Sonata for Violin and Piano by John Corigliano: A Performance Guide

Xinyu Yang
yangxinyu1991@hotmail.com

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SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO BY JOHN CORIGLIANO: 
A PERFORMANCE GUIDE

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the 
Louisiana State University and 
Agricultural and Mechanical College 
in partial fulfillment of the 
requirements for the degree of 
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in
The School of Music

by
Xinyu Yang
B.M., East China Normal University, 2013
M.M., Louisiana State University, 2016
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Abstract

John Corigliano is one of the most famous American composers of modern times having gained global recognition over the course of his career. The focus of this dissertation is on one of his earlier works, the Sonata for Violin and Piano. This sonata is the first of his compositions to have gained international attention. In the Sonata for Violin and Piano, Corigliano uses traditional music elements that are accessible to the audience. Although it is based on the traditional composition, Corigliano uses ambiguous tonality, polytonality, complicated rhythm, and polyrhythm throughout the piece. These factors cause several technical issues which occur in the violin part and also in the ensemble between the violin and piano parts.

This dissertation will be presented in three chapters. The first chapter will provide biographical information about the composer and the transformation of his compositional approach in different periods. The second chapter will be the motivic analysis where I will provide new insight for performance practices. The last chapter addresses performance issues from two perspectives: violin technique and ensemble issues that I have encountered in performing the piece. I will explore some solutions and provide suggestions based on original markings on the score and recordings of different performers. I will give insight from a violinist’s point of view and seek to alleviate some of the inherent difficulties of the piece.
Chapter I. Life of John Corigliano

1.1 Composer’s Biography

John Corigliano is one of the most famous American composers of modern times. Achieving a global reach with recognition worldwide, his journey into the world of composition initially began while studying under Otto Luening at Columbia University. Corigliano is a music programmer, music director, recording producer, and a university professor serving on the composition faculty at the Juilliard School, Lehman College, and CUNY.¹ Corigliano's compositions include three symphonies, eight concertos, and over one hundred chamber, vocal, choral, and orchestral works. His compositions have been performed and recorded by many of the most prominent orchestras, soloists, and chamber musicians in the world. Famed American composer Aaron Copland described Corigliano as "one of the most talented composers on the scene today- the real thing. His music is individual, imaginative, expertly crafted, and aurally quite stunning."²

Corigliano was born on February 16, 1938, into a musical family. His father, John Corigliano Sr., was the concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic for 23 years and his mother, Rose Buzen, was a pianist. Corigliano’s childhood was non-traditional in that his parents often lived apart and the young Corigliano primarily resided with his mother.³ He had a difficult relationship with his father and the atmosphere of his home life was heavily affected each time his father received public criticism, positive or negative, for one of his recent

performances. Born in a musical environment, Corigliano did not want to be a performer like his parents. He was intimidated by live performance and therefore, throughout most of his career as a composer, Corigliano stayed in the green room and listened to the speaker for the premiere of his works. This fear came from his childhood:

My father played concertos with the Philharmonic, and I used to sit in the green room as a 7-year old or 8-year old, listening on speakers to him play and worry with my headed hands because I knew the concerto so well. If he was going through a rough spot, what would you make that? If he forgot something, how would he do it? Because I knew my life depended upon that in terms of his moods for the next month afterward. So, I became very concerned about the live performance is something been very scary.

Corigliano’s parents did not expect their son to be a musician but rather they wanted him to be a doctor or lawyer. It was his high school music teacher, Bella Tillis, who suggested that he become a composer. The idea of being a composer first arose when Corigliano listened to the LP record of Copland’s *Billy the Kid*. He recalls:

I wasn’t interested in classical music until high school, and that was mainly because of the advent of LP record, and my getting a hi-fi set with a fifteen-inch speaker, and listening to *Billy the Kid* mainly for the bass drum of the gunfight scene, and being fascinated by all the things Copland did before and after that bass drum- the way he spaced a triad so it sounded totally fresh, or juxtaposed irregular meters that I was acquainted with. I played those things on the piano then and found them very exciting, and from there grew in love with that kind of music and wanted to write in that language.

He went on to study composition with Otto Luening at Columbia University and later with Vittorio Giannini at the Manhattan School of Music. After graduation, Corigliano worked as a

---

5 John Corigliano - Living the Classical Life: Episode 60.
music programmer for CBS television, WQXR, and the New York Times radio station. He also worked as the music director for WBAI and the Morris Theater in New Jersey, as well as having been the assistant producer on the Leonard Bernstein Young People’s Concerts. In 1964, the Sonata for Violin and Piano won the Spoleto Festival Competition which became a turning point in Corigliano’s professional career.

1.2 The Compositional Concept

As a composer, Corigliano described his compositional process as difficult and the writing process as usually very slow. When he starts to write a piece, he hasn't determined its complete direction yet. For Corigliano, inspiration and technique always work together synchronously. When Corigliano composes, he has to start with inspiration and simultaneously incorporate compositional technique. It is hard for him to compose something, technically, until he is inspired to write a piece. When he begins to write, he repeatedly changes his mind due to a personal tendency towards hyper self-criticism. This staggering sense makes him constantly feel unsettled during the writing process until the piece is nearly over. Corigliano explained this by stating that he thought there are two types of composers, the Mozart type and the Beethoven type. The Mozart type represents composers who can compose music fluently and enjoy their compositional process. Corigliano thought of himself as identifying more with the Beethoven type, whose compositional ideas always go back and forth to write sketch after sketch. Therefore, one of the most important compositional concepts is to find out something

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9 John Corigliano - Living the Classical Life: Episode 60.
for which there is a specific purpose to write. Because of this, Corigliano does not like to compose exactly the same genre of music. He has composed works in a variety of genres, possessing a body of work with over a hundred compositions, although there is no consistent genre. For example, of his three symphonies one is for full orchestra, one is for string ensemble, and one is just for wind band. For violin, he composed one sonata for violin and piano and also the score for the film The Red Violin. The score for the film The Red Violin includes one suite, one chaconne, one caprice, and one concerto. With the more recent, contemporary compositions, Corigliano believes that it is very important for a composer to communicate with his audience. He presented:

It has been fashionable, of late, for the earliest to be misunderstood. I wish to be understood. It is the job of the composer to reach out to his audience with every means at his disposal… Communication should be a primary goal.10

This can be one interpretation of his American sound approach and traditional writing style although Corigliano previously thought he didn’t have a style. He thought his music just sounds like what it is, and he did not believe in originality. However, his style was proven when a friend pointed out that there is exactly the same musical figure used in two of his different pieces. It was then that Corigliano realized that he did have a musical personality that can be called style.11 Throughout the rest of the chapter, I will explain Corigliano’s compositional style in different periods of his career as it is important for performers to understand the

11 John Corigliano - Living the Classical Life: Episode 60.
composer’s compositional concepts and style. These will be fundamental elements for interpreting and performing his Sonata for Violin and Piano.

1.3 Composer’s Early Works

In the early 20th century, due to ethnic, political, and religious reasons, many composers had to leave their countries and move to the United States. Some of these composers included Hindemith, Schoenberg, Bartok, and Stravinsky. These composers brought different cultural experiences, compositional styles, and aesthetic views to the United States. This, in turn, affected local, American composers. After the 1950s, Neo-Romanticism reduced the gap between modern and earlier idioms as well as classical and popular music. Composers often conceptually borrowed from one another to represent a blending of idioms.

In this dissertation, Corigliano's compositional style will be divided into two periods: early period compositions that were written before the mid-1970s, and mature period compositions that were written after the mid-1970s. Corigliano's early compositions were comparatively traditional and the musical language was easy to understand. Most of these early compositions were tonal music with conventional music structure. Oliver Schneller, who studied with Corigliano, described his master as not worrying too much about modernism, experimentalism, and their aesthetic and technical innovations, but as being more interested in the traditional American sound. Corigliano's early compositions were influenced by the Americana school of composers such as Aaron Copland and Samuel Barber. He tried to absorb other composer's technique and discover his own vocabulary:
In the beginning, I accepted a language, a vocabulary, a set of techniques, because I didn't know them well and I wanted to master them. That lasted until the 1970s because I needed to learn. Even when you're working through things that other people have done, there's a certain freshness in discovering them for yourself. I'm not sure it would have stayed fresh if I’d continued writing that way for the rest of my life. I eventually needed to move on, and that’s what I did.\textsuperscript{12}

Before the mid-1970s, serial music was one of the most popular music genres and the twelve-tone technique quickly became a dominant musical language among composers. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Corigliano's early compositions quoted Baroque, Classical, and Romantic styles while also containing conventional American elements. Table 1 lists instrumental compositions before 1975:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Instrumentation</th>
<th>Key Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kaleidoscope (1959)</td>
<td>Two Piano</td>
<td>Diatonic; ternary form; ragtime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonata (1963)</td>
<td>Violin and Piano</td>
<td>Tonal and Polytonal; Polyrhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elegy (1965)</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Diatonic; neo-romantic American style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tournaments (1965)</td>
<td>Mini Orchestra</td>
<td>Tonal; Bernstein’s influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerto (1968)</td>
<td>Piano and Orchestra</td>
<td>Tonal, Polytonal, 12-tone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gazebo Dances (1972-1974)</td>
<td>Piano Four hands</td>
<td>Tonal, American Style; Waltz, Adagio, Tarantella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Winds Ensemble</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Solo Piano (Adagio)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orchestra (Overture)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1 lists, Corigliano's early compositions were mostly based on the tonal system and established close connections with traditional musical themes. *Kaleidoscope*, a piece written for two pianos during Corigliano's student years, is a diatonic work with ABA form. The piece is comparatively conservative and has an adapted American ragtime feel and rhythm. The melody is highly lyrical, and it is treated as a folk-like melody. According to Deall, the three compositions *Elegy*, *Tournaments*, and *Gazebo Dances* all convey the Americana School style.\(^\text{13}\) They contain the beauty of simple melodies and adapt national rhythms. The orchestral work *Elegy*, composed in 1965, is musically tonal with a simple harmonic progression. Corigliano emphasized the American influence in his program note:

> Stylistically, as the dedication to Samuel Barber might suggest, the work identifies itself with neo-romantic American style, typified in a diversity of works by Barber himself, Walter Piston, or William Schuman.\(^\text{14}\)

Compared to the three American style compositions above, the Piano Concerto and Sonata for Violin and Piano are less conventional. Even though the two pieces are still based on the tonal center, the composer's future compositional transformation first appears in these works. In the Piano Concerto, Corigliano permeates atonal technique while the musical virtuosity and histronics are being reinforced. Furthermore, the Sonata for Violin and Piano is one of the more important compositions from Corigliano's early period. The music masterfully combines traditional elements and implies Corigliano's vast, musical vocabulary. Corigliano explained


in the program notes that the American influence is an unconscious choice: "This is more the result of an American writing music than writing American music."\textsuperscript{15}

\subsection*{1.4 Composer’s Late Works}

In contrast to Corigliano's earlier works, representing an American style that pays much attention to melody and pitch, his later compositional approach focused on music architecture and instrumental sonority. These compositions used more advanced techniques such as twelve-tone, quotation, collage, aleatoric techniques, and so on. Corigliano's music genres grew increasingly diverse as he began to write more utility music. While some works were written for individual commission, others were composed for visual arts such as opera music and film music.

A turning point came around 1975 when he composed the Oboe Concerto. He claimed that at that point in time he started to focus on building up the architectural structure.\textsuperscript{16} In the Oboe Concerto, Corigliano constructs five movements and each movement depicts a different quality of the instrumental sound. The movements are not independent but are related to each other. Harmonically, Corigliano employs multiphonics which includes non-definable chords, quarter-tones, and other tones between tones. Structurally, Corigliano started to think about the musical shape and drew graphs before writing down the notes. He explained his new compositional approach in the interview with Eve Grimes:

\begin{quote}
The Oboe Concerto, I think, is the piece that finally pushed me into another world of composing. From then on, I've composed using this method of writing. It's not a method;\end{quote}

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{15} John Corigliano official webpage, Sonata for Violin and Piano, program note, http://www.johncorigliano.com/index.php?p=item2\&sub=cat\&item=50

it's just really making the big decisions first instead of the little ones. By that, I mean not composing by extending an interval or a melody into a piece which is how many people do it, including Copland, who writes wonderful music. But to me, the idea of the bigger shape being governed by the smaller idea just seems backward. I finally came to realize that the most important thing about a piece of music . . . is the shape, what a piece is from beginning to end.17

In Corigliano’s later works, an important, notable feature is the awareness of vertical sonority.18 He believed melody is difficult to remember and that sonority is more memorable. Furthermore, he claimed that the vertical sonority of a composition is more important than its horizontal melodies. After 1975, the harmonic content of his music became more complex as Corigliano’s unique approach to sonority and texture was being incorporated. The vertical sonority in Corigliano’s music is presented as adding non-functional notes in the harmonies, advanced instrumental technique, primitive sound, unique orchestration, and so on. In the final movement of the Oboe Concerto, titled Rheita Dance, Corigliano requires the solo oboist to produce sound by placing his or her lips differently on the instrument to yield a non-typical sound. In the last movement of his Clarinet Concerto, Antiphonal Toccata, Corigliano located the strings in a conventional way while the brass and percussion are located in a dimensional position. Usually trombones and tuba are sitting next to the trumpets, but in the Clarinet Concerto, Corigliano separated them on different sides of the stage. Similarly, the two timpani are separated to each side as well. In this way, Corigliano created a special sonority that he called "antiphonal" which recalls the title of the movement.


Later on, Corigliano extended his sonority approach to create a technique called "motion sonority" which was used in the film score of *Altered States*.\(^{19}\) In the score, Corigliano marked a symbol of a box with two notes which requires players to play between the two notes as fast as possible. In this way, Corigliano creates cluster chords by different improvisation-like playing.

In sum, Corigliano was a highly prolific, eclectic composer. In his early period, when people were indulging in serial music, he kept writing music by using the tonal system and traditional structure. The core of most of Corigliano’s music contains lyrical melodies and American rhythm. At the same time, Corigliano was constantly trying to experiment with his writing to explore new, creative approaches to composition. In his mature period, Corigliano established his own style where his music consistently starts with a clear, structural attempt and specific approach to sonority. As previously mentioned, the Sonata for Violin and Piano is one of the most important works of music in Corigliano’s compositional career. Despite having been written in his early period and mostly in a traditional way, it illustrates the composer’s unique musical preference which would become more apparent in his later works. Chapter II will further analyze the piece to find the traditional influences and characteristics that correlate to his later compositional style. Based on this theoretical analysis, performance suggestion will be offered throughout the dissertation.

---

Chapter II. Motivic Analysis of Sonata for Violin and Piano

2.1 Compositional Background

The Violin Sonata, the first of Corigliano’s compositions to have gained international attention, was written in 1963 and dedicated to his parents. The piece was first performed on July 10, 1964 at the Festival Competition for Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy. The piece was highly received and won the festival competition for chamber music.\(^{20}\) Since its initial release, the piece has been considered a standard piece of the violin repertoire and has been recorded by many notable performers. The violinist Joshua Bell described Corigliano's violin music as "rooted in the grand traditions of the past" and "his music is often harmonically complex and rhythmically challenging."\(^{21}\)

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the composer's father, John Corigliano Sr., did not initially support his son in becoming a composer. Despite the sonata winning first prize and having been premiered internationally, he still refused to recognize his son’s talent. Furthermore, he even went as far as taking the composition to acquaintances such as David Diamond, George Szell, and Morton Gould in hopes of acquiring negative criticism that would make his son give up composing. However, these people highly praised the piece.\(^{22}\) After attending a performance of the piece by Roman Totenberg, Corigliano Sr. finally agreed to learn the part and recorded it with pianist Ralph Votapek. In 1975, while playing the Violin Sonata at his birthday party, Corigliano Sr. suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and died a few days after...
later. Although Corigliano Sr. was not originally an ardent supporter of the music, yet he contributed to editing the violin part, and offering his fingering suggestions.

2.2 Motivic Analysis

Corigliano states in many interviews that the structural architecture and specific sonority of a piece are significant components of his compositional vocabulary. It is imperative for performers to understand the musical structure and compositional approach of the piece. In this sonata, adhering to traditional multi-movement sonata structure, there are four movements: Allegro, Andantino, Lento, and Allegro. They are not independent of one another but act more like a unit. Corigliano builds his thematic structure by using the interval of second and its inversion seventh. The themes of each movement, throughout the entirety of the sonata, are intertwined, derived, and intricately woven together. The following table shows the structure of the sonata.

---

### Table 2. The structure of the sonata

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Exp.</th>
<th>Dev.</th>
<th>Recap.</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First movement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allegro</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonata-form</td>
<td>Intro.</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>8-33</td>
<td>33-49</td>
<td>49-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitch center</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>D♭-A</td>
<td>A-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second movement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andantino</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonata-form</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>1-18</td>
<td>19-41</td>
<td>42-109</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitch center</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D-A</td>
<td>E-F-D-B♭-E♭-F-F-A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third movement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lento</td>
<td>Section A</td>
<td>Section B</td>
<td>Section C</td>
<td>Section D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recitative</td>
<td>Piano solo</td>
<td>Duet</td>
<td>Piano solo</td>
<td>Violin cadenza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>8-22</td>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitch center</td>
<td>d-g</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fourth movement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonata-rondo</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>TR</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>1-22</td>
<td>22-45</td>
<td>45-102</td>
<td>103-172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitch center</td>
<td>D-C-polytonality</td>
<td>B♭-C-A-B♭</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As with many 20th century works that incorporate sonata form, this work departs from the form’s traditional tonal organization. The first movement lasts less than 3 minutes. This movement contains the lively, but rational, main character of the whole piece. The sonata mostly stays in the major key while displaying vivid, perpetual motion and continuous emotion. However, the progression of the motivic material is restrained and rational. The exposition of the first movement includes an introduction, primary theme, and secondary theme.

Figure 1. John Corigliano’s Violin Sonata, 1st movement, measure 1-7
All musical examples herein are from:
SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO
By John Corigliano
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As Figure 1 shows, the movement starts with seven introductory measures of violin and piano interplay with staggered, fanfare-like chords. The violin begins with double-stop seventh chords as the piano plays C major broken chords with an occasional seventh. In this opening section, the two instruments are juxtaposed as competing and interlocking. The chords are based on the interval of second and seventh and this idea is used throughout the whole piece. The double-stops (D, C) and (A, G) are repeated and emphasized in measure 5. The four-note chords in the violin part (G, F, D, C) and (C, D, A, G) are related to each other. If we analyze the chords by using the techniques of pitch-class set theory, the chord (0,2,9,7) is an inversion of (7, 5, 2, 0), transposed up a whole tone. If we break the chords to (2, 0), (7, 5) and (9, 7), (2, 0), the upper and lower chords are related by the interval of a fifth. Also, the chords are based on (C, D), (F, G), and (G, A), which emphasizes tonal, subdominant, and dominant functionality, while maintaining traditional tonality.

The primary theme begins in measure 8 as the violin plays the lyrical melody and the piano plays repeated eighth notes (see Figure 2). Corigliano follows the traditional diatonic system and the motive is comprised of a broken C major triad. The (G₃, A₃, G₄) includes both a major second and a minor seventh. The A is a major second above the G and the B is a minor second
below the C. Furthermore, the intervals A₃ to E₄ and E₄ to B₄ are symmetrical with respect to E₄. The secondary theme operates similarly to the chordal relationship presented in the primary theme. In measure 33, Corigliano constructs a minor second above E and a major second below E. In this way, Corigliano emphasizes the functionality of the generic interval of a second to relate the primary and secondary theme (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. The secondary movement, 1st movement, measure 33-36

At measure 39 both hands of the piano part play sixteenth notes with staggered accents. At the same time, the violin part produces the third different rhythm by employing the technique knowns as pizzicato. Each pizzicato note aligns with every other sixteenth note of the piano's right-hand part (see Figure 4).

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24 The term pizzicato refers to using a finger to pluck the string as a way to obtain a different sound.
In this way, the composer creates three different rhythmic lines. Similarly, this rhythmic design happens again at measure 45 (see Figure 5). Compared to Figure 4, Corigliano switches the content of each line and adjusts the polyrhythm. The left-hand melody from figure 4 moves to the right hand, and the right-hand melody moves to the violin part as seen in figure 5.
The recapitulation starts at measure 63 and adapts the motives from the exposition and development. Corigliano does not simply repeat the same theme, but rather he modulates and summarizes the theme into a short version in order to transition to the coda. The key returns to C major in measure 87 for the start of the coda and the same motivic material occurs again. However, there is only a slight difference between this one and the one at measure 8. Unlike the primary theme, Corigliano uses A-flat instead of A. Rhythmically, the meter of the piano part is also treated differently. At measure 8 the piano has the same 10/8 meter as the violin. Corigliano indicates 6/8 + 2/4 by using a dashed bar line. However, in Figure 6, the meter of the piano part is 5/8 while the meter of violin part maintains 10/8 as before. The material of the piano part changes from repeated chords to jumping chords to produce a flowing and lively character. Corigliano makes polyrhythm between the two instruments which reflects the rhythmic experiments in the later movements.

Figure 6. John Corigliano’s Violin Sonata, 1st movement, measure 87

The second movement is slow and lyrical adhering to multi-movement sonata form. Corigliano uses the same thematic idea and builds up the structure of the movement by using two primary motives. The first theme is introduced at the beginning of the movement and is
based on the D major tonal center (Figure 7). Compared to the first movement, Corigliano changes the tonal center from C major to D major which is a major second higher. There are no big leaps in this motive, and it mainly consists of neighbor and passing tones.

![Figure 7. The primary theme, 2nd movement, measure 1-2](image)

The second motive starting in measure 19 uses the major second intervals of (B, C#) and (D, E) as seen in Figure 8. It has similar characteristics to the primary theme thus making it sounds more like a derivative of the first motive. The motive continues using groups of major second notes. The violin has progressed comfortably until measure 34 when the music becomes more compact and intensive. The violin has a big jump to a high position and the major second is squeezed to a minor second. Later on, this motion is imitated by using accents and octave double-stops to propel the music to a climax. After two measures, the music deescalates and transitions into the development.
Overall, the structure of the second movement compared to the first movement is less traditional. Even though it is identified as a sonata form, it is treated more like one analogous unit. The first motive, (D, C#, D), modulates, develops, and derives throughout the movement as seen in Figure 9. Corigliano indicates four relationships between these motives: ascending interval of second as (D, E, F, F#), a descending interval of second as (E, E♭, D), an augmented second (E♭, F#), and a basic motive (A, A♭, A). Additionally, Corigliano applies a perfect authentic cadence at the end of the movement.

Figure 9. The progression of basic motives, 2nd movement
The third movement is a short, recitative-like movement entitled *quasi recitativo* that has been identified as being closely related to works by other composers. According to Tuinenga’s dissertation, the third movement has many similarities with the third movement of Cesar Franck’s Sonata for Violin and Piano; they both have recitative-like quality. Tuinenga points out that the structure of the third movement of Corigliano’s sonata builds by using recurring thematic material. The movement has only 35 measures which includes five parts: piano solo introduction, duet, piano solo transition, violin cadenza, and final duet.

The movement starts with solo piano to introduce the primary motive. As Figure 10 shows, this motive consists of a turn established on dominant D. The following B is a major seventh above C; an inversion of the minor second. Similar to the second movement, the composer uses variations of the motivic material to build up the music.

![Figure 10. The main theme, 3rd movement measure 8](image)

At measure 8, Corigliano builds a long phrase by using a similar motive. The violin plays the tune and the music grows with an ascending progression through D, Eb, F#, G. The

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augmented second (E♭, F#) between measure 13 to 14 corresponds to the same interval in the second movement. Starting in the middle part of the movement, a cadenza is played by solo violin. As in a traditional cadenza, the motivic material comes from the rest of the movement and the rhythm is more complicated and freer. This cadenza is mostly based on the diatonic system. However, in Figure 11, Corigliano uses the descending whole tone scale to hint at the motivic material that comes later in the last movement of the piece.

Figure 11. The violin cadenza, 3rd movement, measure 26

The fourth movement incorporates a sonata-rondo form and is the most extended movement in the sonata. The main character is humorous and whimsical, like a scherzo. Corigliano creates his joke by using a contrast of dynamics, articulation, ambiguous tonality, and complex rhythms. Corigliano cites an example in the program note:

The last movement Rondo includes in it a virtuosic polyrhythmic and polytonal perpetual motion whose thematic material and accompaniment figures are composed of three distinct elements derived from materials stated at the beginning of the movement. The 16th-note constant motion theme is originally a counterpoint to the movement's initial theme. Against this are set two figures – an augmentation of the movement's primary theme and, in combination with that, a 5/8 rhythmic ostinato utilized initially been accompanied a different earlier passage. All three elements combine to form a new virtuoso perpetual motion theme which is, of course, subjected to further development and elaboration.26

As Corigliano stated, the last movement of the sonata incorporates many modern musical ingredients. Even so, he did not put the movement to the extreme side as he still wants to be understood. The thematic elements are subtly related to similar material from the previous three movements. The primary theme of the exposition incorporates a descending arpeggio based on an E major triad as seen in Figure 12. The (A, F#) and (B, G#) of this arpeggio are related by a whole step. Similarly, the descending arpeggio starting in Figure 13 is adapted from the primary theme by using accidental notes. Furthermore, the theme undulates between E-flat major and E minor triads. The same treatment can be seen in the piano one and a half beats later and this staggered rhythm is similar to the rhythmic idea in measure 39 of the first movement. Vertically, this rhythm makes a minor second when the two instruments are playing simultaneously. The sharp sound of using minor second chords reflects Corigliano's compositional approach to vertical sonority in his late period.

Figure 12. The primary theme, 4th movement, measure 3
Beginning at measure 22, the transition displays a primitive sound as Corigliano uses a descending chromatic major third while the piano plays a 5/8 rhythmic ostinato. In the violin part, there is an optional glissando marking between grace notes and eighth notes pronounced with a $p$ dynamic. By contrast, the piano responds with $f$ and an emphasis on the minor third. This dramatic conversation transits the music to the secondary theme. The secondary theme starts from measure 51 and consists of perpetual motion and 5/8 rhythmic ostinato (see Figure 14).
According to Corigliano, the 16th-note perpetual motion is originally a counterpoint to the movement’s primary theme. It indicates the whole tone scale that has been intimated in the third movement. At measure 83, Corigliano creates a unique sonority by using polytonality between the two instruments. In addition to different key signatures, the violin part is written in D major while the right hand of the piano part is in B major. The violin continues to play the perpetual motions while the piano plays parallel minor thirds (see Figure 15).
The development consists of two sections and begins at measure 103. The first section, containing similar characteristics to the second movement, has a lyrical motive continuously using the interval of second and its inversion. In Figure 16, when the lyrical melody is reaching a climax, the (A₆, G♯₆, G₅) includes a minor second and major seventh to recall the primary theme of the first movement. The second section, starting on measure 142, consists of both instruments playing the same staccato, rhythmic pattern to convey the motivic materials. The ambiguous tonality includes a major key, minor key, whole tone, and chromatic scale. From a technical standpoint, the violin part is exceptionally complicated. Corigliano changes the sonority of the violin by incorporating \textit{staccato, legato, harmonics, ponticello,} mute, and trill techniques. Chapter III will explain more about these technical issues.

![Figure 16. The 4th movement, measure 131-134](image)

In the recapitulation, Corigliano inserts a new transitional section between the primary theme and secondary theme that has a similar character to the development. The piano cadenza of measure 217 adapts the same motive of measure 39 from the first movement. This indicates the function of the section is not only the recapitulation of the movement but also a recapitulation of the overall piece.
To conclude, Corigliano uses traditional structure in the sonata and each movement conveys an individual character. The first movement is a forceful and spirited introduction with vivid rhythmic pattern whereas the second movement is a lyrical song with expression and simplicity. Furthermore, the third movement is a recitative for both instruments that transitions to the last movement. The last movement is comprised as a prank-like movement where the composer experiments with various sonorities. Overall, the intervals of second and seventh are a reoccurring element used throughout the whole piece. Based on the motivic analysis, performers can understand how the composer builds up the structure by using thematic materials. The function of the themes should always be in consideration for the interpretation of the sonata.
Chapter III. Thoughts from a Violinist’s Perspective

In regard to preparation, a theoretical analysis is the first necessary step to adequately prepare for a performance of the sonata. Subsequently, the issues surrounding technique and ensemble must be considered. As I mentioned before, Corigliano uses traditional music elements that are highly accessible to the American audience. Additionally, Corigliano employs ambiguous tonality and polytonality, complex rhythm, and polyrhythm which generally causes ensemble issues between the violin and piano. The New York Times characterized the sonata as “an engaging, extroverted work with plenty of technical skill and personality behind it.”

In the sonata, Corigliano places equal importance on both instruments as both parts include many technical issues. Additionally, preparation for the violinist involves not only solving the technical issues for the violin but also being aware of the technical issues for the piano. By doing so, it will be much easier to play together as an ensemble. The following chapter will offer practice suggestions based on personal experience for preparation of the sonata. These suggestions will be focused on violin technique issues and rhythmic ensemble issues between the violin and the piano.

3.1 Violin Technique: Bow Articulation

In the violin part, Corigliano clearly indicates his intent or purpose by using various markings and symbols. It is helpful for violinists to play the part by strictly adhering to each marking or symbol although it can be a challenge to play with such restrictive musical indications. The first important technical violin issue to consider is the articulation changes for

the right hand. Corigliano inscribes these specific articulation symbols and changes as they change frequently through the piece. It is essential for a violinist to interpret these different articulations symbols and use an appropriate way to practice. In measure 84-85 of the first movement, Corigliano indicates four kinds of bow strokes: slur *legato*, *détaché*, accent and *marcato* (see Figure 17).

![Figure 17. Violin part, 1st movement, measure 82-86](image)

The slur *legato* is a bow technique which requires the violinist to connect the notes and play them smoothly. The slur *legato* is then followed by *détaché* which refers to simple, separate bowing. The accent symbol “>” indicates that the notes need to be played loudly, with forceful accents. Similarly, the accent symbol “” or *marcato*, implies the use of notes that are shorter and heavier than staccato. Despite marking these specific articulation symbols, Corigliano further clarifies by writing “change to *marcato e crescendo*” on the music. The purpose of this is to gradually make the phrase louder and more exciting. Therefore, the stroke is getting progressively more choppy and powerful rather than suddenly changing from one to the other. To practice this part, one approach is to practice each type of stroke independently, and then focusing on the switching point (see Figure 18). While practicing, it is important to keep in consideration the portion of the bow that is suitable for each stroke. Since the phrase
starts with $p$, the bow can start from the tip and gradually shift to the lower half to allow the bow to lift naturally. At the same time, the bow pressure and bow speed need to be increased.

![Figure 18. Practice pattern of switching bow articulation](image)

**3.2 Violin Technique: Left Hand**

Intonation, as with all string instruments, is a vital feature in violin playing. As I previously mentioned, Corigliano uses complex tonality in this sonata which causes issues of intonation for the violin. Ivan Galamian, one of the most famous violin pedagogies, pointed out the four main factors in building up a good intonation: the sense of feeling the distance, the guidance of the ears, the frame of the hand, and the ability of the adjustment.\(^{28}\) Regarding this particular sonata, it is difficult to meet all these factors. For example, at measure 100 of the second

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movement, the canon for the violin part makes awkward double-stops: seventh and ninth (see Figure 19). For violin players, practicing double-stops is one of the most common exercises in a daily practice routine whereas sevenths and ninths are less commonly practiced. Instead, thirds, sixths, octaves and tenths are more common in contemporary scale systems and etude books. Therefore, neither the ears nor the left hand have established the intonational sense of seventh and ninth.

Figure 19. The 2nd movement, measure 100-103

There are several factors that need to be incorporated into a daily practice routine to improve double-stop sevenths and ninths. I would suggest using the octave double-stops as a bridge to establish the frame of the left hand and the intonational sense of the ears. As Figure 20 shows, the seventh and ninth scale double-stops practice pattern can be derived from the octave scale. It should be incorporated into a daily practice routine to train the ears and frame of the left hand.
Octave:

Seventh:

Ninth:

Figure 20. Seventh and ninth double-stops practice pattern

The method of using common scales as a tool to practice the uncommon double-stops or broken chords can similarly be borrowed for other issues. Additionally, there is another technical issue of the left hand that occurs in the last movement that is based on a common chromatic scale. In Figure 21, there is one descending chromatic line with ornamentation on every eighth note. Every note of the chromatic line is related to their ornamentation by a major third. It requires the left hand to have a good frame of major thirds and a precise feel of half-step distances.

Figure 21. The 4th movement, measure 27-31

The first step of developing a good sense of the half-step distance is to practice the ornamentation and the eighth-note line independently. After that, begin to group the notes and use different rhythmic patterns to practice the motion of shifting position as seen in Figure 22. The first finger should not lift during each shift.
Furthermore, Corigliano outlines an optional violin technique for this passage known as *glissando*. The *glissando* occurs between the ornament and the eighth note and increases the difficulty as it will make the frame of left hand less stable. Corigliano proposes this kind of optional technique several times in the violin part.

### 3.3 Optional Violin Techniques

To achieve a variety of sounds on the violin, Corigliano indicates some optional, extended techniques which he leaves open for the performers’ choice. Some of these optional techniques are difficult to execute in the performance which explains why, in many recordings, performers choose not to incorporate these uncomfortable technical suggestions.
As Figure 20 illustrates, Corigliano creates an animal-like sound for the violin part. The descending short notes are marked with $p$ to imitate bird-like sounds. The *glissando*, for example, cannot be played clearly in the performance with a fast tempo. The function of the *glissando* here is to imitate a bird-like sound. This unconventional sound has a drastic contrast to the following $16^{th}$ notes marked with $f$. Comparing the recording of John Corigliano Sr. to that of Joshua Bell and Philippe Quint, both Corigliano Sr. and Quint did not follow the composer’s optional suggestions. The *glissando* was not applied at all in Corigliano Sr.’s performance whereas the interpretation by Bell emphasizes only the first *glissando* and not all of them.

The next optional violin technique that occurs in the perpetual sixteenth-note motion of the last movement involves Corigliano indicating two left hand *pizzicato* notes (see Figure 23). The first four sixteenth notes are each played on a different string. The optional *pizzicato* requires for the left hand, the fingers to press the D on the E string while simultaneously pressing another finger on the A string to plunk the next note. For the right hand, the bow needs to stop on the E string suddenly after several measures of fast sixteenth-note motion and be prepared to play the D string right after the first left hand *pizzicato*. It requires extremely good control of both hands. Therefore, many violinists including Corigliano Sr., Joshua Bell and Philippe Quint play just *arco* for this passage in their recordings.
3.4 Ensemble Consideration

Regarding the ensemble, Corigliano presents his consideration in the program notes. He believes the two instruments are treated as co-partners although the rhythmic patterns of the two instruments are mostly independent.\(^2\)\(^9\) Technically, the independent rhythmic patterns may cause difficulty for the performer to count and phrase. Musically, these patterns create difficulties for the two instruments to communicate.

In the introduction of the first movement, the violin and piano have a fanfare-like conversation. The meter frequently changes among 7/8, 6/8, 4/4, 3/4, 2/4, 5/8. It mixes simple meter and compound meters as can be seen in Figure 1. Even though the composer wrote the same meter for violin and piano, the rhythm conveys a sense of chaos and conflict. The polyrhythmic and the off-beat entrances make it even harder to identify the downbeat of the measure. Corigliano considers these issues when he composes and offers the sub-bar line to help performers phrase and count. For example, in the development of the second movement there is a polyrhythm between the parts of each instrument. The piano part is repeating a 7/8 rhythmic pattern thus Corigliano uses the sub-bar line to make sure the violin part is subdivided

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by a quarter note such as 3/4, 4/4, and 2/4. Similarly, in the third movement, Corigliano marks the violin cadenza in one measure and adds several sub-bar lines to clarify the phrase. The one-measure cadenza is further divided into ten sub-measures. In relation to this particular kind of rhythmic issue, one suggestion is to use the sub-bar line as a practice method which can be seen in Figure 24. The bar lines are moved ahead, marked as a dotted sub-bar line, to make the entrance happen on the downbeat.

![Figure 24. Moved bar-line practice part of the introduction, 1st movement](image)

Communication between instrumentalists can be difficult due to the rhythmic complexity of both parts. Communication must be maintained within the ensemble as the role of lead and response alternate throughout the piece. In the score, Corigliano details his musical purpose by using lots of markings including wide dynamic range, frequent articulation changes, diverse musical expressions, and tempo changes. Performers, particularly violinists, need to adequately study the score because some indications cannot be found in the violin part. For example, in the recapitulation of the second movement, the polyrhythm is applied to the two instruments. Corigliano indicates the conversation between the violin part and piano part by
using an extra line to show the movement of the phrase from the piano to the violin. (see Figure 25).

![Figure 25. The phrasing lines between the violin and piano part, 2nd movement](image)

In this passage, Corigliano indicates a long melodic line played by the two instruments. The transition, for each instrument, between the 7/8 accompaniment pattern and the melodic line needs careful consideration. The violin and piano part should connect the melodic phrase and make it stand out while being accompanied by the 7/8 rhythmic pattern.

3.5 Conclusion

Corigliano masterfully integrates traditional and non-traditional styles to convey meanings that draw on a stylistic continuum that spans from Baroque and Classical to Avant-Garde.³⁰

Having created an expansive body of varying works during his lifetime, Corigliano’s music tends to borrow materials that are familiar for listeners while also infusing modern compositional techniques to tread undiscovered territory. The Sonata for Violin and Piano is one of the most important works in Corigliano’s early period although his stylistic approach would inevitably evolve thereafter. This sonata can be regarded as a prime example of the composer’s influence on the violin repertoire of the late 20th century.

This study provides a practical approach to performing Corigliano’s violin sonata by analyzing the relationship between the motives and giving suggestions pertaining to technique and ensemble issues. It is a valuable introductory piece for performers who wish to delve into Corigliano’s music, and it is an excellent starting place for those attempting to comprehend Corigliano’s unique compositional vocabulary and approach.
Appendix A: Request for Permission to Use the Musical Examples

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Title of the Composition

4597
Edition Number

John Corigliano
Name of Composer

1st movement: measures 1-10; 20-35, 30-45, 60-65; 2nd movement: measure 1-15, 20, 30-35; 3rd movement: measures 1-30, 50-65; 4th movement: measures 1-20, 60-70; 5th movement: measures 1-70

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Vita

Xinyu Yang was born in Xuzhou, China. She began her violin study at the age of five. She received a bachelor’s degree from East China Normal University in violin performance. In 2014, she came to United States to continue her musical studies and earned her Master of Music at Louisiana State University in Spring 2016. During her study life, she advanced to the Louisiana State University Instrumental Concerto Competition finals in 2014 and 2015. Also, she received the Sidney M. Blitzer Award at Louisiana State University in 2015 and 2017.

As a violinist, Xinyu served as the orchestra concertmaster in the LSU symphony orchestra and a violinists with the Baton Rouge Symphony, Acadiana Symphony, Rapides Symphony. Xinyu is currently a Doctor of Musical Arts candidate at Louisiana State University. Xinyu’s primary teachers includes Lin He, Shuangze Xie, Dating He and Guoping Jiang (violin) and Elias Goldstein (viola).