to jazz music and ethnic music. She likes to hear "what is in the contemporary field."³⁶ She mentioned that she has always liked jazz and 'big band' music and what is derived from them: Gershwin, Copland, and Ravel.³⁷ Needless to say, from the title of the final movement, "*Tango Fantastique*," the third sonata exemplifies her interest in popular music. In addition the opening of the second movement uses sonorities of the open 9th and 2nd

³⁴ Diemer, *Backward and Forward Looking*, *ILWC Journal* (1993):11.

³⁵ JoAnn Kinghorn Rediger, *Videotaped Interviews with Emma Lou Diemer: Her Compositional and Personal Perspectives*, D.A. diss., Ball State University, 1994, 35.

³⁶ Rediger, 43.

³⁷ Philip Todd Westgate, *Selected Organ Works of Emma Lou Diemer*, D.M.A. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1994, A-2.

found so often in Copland's music (Example 2.13).



Example 2.13. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, II, m. 1

Harmonically, the third piano sonata has the most consonant sonorities of the three; perhaps to comply with the philosophy of writing music for both sophisticated musicians and amateur listeners. Diemer did not want to write something too inharmonious, and she believed that after decades of 12 tone and atonal music “tonality gives the listeners a sense of stability and calm” to return to.³⁸

Speaking of the piano idiomatically, Diemer compared her piano music to that of Ravel. In her piano sonata writing, she frequently uses parallelism in chord progressions and hand motions. And, as stated before, for her, structure is the key to composition.

I'd like be closer to Ravel at this point, because of the emphasis on tone color that you can create on the piano—chords and sonorities and various ranges and a kind of less use of melody. You don't find many long melodies in Ravel – or Debussy even. You have more color. But structure has always been very important to me in music and always will be whether it's electronic or whatever it is. The structure –what you do with your ideas and how you develop them.³⁹

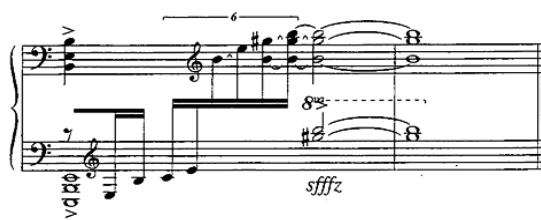
Example 2.14 illustrates this idiom of Ravel's parallelism and whole tone sonority, and Example 2.15a simply reminds one of the brilliant ending from Ravel's *Sonatine* (Example 2.15b).

³⁸ JoAnn Kinghorn Rediger, *Videotaped Interviews with Emma Lou Diemer: Her Compositional and Personal Perspectives*, D.A. diss., Ball State University, 1994, 74.

³⁹ Rediger, 61.



Example 2.14. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, III, mm. 322-323



Example 2.15a. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, III, mm. 334-335



Example 2.15b. Ravel, *Sonatine*, III, ending

CHAPTER THREE

FORMAL ANALYTIC OBSERVATIONS

Sonata for Piano in One Movement

The *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, Diemer's first piano sonata, was completed at Yale University in November 1949. It is filled with romantic musical gestures influenced by Prokofiev and Brahms. The tonal center in this one-movement sonata is E major with considerable E minor color, which is indicated by both an octave in the low bass in measure 2 and the E major triad at the end of the work. The composition displays a free sonata form built on two main themes and their intervallic structure unifies this piece.

Exposition

The exposition consists of a broad chordal first theme, a march-like second theme, and a closing theme which explores a wide keyboard range, sometimes over six octaves. The first theme, a long phrase of eleven measures in a moderately slow tempo, contains an ascending eight-note motive (a) and provides the most fundamental intervals in this piece: major and minor seconds, augmented fourths and perfect fourths (Example 3.1a). Example 3.1b illustrates the most important developmental method of this sonata: varying the thematic materials with the identical intervallic relationships originating in the primary theme.

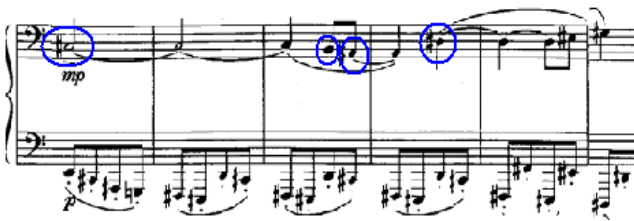
Example 3.1a. Diemer, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm. 1-6, first theme



Example 3.1b. Diemer, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm. 33-37

Example 3.1 and 3.2 demonstrate another important gesture: the sustained bass and long harmonic rhythm, which recurs significantly in Diemer's music.

The march-like second theme is in a slightly faster tempo and characterized by a low and dark sonority created by placing both hands in the bass clef. Harmonically, the second theme is presented neither in the dominant (key of B) nor in the relative major (key of G), but begins instead in a remote key, f-sharp minor (Example 3.2).



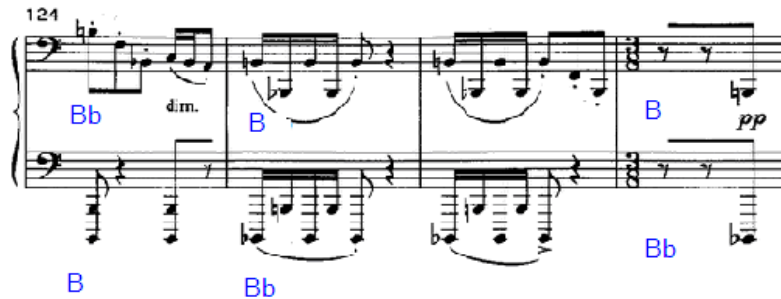
Example 3.2. Diemer, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm. 84-88, second theme

The second theme is modified repeatedly in this movement. For example, in its altered form in measure 102, in which the right hand plays octaves in the treble clef, the rhythmic pattern is subtly changed in both hands, and the key is lowered a half step to f minor (Example 3.3). The second theme also utilizes the same intervallic method as the first theme.



Example 3.3. Diemer, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm. 102-104, consequent of the second theme

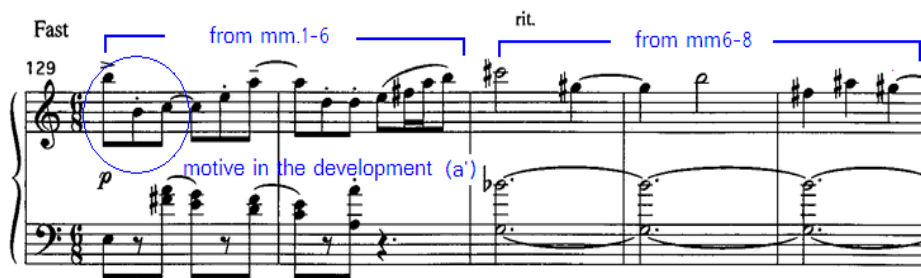
The closing section comes after the second theme in m.116 in the combined keys of B and B-flat. This combination gradually takes on the dominant function of the E major tonality. The exposition ends with an unresolved conflict between the B and B-flat (Example 3.4).



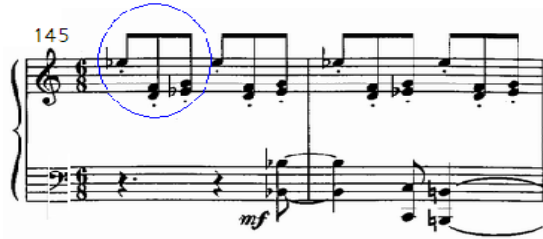
Example 3.4. Diemer, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm. 121-124, closing theme

Development

The development also consists of two contrasting sections. The tempo marking in the first development section indicates *Fast* as the fastest tempo within the entire sonata. This fast section of the development has a 6/8 time signature which specifies the musical pulse of the eighth-note, twice as fast as the quarter-note pulse in the exposition. Again, Diemer manipulates the intervallic relationship (Example 3.5), in which motive a' is altered and adapted from the first theme. Motive a' is constantly used, and Example 3.5a and 3.5b illustrate the reoccurrence of this figure a few more times.



Example 3.5. Diemer, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm. 129-132, the opening in the development

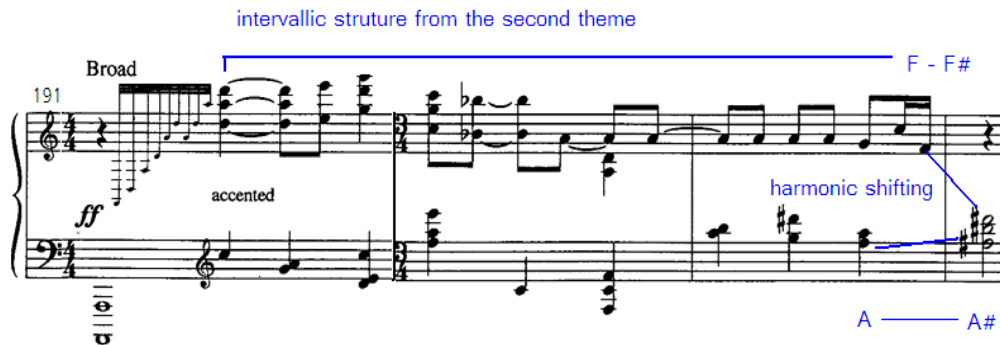


Example 3.5a. Diemer, *Sonata in One Movement*, mm. 145-146, varied a'



Example 3.5b. Diemer, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm. 156-159, varied a'

In the succeeding section of the development, the material of the second theme is transformed into a slow and chordal texture. It starts in e minor, but most of the time the harmony either shifts up or down a semi-tone or is bi-tonal (Example 3.6).




Example 3.6. Diemer, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm. 191-194, second section in the development

Recapitulation

Thematic transformation is also used in the recapitulation, which starts with the contrapuntal and tranquil return of the first theme (Example 3.7). The second theme returns, without changing its character, in the remote key of G-sharp major. The use of bi-tonality is seen throughout the rest of this piece.

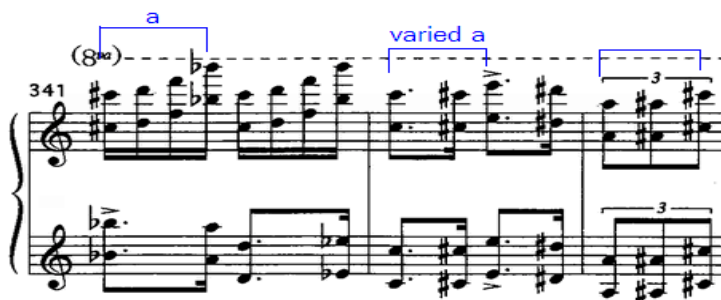


Example 3.7. Diemer, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm. 220-223, first theme in the recapitulation

The closing theme in the recapitulation is nearly omitted, only the rhythmic element  subtly remains. This reminiscence of the closing theme functions as a link to the coda and stabilizes the harmony with a strong E major V-I cadence (Example 3.8). The coda brings back the ascending motive (a) in a cadenza-like chromatic passage with brilliant double octaves in both hands (Example 3.9), and the work comes to a close on an E major chord.



Example 3.8. Diemer, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm. 317-321, closing theme to coda



Example 3.9. Diemer, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm. 341-343, motive a in the coda

Table 3.1. The form of *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*

Section	Theme	Measure numbers	Key center
Exposition	Theme I	1-57	E minor →
	Transition	58-83	G minor →
	Theme II	84-115	F# minor→
	Closing theme	116-128	B major/minor→
Development	1 st theme material	129-190	E minor →
	2 nd theme material	191-219	A minor →
Recapitulation	Theme I	220-271	E minor →
	Transition	272-288	B minor→
	Theme II	289-320	G# minor→
	Coda	321-351	E major

Summary of Sonata for Piano in One Movement

This sonata has a clear tonal center (E) and uses chromaticism and bitonality. The compositional technique of motivic development and thematic transformation are both used in this piece. The first theme is lyrically transformed in the recapitulation, and the ascending motive (a) is manipulated in many places. The sudden harmonic shifts, the utilization of extreme registers on the keyboard, and great contrapuntal sections and multiple voice passages evoke the style of Brahms and Prokofiev.

Second Sonata for Piano

The *Second Sonata for Piano* was composed in 1955 at Diemer's home in Warrensburg, Missouri. Unlike her first sonata, which was a school and competition work, Diemer wrote her second sonata because of her own interest in the piano sonata. It embraces characteristics similar to the first sonata in terms of harmonic language and intervallic application. In the notes to the *Second Sonata for Piano*, Diemer wrote that the macro and micro structure are all-important,

with much attention paid intuitively to themes and motives and form.⁴⁰ In addition she explained the following

“Macro” structure is the overall form, the first movement being in sonata form, the second movement (after the introduction) being in variation form. “Micro” structure has to do with the motives from the themes. These motives keep recurring in various guises and are used for development. In this way, the music is supposed to unfold logically and in a unified manner.⁴¹

This neo-classical work has two movements. The first *Moderate Fast* movement is sonata-form and the second movement, *Fast, relentless*, is a variation form, with a *Slow, Ponderous* introduction. The sonata form in the first movement is explicit, and the variation technique in the second movement makes it the most complicated movement in Diemer’s piano sonata writing.

Movement I: *Moderate Fast*

This sonata-form movement is relatively conventional - as compared to the first sonata- except for its use of an arched form: the second theme returns before the first theme in the recapitulation. The key center is B-flat major in this movement, but there is no key signature in either the first or second movement.

Exposition

The first theme states its Bb major tonality unequivocally in the first measure. In the first two measures the right hand performs the two main motives of this movement: the four ascending notes (a) and the turned-figure (b) (Example 3.10). A two-part texture and Alberti bass govern the first theme (A), which instantly suggests the neo-classical style with the appearance of a four-bar phrase.

⁴⁰ Emma Lou Diemer, composers’ note, *Second Piano Sonata*.

⁴¹ Diemer, electronic mail to the writer, 10 August, 2007.



Example 3.10. Diemer, *Second Sonata for Piano*, first movement, mm. 1-4, first theme
The transition to the second theme (B) combines the opening motive (a) with another figure (c) from measure 13 (Example 3.11).



Example 3.11. Diemer, *Second Sonata for Piano*, first movement, mm. 13-15, link to transition.

As expected, the second theme (B) is in the key of F with a contrasting texture to the first theme. It abandons the *alberti bass* and presents a slowly moving two-part texture (Example 3.12).



Example 3.12. Diemer, *Second Sonata for Piano*, first movement, mm. 35-37

The second theme is followed by a closing, chordal-textured theme (C). Example 3.13 demonstrates the ascending eighth-note motive (a) which reoccurs in its original and inverted form in Theme C. The operation of combining motives and their inversion provides the main

material for the transition and development of this movement.

closing theme
express.

semi-legato

D/d: b---a---g---f#

f---e---d---c

g---a---b-flat---c

e---f#---g#---a

Example 3.13. Diemer, *Second Sonata for Piano*, first movement, mm. 46-49, closing theme

Development

The closing theme (C) functions as a bridge to the development which starts with the opening thematic element in tonic. In the development, the materials alternate between motive (a), (b) and (c) (Example 3.14), basically using the first theme and its shortened version, as well as the augmentation of the first theme. Also, as seen in the *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, the rhythm of two against three is used.

from measure 3

mp Semi-leg.

b

Example 3.14. Diemer, *Second Sonata for Piano*, first movement, mm.92-94, development

Recapitulation

There is a passage before the recapitulation in which the altered first theme seems to be reintroduced by a distorted ascending motive (a). This procedure suggests a false recapitulation. The real recapitulation starts with the second theme in B-flat major (Example 3.15). Even though the texture here is quite different from the exposition, the well-built Bb major tonic makes the recapitulation identical to measure 130. Afterwards, the harmony unexpectedly shifts from B-flat major down to A major where it remains for a long period of time even as the closing theme

reoccurs in measure 137. The closing theme links the key back to Bb major tonic at measure 162 with the first theme finally retaking its place in the coda.



Example 3.15. Diemer, *Second Sonata for Piano*, first movement, mm.128-133, recapitulation
This movement begins and ends with the same first theme material (A). Example 3.16 shows that the last phrase completely recalls the first phrase from the beginning of this movement.



Example 3.16. Diemer, *Second Sonata for Piano*, first movement, mm.164-167, coda

Table 3.2. The formal outline for the first movement

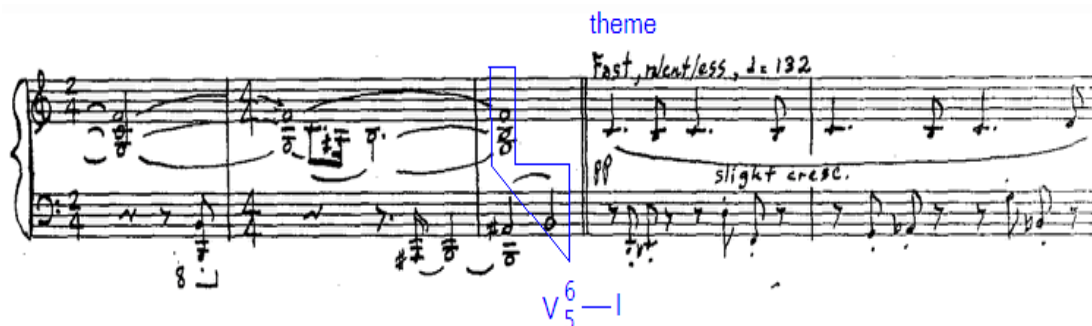
Section	Theme	Motive	mm	Key center
Exposition	Theme I (A)	a, b	1-13	Bb major
	Transition	C	14-34	→
	Theme II (B)		35-45	F major
	Closing theme (C)	A'	46-59	D major/minor
Development	Theme I	a, b, c	60-129	Bb major→
Recapitulation	Theme II (B)		130-136	Bb major
	Closing (C)	A'	137-151	A major/minor
	Coda (A)	a, b	162-end	Bb major

Movement II: *Slow, Ponderous –Fast, Relentless*

The second movement is divided into two sections and both of them incorporate much contrapuntal texture. The first slow section functions as an introduction as well as a connecting passage between movements one and two. Diemer describes this introductory section as “dramatic and rather declamatory”⁴² (Example 3.17).



Example 3.17. Diemer, *Second Sonata for Piano*, second movement, mm.1-3, introduction
Harmonically, the key center is B minor, which is stated by the pedal tone of the opening chord. However, at the end of the first section, this B minor melds into a G major seventh chord and becomes a dominant seventh first inversion chord of C: V_5^6 (Example 3.18).



Example 3.18. Diemer, *Second Sonata for Piano*, second movement, mm.22-26, dominant seventh cadence–theme in tonic

The second section is comprised of a theme and five variations. The theme starts with a two-part texture in the middle range of the piano and gradually becomes more complicated by increasing the range and shortening the note values. Example 3.18 also shows that the theme borrows the elements of the interval of a second and dotted rhythm from the introduction.

⁴² Emma Lou Diemer, composer's note, *Second Piano Sonata*.

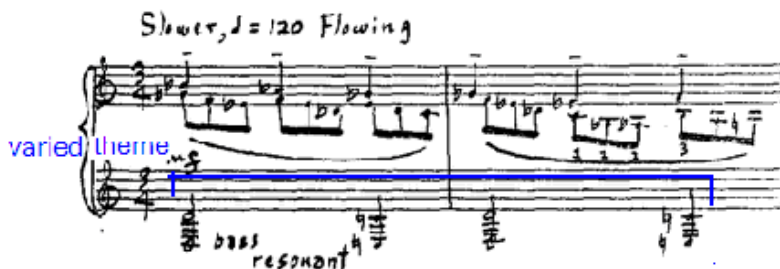
The first variation starts on an E-flat minor sonority, and the texture is extended into octaves. Furthermore, the register is enlarged gradually until the end of this variation (Example 3.19). This variation is the shortest and soon leads to the next variation which exploits extremes of the keyboard range.



Example 3.19. Diemer, *Second Sonata for Piano*, second movement, mm.45-47, first variation

The second variation has already been introduced in chapter two; it contains a Stravinsky-like chordal and rhythmic texture. It features the characteristic of an off-beat accent; harmonically, the key of A minor gradually emerges.

The following variation deviates from the trochaic rhythmic idea. The value of the thematic note is augmented in the left hand with a triplet-counterpoint in the right hand (Example 3.20). Harmonically, it starts in F minor and returns to tonic (c minor) in measures 106 to 114. However, instead of staying in the tonic, the theme continues its harmonic journey and finally reaches a new key, D minor, at the end of this variation.

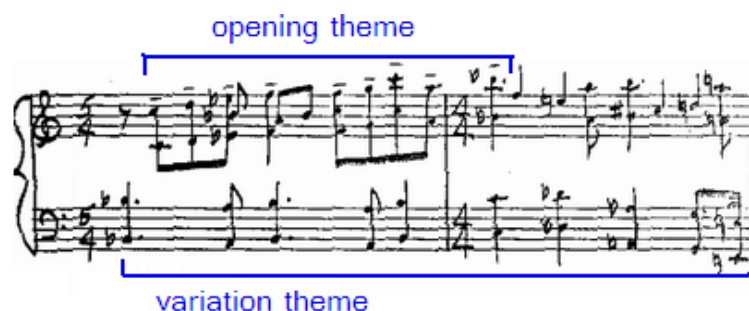


Example 3.20. Diemer, *Second Sonata for Piano*, second movement, mm.84-85, third variation, varied theme in the L.H.

The fourth variation continues the diversification process: the meter is 7/8, the key is Db major (Example 3.21). The final variation is a fugue in the tonic key which recalls the opening theme from the first movement in mm.182-183 as a countersubject (Example 3.22).



Example 3.21. Diemer, *Second Sonata for Piano*, second movement, mm. 131-132, fourth variation, varied theme in the R.H.



Example 3.22. Diemer, *Second Sonata for Piano*, second movement, mm. 182-183, fugal variation

Table 3.3. The formal outline for the variation movement

Section	Mm	Key center	Meter	Character
Introduction	1-24	B minor	5/4, 4/4 3/4	Declamatory
Theme	25-44	C minor	4/4, 5/4	Trochee
Variation 1	45-56	Eb minor	4/4	Trochee, orchestral and extended
Variation 2	57-83	A minor	4/4, 3/4, 2/4	Chordal, percussive, staccato
Variation 3	84-130	F minor	3/4	Triplets, octave theme in the low bass
Variation 4	131-149	Db major	7/8	Arpeggio accompaniment
Variation 5	150-208	C minor	4/4	Fugue in three voices

Summary of *Second Sonata for Piano*

The *Second Sonata for Piano* is a two-movement work based on traditional forms: sonata form and variation. Harmonically it is highly chromatic and dissonant. Even though the Second Sonata is complicated, the compositional techniques as well as the diversity of materials and energy level are fairly conservative in comparison to the first sonata.⁴³ Nevertheless, for Diemer all of the compositional procedures are usually “intuitive rather than analytical.” She said, “If it isn’t intuitive, the writing can be very mechanical — anathema to composing music!”⁴⁴

Piano Sonata No. 3

Piano Sonata No. 3 is a three-movement work written between 1996 and 2000. This sonata is the only sonata with a title for each movement. The first movement, *Serenade/Toccata*, was originally a self-contained work and published as such in October 1996. The third movement, *Tango Fantastique*, was written in May 1999, and the second movement, *Interlude*, was completed in April 2000. *Serenade/Toccata* was premiered by Kathleen Murray in January 1999 at the Festival of Contemporary Piano Music at Lawrence University, Appleton, WI, and recorded by Joan DeVee Dixon Broyles on RBW Recording. She also premiered the complete sonata at the Festival of Women Composers International at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in March, 2001. A recording of the complete sonata was released by pianist Nancy Boston in 2006.

The style of writing in *Piano Sonata No. 3* includes several similar gestures to Diemer’s early sonatas, such as using major/minor key juxtaposition, bitonality, and modality as well as sectional form, long harmonic rhythm and harmonic shifts. The range on the keyboard is

⁴³ Diemer herself critiqued this sonata as her “least inspiring among three,” February 1 2007, electronic mail to the writer.

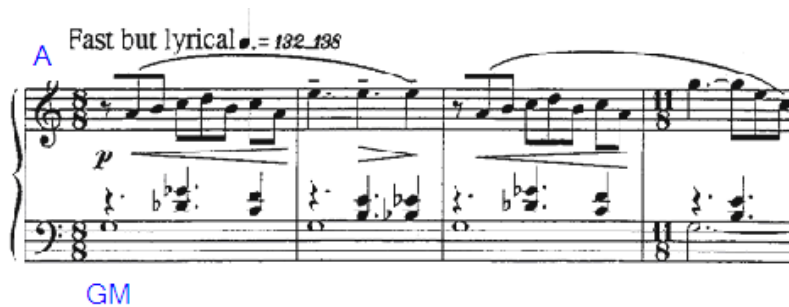
⁴⁴ Emma Lou Diemer, electronic mail to writer, 10 august 2007.

extremely extended in this sonata, and it contains the most colorful pianistic writing among the three sonatas.

Serenade/Toccata

Serenade/Toccata was written for Carol Dvoran-Lancaster, a pianist and pedagogue in Los Angeles. She asked for “the work to be colorful, rhythmic, expressive, and not too discordant.”⁴⁵ Diemer considered Lancaster’s enormous sensitivity to lyricism, rhythm, and pianistic color in writing this piece. This three-movement sonata is not at all avant-garde and has no extreme dissonances, again respecting Ms. Lancaster’s wishes.⁴⁶

Serenade/Toccata consists of six main sections including a partial recapitulation of the opening theme in the fifth section. Double bar lines divide all the important sections. Characteristically, the title “*Serenade*” and “*Toccata*” directly describes the essential facets of this piece. The opening lyrical theme (A) reflects the nature of the serenade (Example 3.23), and gradually develops into an emphatic toccata by repeating the rhythmic pattern of 3+3+2 in perpetual motion.



Example 3.23. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Serenade/Toccata, mm. 1-4, first section, Theme A

⁴⁵ Pamela Sue Haynes, “Emma Lou Diemer: Solo-piano Compositions of the Last Decade,” Ph. D. diss., University of Kansas, 2000, 18.

⁴⁶ Emma Lou Diemer, composer’s note, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, (Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania: Hildegard Publishing Company, 2001).

Theme A is unambiguously in the key of G major, where it remains whenever it reoccurs later. A jazzy style is conveyed in the descending chords in the middle voice. This harmonic accompaniment is associated with thematic reoccurrences a few more times in this movement as well as later movements (Example 3.23 a-d).



Example 3.23 a. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Serenade/Toccata, mm. 3-5



Example 3.23 b. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Serenade/Toccata, mm. 65-66



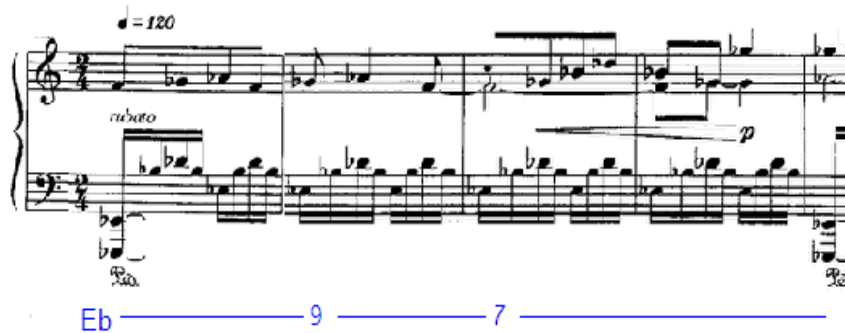
Example 3.23 c. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Interlude, mm. 45



Example 3.23 d. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Tango Fantastique, mm. 52-53

Additionally, a slight change is made each time when Theme A returns. For example, the character of Theme A is changed by the indication of “more aggressive” in its first return in measure 203 and in a reiteration in measure 283 with a tiny variation in the recapitulation.

The second section starts on measure 133,⁴⁷ which introduces Theme B with a sixteenth note figure in the accompaniment (Example 3.24). Two separate passages in the second section are distinguished by use of a pedal tone, Eb and D respectively; and both passages are built on the dominant seventh and ninth chord harmonies. The end of the second passage holds a long pedal tone on B.



Example 3.24. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Serenade/Toccata, mm.133-137, second section, Theme B

According to Diemer, the third section starts when “the main theme returns more insistently” in measure 203. It functions as a transition to the next thematic variation in measure 232.⁴⁸ This transition section abandons the second section material and brings Theme A back instead. Theme A comes once again in its complete version and then gradually is compressed into a shortened fragment. The articulation in this rhythmic and percussive variation is “very detached” and “accented” (Example 3.25).

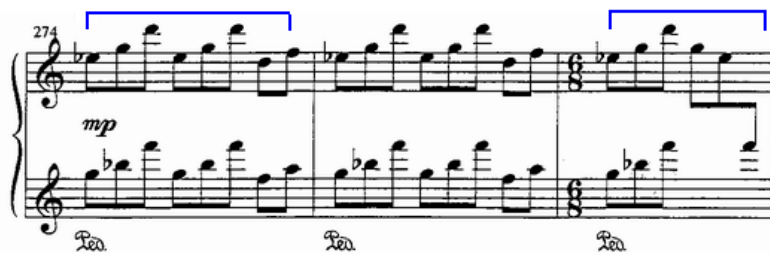
⁴⁷ Emma Lou Diemer, composer’s note, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, (Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania: Hildegard Publishing Company, 2001).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

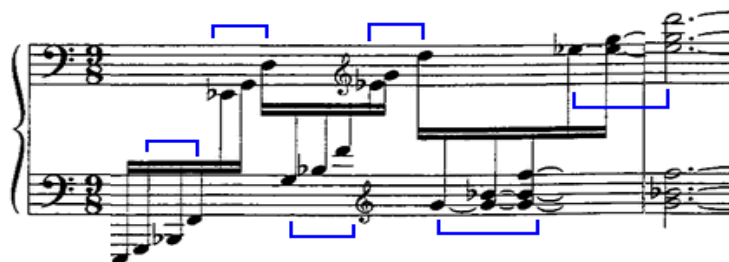


Example 3.25. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Serenade/Toccata, mm.232-234, fourth section

The technique in this variation section includes the procedure of shortening, fragmenting, and the reversing of theme A as well as the addition of grace notes. The fourth section ends with its smallest rhythmic component, sixteenth notes (Example 3.26a and 3.26b). In addition to that, the sixteenth-note arpeggio serves as transitional material and is used in all three movements (Example 3.27a and 3.27b).



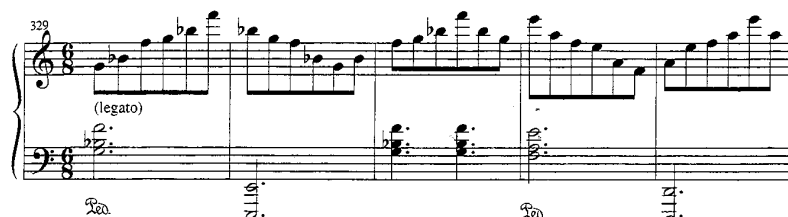
Example 3.26a. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Serenade/Toccata, mm.274-276, varied theme in the fourth section



Example 3.26b. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Serenade/Toccata, mm.280-281, varied theme at the end of the fourth section



Example 3.27a. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Serenade/Toccata, mm.97-100, transition to second theme



Example 3.27b. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Serenade/Toccata, mm. 329-333, transition to the Coda

The opening theme returns in its original form and makes up the fifth section, a recapitulation starting in measure 283 only with Theme B of the second section omitted. The recapitulation and coda reflects a similar procedure as the third to the fourth sections: toward the end of each subsequent section the music becomes more percussive and greatly increases the use of the keyboard range. The 3+3+2 rhythmic pattern carries on in perpetual motion featuring the style of *toccata*.

The bridge to the coda (Example 3.28) starts with a wide six-octave range on the piano very softly (*pp*) and progressively brings both hands back to the middle register. The coda starts in measure 362 featuring a condensed version of the theme.



Example 3.28. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Serenade/Toccata, mm.343-345, link to the coda

The extreme use of the keyboard range can be found again at the end of the coda, where both hands appear either close together in the lowest register or in a span of over six octaves. Furthermore, the coda reminds one of Stravinskian clusters, texture, and sound consisting of seconds, thirds, fourths, fifths (Example 3.29 a and 3.29 b), as the harmony moves in a cycle of fifths in the bass.

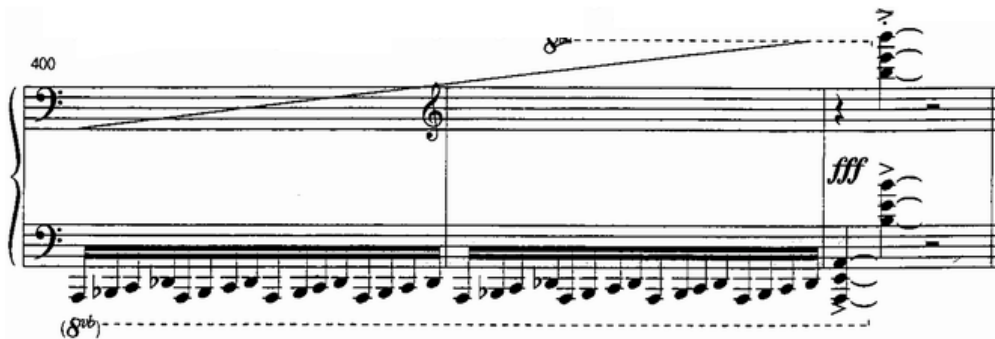


Example 3.29 a. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Serenade/Toccata, mm.362



Example 3.29 b. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Serenade/Toccata, mm. 383

By the end of this movement one no longer hears the G major tonic key. A long glissando on an A minor 9th chord closes this movement, which can also be perceived, because of a held pedal, as a combination of A minor chord (A-C-E) and a G minor diminished triad (G-Bb-Db) (Example 3.30).



Example 3.30. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Serenade/Toccata, mm 400-402, the end

Table 3.4. The form of *Serenade/Toccata*

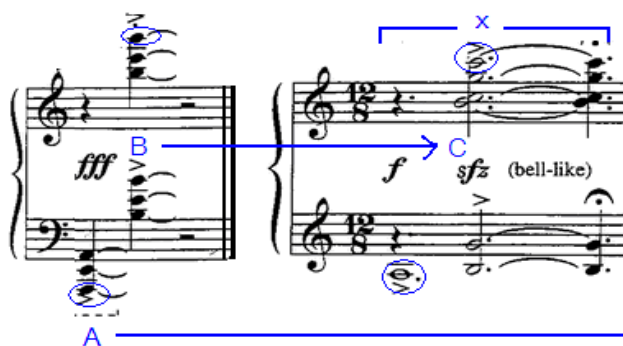
Section	I	II	III	IV	V	Coda
	Exposition		Development		Recapitulation	
measure	1-132	133-188	189- 232	233-282	283- 362	362 to the end
Theme	A	B	A'	A''	A	(varied A)
Key	G Major → f	Eb → D→	C#→G→D→	Bb→	G →	C → A

Interlude

Interlude is a short movement that serves as a bridge between the first and third movements.

Diemer stated in an interview with Pamela Sue Haynes:

I played particularly the ending of *Serenade/Toccata* and suddenly found myself playing a beginning for *Interlude*: a rather percussive sounding of a chord also in A. As the piece developed, it echoed the eight-note groupings of *Serenade/Toccata* and motives that occur in *Tango Fantastique*.⁴⁹



Example 3.31. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, ending of *Serenade/Toccata* and *Interlude*, motive x, mm. 1-2

Example 3.31 demonstrates the opening motive (x) of *Serenade/Toccata* and how the chords relate to each other between movements. Although in very distant registers, the bass remains on A while the top voice has in B moving to C. The key of the second movement, C major, is introduced subtly by a step-wise motion, A → B → C.

⁴⁹ Pamela Sue Haynes, “Emma Lou Diemer: Solo-piano Compositions of the Last Decade,” Ph. D. diss., University of Kansas, 2000, 21.

The other two important motives Diemer mentioned are provided in Example 3.32a and 3.32b. They are the rhythmic reminders (3+3+2) from the *Serenade/Toccata* movement (y) and a melodic anticipation of the *Tango Fantastique* movement (z).



Example 3.32a. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Interlude, motive y, mm. 7-9



Example 3.32b. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Interlude, motive b, mm. 21-22

There are five sections which constitute an arch form structure in this movement (A B C B' A'). Section A consists of the opening bell-like motive a followed by 3+3+2 motive y. Section B has the chordal texture in a key of G (Example 3.33a) and ends with the melodic idea from Tango movement (motive z). A left hand *Ostinato* also functions as a distinctive accompanying pattern.



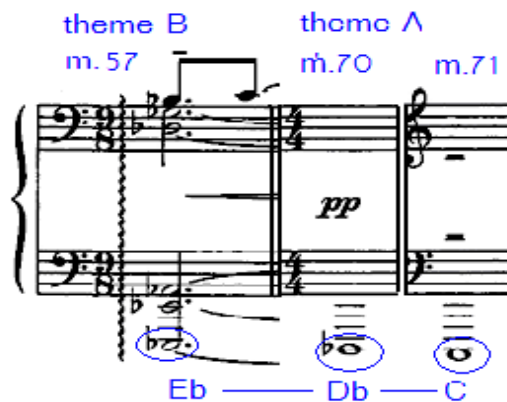
Example 3.33a. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Interlude, theme B, mm. 11-12

In spite of the fact that this movement adopts its harmonic language from the first movement, the interval of a sixth is frequently heard. These parallel sixths accompany motive (z) in the left hand (Example 3.33b) in the middle section (C) and modulates into the varied motive (y) in the key of B major in the following section (B').



Example 3.33b. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Interlude, section C, mm. 37-38

The return of theme (A') also functions as a closing theme. The opening motive (x) begins at a lower dynamic level (*mf*) and gradually diminishes until the sound disappears altogether. Harmonically it opens in A minor and descends to C major on the very last chord. It also has an interesting linear bass-line movement which connects two themes and leads the piece back to C major. The low E-flat bass note in measure 57 finally changes to C major by way of the passing note D-flat in measure 70 (Example 3.34).



Example 3.34. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Interlude, m. 57, m. 70, and m. 71

This arch form movement is constructed linearly by that quick ascending motion A → B → C in the beginning and the descending Eb → Db → C at the end.

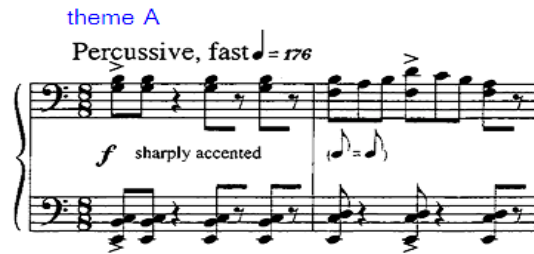
Table 3.4. The arched form of *Interlude*

<u>Section</u>	I	II	III	IV	V
<u>Theme</u>	A	B	C	B'	A'
<u>Motive</u>	x y	z	z y	z	x y
<u>Measures</u>	mm. 1-10	mm. 11-36	mm. 37-43	mm. 44-61	mm. 62-73
<u>Key</u>	A minor	G major	modulation	B major	A → C major

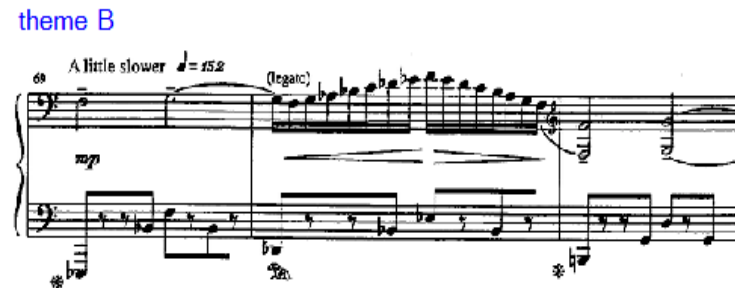
Tango Fantastique

This movement is particularly influenced by Latin American dance music. Diemer remembered entering tango performances during her tour in Argentina and was inspired by the imaginative and exciting dance music. She used those characteristics of rhythmic excitement, emotional intensity, and popular harmonies from the dance music and transferred their percussiveness and aggressiveness into her piano music. It is noteworthy to mention that the initial indication of this movement is “Percussive, fast,” and the articulation indication is “sharply accented.”

Tango Fantastique is again composed in a sectional form with some repetitions. The main key is E, featuring E Phrygian melodically and harmonically in the beginning and E major at the end. The most distinctive characteristics in this movement include the tango rhythm and the 3+3+2 rhythmic pattern in the first theme (A) (Example 3.35a), and the *habañera* rhythm in the left hand in the second theme (B) (Example 3.35b).



Example 3.35a. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Tango Fantastique, mm.1-2, first theme



Example 3.35b. Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Tango Fantastique, mm.69-71, second theme

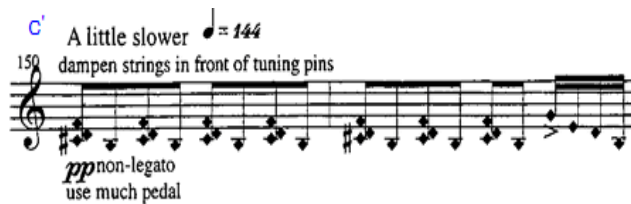
These two themes complement each other stylistically; theme A is fast and rhythmic and theme B is tranquillo and very lyrical. Moreover, the theme A material, dominant in the first section, reoccurs in varied forms throughout the movement. Although theme B is the most important theme of the second section, a varied, incomplete theme A figure (*a'*) and a fast humorous new figure (*b'*) repeatedly interrupts the lyrical theme B (Example 3.36).⁵⁰ Again, a sixteenth arpeggio functions as the transitional material dividing this second section into two parts (mm. 93- 99 and mm.124-128).



Example 3.36, Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Tango Fantastique, mm.75-76, *a'*, and mm. 85-86, *b'*

⁵⁰ Diemer explains this thematic interaction and alteration as a “dialogue between dancers, composer’s note, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, (Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania: Hildegard Publishing Company, 2001).

The third section turns to an entirely different atmosphere, a quiet and meditative fantasia. The technique of “dampening strings in front of the tuning pins” is used here as is a new figure (*c'*), in which there is no harmonic motion and the listener’s sense of time is thus suspended (Example 3.37). These two ideas (*a'* and *b'*) from the second section return and alter the figure idea *c'* contributing to a process of “scene change.”



Example 3.37, Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Tango Fantastique, mm.150-151, figure *c'*

The recapitulation begins with the partial return of materials from the first section. Theme A reoccurs variously and insistently from the recapitulation to the coda section, in which the keyboard range is extended and the texture becomes much thicker. A brilliant ending finishes up this sonata with great emphasis on the tango and *habañera* rhythm in E major.

Table 3.6. The form of *Tango Fantastique*

<u>Section</u>	I	II	III	IV	Coda
<u>Theme</u>	A	B	B'	A	varied A
<u>Figure</u>	a b	a' b'	c' a' b'	b a	a'
<u>Measures</u>	1-68	69-149	150-240	241-305	306-335
<u>Key</u>	E→C→Bb→A	Eb → G	Bb major/minor	→ A → G → E	Bb → F# → E

Summary of *Piano Sonata No. 3*

Diemer has always found joy writing sonatas. Again, she wrote the *Piano Sonata No. 3* without sticking to certain formal rules from the traditional classical sonata form. In her emails to answer this writer's question about her formal design, she said that:

I probably didn't think about "sonata form" when writing the sonatas. Both the first and second sonatas progressed naturally toward first and second theme groups, development, some kind of recap. The third sonata unfolded a bit more freely though there are definite themes and their development. I don't think of the form first—it evolves, if that makes sense.⁵¹

I used the original definition of "sonata": a "sound piece". It can take many forms from the binary, one-movement sonatas of Scarlatti to the multi-movement sonatas of the classical/romantic periods.⁵²

She also has favorite keys on the piano and is very much aware of the contrast between tonalities. For example, the first and third sonatas end in E (major), and the second movement of the second and third sonatas end in C (major). She explained that she liked "the brilliance of E major, and probably it related to what came before. C major is a good contrast to E major."⁵³

Diemer likes to use simple ideas to start a piece of music. She said "I think you have to start with an idea which is a little bit unique and then keep it fairly simple, rather than starting with things that are terribly complex or cliché."⁵⁴ The *Piano Sonata No. 3* is so successful because of its simplicity and accessible musicality; it also fits her stated purpose of writing music for both professional players and amateur listeners. This sonata would be a good one to introduce uninitiated players to contemporary piano music, not only because it uses pop music material, but it is also fairly easy on the hands and ears.

⁵¹ Emma Lou Diemer, electronic mail to the writer, 18 May 2007.

⁵² Diemer, 23 May, 2007.

⁵³ Diemer, 30 May, 2007.

⁵⁴ JoAnn Kinghorn Rediger, *Videotaped Interviews with Emma Lou Diemer: Her Compositional and Personal Perspectives*, D.A. diss., Ball State University, 1994, 85.

CHAPTER FOUR

PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS OF DIEMER'S PIANO SONATAS

Diemer has always considered herself both a performer and a composer and that has affected her writing of piano music significantly. Piano and organ are Diemer's main instruments. She composes at the piano which makes her piano music highly idiomatic, and yet the organ is still a presence in her piano music. For example, in the beginning of the *Sonata for Piano in One Movement* the bass can be held until the A-sharp in m. 6, which evokes a sustained, long, organ-like pedal (Example 4.1).



Example 4.1, *Sonata for Piano in One Movement*, mm 1-6.

Improvisation is her primary method of composition and needless to say, the improvisatory style is the essential musical component in Diemer's piano sonatas.

I always did a lot of improvising at the piano and this is, was from the beginning, my method. My process of composing was to sit down at the piano and play until something really seemed to be worthwhile. Then I would start writing that down.⁵⁵

When Diemer was at Yale, she played and memorized music on the piano before writing it down. Even though she is not doing that as extensively now as in her early days, she still believes that “the physical aspect of playing the piano is very important,” as well as “finding

⁵⁵ Rediger, 25.

things for yourself on the piano, and then listening to what you're doing," and making pieces from that creative process.⁵⁶

Diemer pointed out that "the idiomatic possibilities of the piano depend on the composers' own technique."⁵⁷ When she wrote her first piano sonata and premiered it at Yale University in 1949 she was working on some large works by Brahms and Prokofiev as previously mentioned. The technical challenges in those works contained octaves, thick chordal textures, a wide keyboard range, and motoric and repetitive rhythmic patterns.

Technically speaking, Diemer's piano sonatas are quite demanding. The *Piano Sonata in One Movement* is nearly equal to Prokofiev's piano writing both technically and musically. The irregular rhythmic patterns and accents can cause difficulty. The *Second Sonata for Piano* is the most awkward piece pianistically, particularly because of the contrapuntal writing and thick texture. Both sonatas need to be well-voiced in order to project the counterpoint clearly. Even though Diemer considers the three piano sonatas to be at the same level of difficulty, *Piano Sonata No. 3* is the most comfortable "under the hands." She remarked that she did not want to make *Piano Sonata No. 3* so difficult because it was written for pedagogue Carol Lancaster; also at her age she feels that the virtuosity of her own piano playing has diminished somewhat.⁵⁸

A few performance considerations need to be addressed in Diemer's three piano sonatas. First of all, there are no metronome markings in the score of the *Piano Sonata in One Movement*. Diemer only provides tempo indications such as "moderate slow," "faster," "faster" and "slower." Performers will need to know the overall structure and characteristics of this piece to decide an appropriate tempo. The *Second Sonata for Piano* and *Piano Sonata No. 3* do not have this problem; the metronome indications are clearly marked. Secondly, Diemer did not offer any

⁵⁶ Rediger, 132.

⁵⁷ Rediger, 61.

⁵⁸ Diemer, electronic mail to the writer, 24 March, 2007.

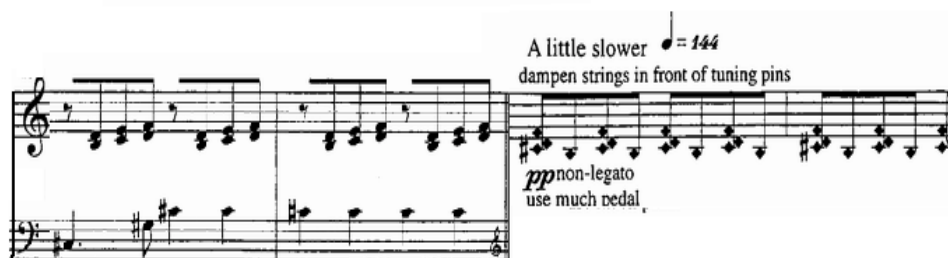
fingerings in her sonatas and only *Piano Sonata No. 3* contains indications concerning pedaling. Worthy of note is that the pedaling in the *Piano Sonata No. 3* suggests extraordinary effects of color and sound. The harmonic color deserves special attention here.

Additional information is provided by the composer regarding twentieth-century piano techniques from *Tango Fantastique* of the *Piano Sonata No. 3*. In measure 128, Diemer suggested that the double glissando can be done in two different ways: the right hand on white keys, the left hand on black keys; or both hands on white keys with the left hand about a third lower than the right hand. Whichever causes the least “pain” is best (Example 4.2).⁵⁹



Example 4.2, Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, *Tango Fantastique*, mm. 126-128.

Moreover, in the passages which call for “dampening strings in front of tuning pins,” performers may not have enough time to place the left hand on the turning pins as notated in the score (Example 4.3).



Example 4.3, Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, *Tango Fantastique*, mm. 148-151.

⁵⁹ Diemer, 12 May, 2007. However, the third is quite hard to do. The writer used sixth instead in her performance.

When that happens, performers can take time switching from keyboard to tuning pins, and perhaps make a little *retard* before switching, “to make it smoother.”⁶⁰

The last performance problem is in measure 221. Some of the pianos cannot be dampened on all the notes the composer requests because the frame above the piano strings is constructed differently. Diemer used a Steinway piano Model D when she composed this piece, and that instrument allows all her requests in the score to be realized. However, when performers meet a different model or brand of piano, she proposes that the performer will “have to either not dampen certain notes, or have an assistant do it” for them.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Diemer, electronic mail to the writer, 18 May, 2007.

⁶¹ Diemer, 14 July, 2007. However, even in Steinway Model D, E-Flat in measure 220 still can not be dampened.

CONCLUSION

Emma Lou Diemer has taken a journey through many styles and approaches to musical language in her long career. She has never written music in one single form. Her current musical thinking takes in folk music and tonality. She has said “The greatest recording successes today, aside from commercial pop music, are in the field of ethnic/folk/New Age/minimalist music, none of which I write in their pure form, though their elements are incorporated in all my music.”⁶² Therefore, she believed that “music [is] related to the people rather than to a theory or formula speaks most clearly and most effectively.” Her populist views have led her to create music for children, and music of great educational value. Over her whole career she has written vital music; accessible and imaginative music that will certainly endure.

⁶² Diemer, *Backward and Forward Looking*, ILWC Journal (1993): 11-13.

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APPENDIX A

WORK LIST FOR SOLO PIANO

1945	Preludes for Piano
1946	Chromatic Fantasy
1947	Piano Suite No. 1
1948	Second Suite for Piano
1949	Sonata in One Movement
1952	Suite No. 1 for Children
1952	Suite No. 2 for Children
1955	Piano Sonata No. 2
1961	Time Pictures
1965	Seven Etudes
1971	Sound Pictures
1971	Four on a Row
1979	Toccata
1982	Encore
1982	Seven Pieces for Marilyn Dance.
1987	Adventures in Sound
1988	Space Suite
1991	Three Pieces for Piano
1993	Fantasy for Piano
1999	Sonata No. 3
2003	Spirituals
2004	Reaching Out

APPENDIX B

PUBLICATION FOR SOLO PIANO

- 1972 Seven Etudes, Carl Fischer, D, 18'.
 Four on a Row, New Scribner Music Library, MD, 4'.
- 1980 Toccata, Arsis Press, D, 7'.
- 1983 Encore, Arsis Press, D, 6'.
 Time Pictures, Boosey & Hawkes, E, 4'.
 Sound Pictures, Boosey & Hawkes, E, 8'.
- 1986 “Monkey Dance” from Suite No. 2 for Children, Yorktown Press
- 1989 Adventures in Sound, Birch Tree Group Ltd., Elementary to MD, 15'.
 Space Suite, Plymouth Music Co., Inc., Elementary to MD, 18'.
- 1992 Three Pieces for Piano, Plymouth Music Co., Inc., Intermediate, 10'.
- 1994 Fantasy for Piano, Plymouth Music Co., Inc., D, 13'.
- 2000 Serenade/Toccata, Hildegard Publishing Co., D, 6'.
- 2002 Sonata No. 3, Hildegard, D, 18'.
- 2003 Spirituals, Santa Barbara Music Publishing.
- 2004 Reaching Out Collection for Intermediate Pianists, FJH.

APPENDIX C

DISCOGRAPHY FOR SOLO PIANO

- 1946 Chromatic Fantasy
Eastman School of Music Student Composition Symposium, Emma Lou Diemer, piano,
analog reel to reel tape in Eastman Audio Archives
- 1948 Four Poems for Piano (also known as suite no.1 Landscapes)
Eastman School of Music Second Annual American Music Students' Symposium,
Rosalyn Caplovitz, piano, analog reel to reel tape in Eastman School of Music audio
archives
- 1980 Toccata for Piano
Music by Women Composers, vol.1, Rosemary Platt, piano, Coronet Recording Co.
LPS 3105, Analog sound disc, 33 1/3 rpm
- 1989 Toccata for Piano
April in Santa Cruz, Mary Jane Cope, piano, analog tape cassette in University of
California, Santa Cruz, Library
- 1991 Encore for Piano
Max Lifchitz Plays American Piano Music, Max Lifchitz, piano, Vienna Modern
Masters CD 2002, compact disc
- 1996 Toccata for Piano
In 5-CD set accompanying *Worlds of Music* by David Willoughby, Sony Music
Entertainment ISBN 0-697-27165-X, compact disc
- 1998 Fantasy for Piano
Sunbursts: Solo Piano Works by 7 American Women, Nanette Kaplan Solomon, piano,
Leonarda LE 345, compact disc
- 1999 Serenade/ Toccata (from Sonata no. 3)
Something Old, something New, Joan DeVee Dixon, piano, RBW Record Co. RBW
CD016, compact disc
- 1999 Toccata for Piano
The 1997 Fellows of the American Pianists, Association Play American Piano Music,
Hiroko Kunitake, piano, 2 compact discs

- 2000 Fantasy for piano
 Women Composers and the Men in their Lives, Leanne Rees, piano, Fleur de son
 Classics. FDS 57939, compact disc
- 2006 Piano Sonata No. 3
 American Women Modern Voices in Piano Music, Nancy Boston, piano, compact disc

D. LETTER OF PERMISSION

August 7, 2007

Dr. Emma Lou Diemer
2249 Vista Del. Campo
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Dear Dr. Diemer,

Having completed work on my dissertation, "Three Sonatas for Piano by Emma Lou Diemer," I am requesting your permission to reproduce the following measures from your Sonata in One Movement, Second Piano Sonata, and Piano Sonata No.3.

Sonata for Piano in One Movement: mm. 1-6, 33-37, 49-54, 74-77, 84-88, 102-104, 121-124, 129-132, 145-146, 151-159, 191-194, 202-203, 224-229, 317-312, 341-343

Second Sonata for Piano, Movement I: mm.1-6, 13-15, 46-49, 92-94, 135-138, 164-167. **Movement II:** mm. 1-3, 22-26, 45-47, 57-61, 84-85, 131-132, 182-183, 207-208.

Piano Sonata No.3, Serenade/Toccata: mm. 1-4, 30-33, 112-115, 133-137, 232-234, 274-276, 280-281, 343-345, 362, 383, 400-402. **Interlude:** mm. 1-2, 7-9, 11-12, 21-22, 37-38. **Tango Fantastique:** mm. 1-2, 69-75, 85-86, 128, 150-151, 221, 322-323, 334-335.

Thank you very much for your assistance and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Chin-Ming Lin

205 East State Street # 4
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

Dear Chin-Ming Lin,

I am happy to give you permission to reproduce in your dissertation the measures you have listed above from my Sonata in One Movement, Second Piano Sonata, and Piano Sonata No.3.

With best wishes,


Emma Lou Diemer

8-7-07

VITA

Chin-Ming Lin, a Phi Kappa Phi and Pi Kappa Lambda honor society Master of Music graduate in piano performance from Carnegie Mellon University, has broad interests in music and fine arts. Her performances included the Hot Springs Music Festival, Heber Spring Music Festival, the Center for the Arts in Society in Pittsburgh, the Tuesday Music Club in Pittsburgh, the Mid-South NACUSA, LSU 60th Festival of Contemporary Music, Carnegie Mellon University Contemporary Ensemble, and Baton Rouge Music Club. She was also a concerto soloist performing at Tunghai University, Carnegie Mellon University and Duquesne University. She enjoys playing collaborative piano as well and her name appears in the Hot Springs Festival Orchestra's newly released compact disk of Gottschalk's Complete Orchestral Works in June 2007.

Before pursuing her piano performance degree, she was a timpanist with the Taiwan Government Chinese Music Orchestra, the Tainan City Philharmonic Orchestra, and taught percussion in numerous schools including the Tainan First Boys' High School Wind Ensemble and the Tainan Women's College Chinese Music Orchestra. Because of her strong interest in conducting she pursued a master's degree in conducting and participated in conducting workshops including the Eastman Summer Conducting Institute. She was invited to conduct the Central Taiwan Universities' Music Festival in 2003 and the Chinese Medical University and Tunghai University Chinese Orchestra. Both schools won the first prizes in the Taiwan National Music Competition under her baton in 2003 and 1997.

Chin-Ming Lin is currently a doctoral candidate in piano performance studying with Mr. Gregory Sioles. She will be awarded the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in the Commencement in December 2007.