

STYLISTIC INTERPRETATION AND PERFORMANCE ISSUES IN  
OTTORINO RESPIGHI'S VIOLIN SONATA IN B MINOR

by

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(Under the Direction of Levon Ambartsumian)

ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the compositional style of Respighi's Violin Sonata in B Minor (1917) based on existing scholarly writings and my own analysis, with the purpose of offering informed performance suggestions. Issues of stylistic interpretation and technical preparation are covered for each movement of the work. In addition, historical backgrounds on the composer and the sonata are provided, focusing on the events and compositional influences surrounding the conception of the work. The study discusses the stylistic influences of Baroque music, the Romantic period, impressionism, and Respighi's orchestral music. Performance suggestions are provided on the topics of sound production, vibrato, articulation, and rubato. In addition, issues of tempo, ensemble, and technical challenges for the violin are discussed for each movement, and practice suggestions are provided.

INDEX WORDS: Ottorino Respighi, Violin Sonata in B Minor, style, interpretation, violin performance practice, violin technique

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Need for Study

Ottorino Respighi's compositional legacy is remembered today mainly through his numerous orchestral works, including the tone poems known as the "Roman Trilogy:" *The Fountains of Rome*, *The Pines of Rome*, and *Roman Festivals*. His output in other genres, on the other hand, is often overlooked. With more than twenty chamber works, Respighi's abilities as a composer of instrumental music were not limited to the orchestral field. While his chamber works were admired during the composer's life, they did not preserve their popularity after his death. This may be attributed partially to the success of his orchestral works, which overshadowed these chamber pieces. However, the lack of scholarly study on Respighi's chamber music after his death further contributed to the decline in popularity of this repertoire. Indeed, most of the scholarly attention between the 1930s and 1960s was diverted to the influences of the Second Viennese School and Stravinsky, overlooking valuable late Romantic chamber compositions from this period. Thorough considerations of the compositional influences in Respighi's chamber music therefore did not begin to appear until almost thirty years after the composer's death in 1936. Prior to this document, studies about performance practice of such works do not exist.

The Violin Sonata in B Minor, composed in 1917, is one of Respighi's most performed and recorded chamber pieces. It has grown steadily in popularity since 1950

after Jascha Heifetz produced one of its most famous recordings so far. Since then, the work has not only been played and recorded more often, but also praised in numerous reviews and scholarly writings about Respighi's music. As the piece's popularity increased, it gradually entered the standard violin repertoire as another great example of twentieth-century violin sonatas. The work has also been featured in recent dissertations and graduate students' recital projects, thus showing its increasing prominence in the academic world.<sup>1</sup> For these reasons, it is timely and necessary to reconsider the stylistic interpretation of the B-Minor Sonata and its performance challenges for the purpose of aiding advanced violin students and professionals in the preparation of this work. An assessment of this piece from a performer's perspective therefore has significance for the modern violinist and for the ongoing research on Respighi's chamber music.

### Purpose and Significance

This study evaluates the compositional style of Respighi's B-Minor Sonata, based on existing scholarly writings, with the purpose of offering informed performance suggestions. Writings from both scholarly and performance perspectives about works for violin and piano by Respighi are practically non-existent. In fact, the literature on his chamber music generally consists of historical information about the works, broad stylistic observations, and structural analyses. This document aims to guide violinists to a deeper familiarization with the B-Minor Sonata and is the first writing to focus on the performance aspects of a chamber work by Respighi.

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<sup>1</sup> The first detailed structural analysis of the work is included in Christoph Flamm's *Ottorino Respighi and Italian Instrumental Music from the Turn of the Century until the Fascist Period* (2008). The sonata has also been included in doctoral recital projects and dissertations such as "Under-Appreciated Violin Repertoire of the Twentieth Century" by Yu Jeong Lee (2009) and "The Voyage of Impressionism in Three Violin Recitals: To See the World in Different Colors" by Chun Hsin Jenny Wu (2013).

The ultimate goal of this document is to provide a useful tool for performance preparation of the B-Minor Sonata. The information presented here includes discussions of the historical background of the piece, its structure, and the most salient characteristics of its compositional style. Based on this information, this performer's guide offers suggestions for using a stylistically appropriate sound in the lyrical passages of the piece, practicing passages of both technical and rhythmic complexity, tackling ensemble issues such as balance, and choosing correct tempos.<sup>2</sup> This document has relevance for the modern violinist at the advanced-student and professional levels, with pedagogical applications in the violin studio and the artist's individual preparation of the piece. In addition, this study contributes to the existing scholarly research on twentieth-century violin works and on Respighi's music. This document thus seeks to inspire a growing interest in the study and performance of Respighi's violin works and chamber music oeuvre, both important and often overlooked parts of his compositional output.

### Review of Literature

One of the first thorough assessments of Respighi's style that mentions his chamber music dates from 1957. In his article, "Lineamenti della personalità di Respighi," Antonio Capri provides a rather personal view of the composer's style and draws attention to the eclecticism of styles in his music, a characteristic that is further explored in future studies by other authors.<sup>3</sup> In addition to Capri's research, other Italian

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<sup>2</sup> Conflicting time signatures and multiple subdivisions of the beat occurring simultaneously between the violin and piano parts are pervasive throughout the B-Minor Sonata. Moreover, Respighi's metronome markings, which are used to highlight the structure of the piece, often show inconsistencies with other tempo indications on the score.

<sup>3</sup> Antonio Capri, "Lineamenti della personalità di Respighi," in *Immagini esotiche nella musica italiana* (Siena: Accademia musicale chigiana, 1957), 77-85.

musicologists, particularly Alberto Cantù<sup>4</sup> and Sergio Martinotti,<sup>5</sup> have provided rigorous studies of Respighi's style and described it as neo-classical, neo-romantic, and impressionist. Recent dissertations have attempted to integrate all of these terms into one description or just focus on one compositional period at a time: Nathan Hess discusses eclecticism in the piano works,<sup>6</sup> and Jason Baker examines the early style of the chamber works written before 1902.<sup>7</sup> However, these writings do not agree on a stylistic interpretation of these works, and more importantly, they do not offer any clues about how Respighi's chamber music should be performed.

Several analyses by Cantù, Christoph Flamm, and Phyllis Skoldberg mention important stylistic characteristics and compositional procedures of the Violin Sonata in B Minor. However, none have taken steps to explain this piece so as to help performers interpret it in a way that reflects these observations. A few performance-oriented studies of other works by the composer exist but are limited to conductors' score guides to orchestral and choral works or analyses of Respighi's folk songs that focus on text and interpretation.<sup>8</sup> Following this direction of research, this document fills the gap in the

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<sup>4</sup> Alberto Cantù, "Respighi e la forma sonata," in *Il novecento musicale italiano: tra neoclassicismo e neogoticismo*, ed. David Bryant (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1988), 137-45.

<sup>5</sup> Sergio Martinotti, "Respighi tra modernità ed arcaismo," in *Ottorino Respighi*, ed. Giancarlo Rostirolla and Elio Battaglia (Torino: ERI, 1985), 117-31.

<sup>6</sup> Nathan Andrew Hess, "Eclecticism in the Piano Works of Ottorino Respighi," DMA diss. (University of Cincinnati, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Jason Bradley Baker, "An Edition of Ottorino Respighi's *Fantasia Slava*, P. 50 with an Analysis of his Early Style," DMA diss. (The University of Alabama, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> One of the first conductor's guides to a work by Respighi, Lee Barrow's dissertation "Ottorino Respighi's *Lauda per la Nativita del Signore*: A Historical Investigation and a Conductor's Analysis" (1985), provides a score analysis of the work for performance purposes. A more recent example, Mary Dawn Fontana's "The Folk Songs of Ottorino Respighi: Interpretation and Aspects for Performance" (2000), is the first performer's guide to a non-orchestral work by the composer.

literature by providing a performance-oriented study of Respighi's most famous chamber work for violin and piano.

### Delimitations

The scope of this document covers primarily issues of stylistic interpretation in Respighi's Violin Sonata in B Minor and technical challenges in the violin part. General information on the composer's life, style, and other works are provided in order to explain the diverse compositional influences of the sonata and its place in Respighi's overall repertoire. However, this study does not present a thorough biography of the composer or in-depth descriptions of any of his works aside from the B-Minor Sonata. A general analysis of the work is provided for reference but will not include a thorough discussion of its form and compositional techniques.

Commentaries regarding stylistic interpretation and technical challenges cover specific passages of the piece that I consider to be the most relevant to the understanding of the sonata's style and its technical preparation. However, this study does not offer a full measure-by-measure discussion. Although elements in the piano part are mentioned for their relevance to ensemble and stylistic issues, this document does not offer suggestions for the technical preparation of the piano part.

## CHAPTER 2

### OTTORINO RESPIGHI'S LIFE AND COMPOSITIONAL BACKGROUND

#### Biography

Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936) is celebrated today as a composer of symphonic works that show a magnificent sound palette through their rich orchestration and harmonic language.<sup>9</sup> His talent as an orchestrator is also evident in his numerous transcriptions of Italian compositions from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At a time when musical culture in most of the country was largely influenced by nineteenth-century Italian opera, Respighi became one of the main figures to revive Italian instrumental music and to achieve international recognition for these works. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, the study of Respighi's music experienced a revival. In-depth research on his life and compositional style led to the discovery of unpublished works, particularly his early chamber and piano pieces, and inspired a renewed interest in the performance of his lesser-known compositions. Thus, the broad, one-sided view of Respighi as an orchestral composer has changed to that of an eclectic artist who used a variety of mediums and styles throughout his life.

Respighi was born in Bologna, where he began his piano studies with his father at an early age. As a child, he also took violin lessons before becoming a student at the *Liceo Musicale* in 1891. There he studied violin and viola with Federico Sarti and composition with Luigi Torchi and Giuseppe Martucci. Torchi, a renowned musicologist

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<sup>9</sup> Janet Waterhouse, John Waterhouse, and Potito Pedarra, "Respighi, Ottorino," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., 21:214-20. The biographical content in this chapter comes from Janet Waterhouse, John Waterhouse, and Pedarra's article.

who specialized in early music, was the first to inspire Respighi's life-long interest in Italian music of previous centuries. Martucci, on the other hand, had a direct influence on the style of his early compositions.

Between 1901 and 1903, Respighi visited Russia, where he was employed as a violist for several months. Meanwhile, he studied composition with Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, who became an important influence in Respighi's music, most evident through his orchestration style. After returning to Bologna, his reputation as a composer increased. Respighi's transcriptions of music from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries began in 1906. His first success outside of Italy came in 1908 with his version of Monteverdi's *Lamento d'Arianna*. That year he became active as an accompanist, leading eventually to multiple collaborations and a long friendship with the singer Chiarina Fino-Savio.

In 1913, Respighi was appointed professor of composition at the *Liceo Musicale di Santa Cecilia* in Rome, where he kept this position for over a decade and eventually became the music director. In 1919, Respighi married one of his students, Elsa Olivieri Sangiacomo. She was a talented singer and composer who performed several of Respighi's vocal works, became his main biographer, and worked for the recognition of his music in the last decades of the twentieth century. During his tenure at *Santa Cecilia*, Respighi's reputation as a composer grew exponentially due to the international success of his symphonic works. Furthermore, his collaboration with Sergei Diaghilev and the success of his ballet *La boutique fantasque* enhanced his reputation as an eclectic composer. While continuing to gain fame through his orchestral pieces, Respighi also started to become more involved in opera.

In 1926, Respighi resigned from his administrative and teaching position in order to have more time to compose. During the following decade, he traveled extensively through Europe, the United States, and South America premiering his compositions as a conductor, piano soloist, and accompanist. Meanwhile, fascist authorities in Italy admired his music. However, Respighi remained uninvolved in politics and, unlike many of his colleagues, his communication with fascist leaders was very limited.<sup>10</sup>

Having been diagnosed with a heart disease in 1931, Respighi's health deteriorated during the last five years of his life. He wrote no new original works after 1933 and his last opera *Lucrezia* had to be completed after his death in 1936 by his wife and his student Ennio Porrino.

### Compositional Style in the Chamber Works

The positive reception of Respighi's chamber music during his life and the few years following his death is substantiated by numerous articles of praise worldwide. In an obituary published in the *Mercure de France*, French music critic René Dumesnil questioned the merit of the composer's symphonic works in proportion to their fame, and suggested that the "real Respighi" lies in his chamber music.<sup>11</sup> This and other similar statements about Respighi's chamber works show the high level of appreciation that these compositions maintained in Italy and abroad until the end of the 1930s. Respighi composed chamber music throughout his entire career. However, most of these works were produced between his formative years and his first mature period of composition,

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<sup>10</sup> Waterhouse, Waterhouse, and Pedarra, 215.

<sup>11</sup> René Dumesnil, "Revue de la Quinzaine: Musique," *Mercure de France* 268 (May 15, 1936): 175-6.

namely between 1895 and 1910. As a result, a large number of these pieces were student compositions and some of them still remain unpublished.

The chamber works before 1902 are essentially in a Romantic style assimilated partially through the study of Martucci's instrumental pieces and influenced by Brahms, Dvorak, and the verismo lyricism of Italian opera.<sup>12</sup> The melodic style resembles that of *bel canto*, while the harmony shows a growing interest in chromaticism and modality. After Respighi's visits to Russia, some of the chamber works from 1902 on show a stronger influence of Rimsky-Korsakov. In particular, the often-performed Quartet in D Major (1904) seems to have been modeled after the Russian composer's quartet *Les Vendredis*.<sup>13</sup> This and other chamber works from this period are, however, closer to the style of Austro-German Romanticism, showing a growing influence of the chromaticism of Richard Strauss and Wagner.<sup>14</sup>

In this period Respighi shows preference for small ensembles, particularly for the violin and piano. The Violin Sonata in D Minor (1897), his first chamber composition, was followed by Sarabanda (1897), Giga (1897), Six Pieces for Violin and Piano (1902), and Five Pieces for Violin and Piano (1906). In addition, Respighi wrote eight Baroque transcriptions for violin and piano of works by Locatelli, Porpora, Tartini, Valentini, Veracini, and Vivaldi. Adding the B-Minor Sonata, these works comprise Respighi's entire repertoire for violin and piano. The other important chamber works written before 1910 include six string quartets, a woodwind quintet (1898), a double string quartet

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<sup>12</sup> Robin Freeman, "Italian Chamber Music (1)," *Tempo* 203 (January 1998): 40-41.

<sup>13</sup> Phyllis Linnea Skoldberg, "The String Quartets of Ottorino Respighi: An Analytical Study," (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1967), 23.

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

(1900), and a piano quintet (1902). Out of the six string quartets, only two have been published while the rest are either incomplete or exist in manuscript form only.

The compositions written between 1910 and 1920 present a wider range of influences that blend successfully into Respighi's well-known eclectic style. With his first opera, *Semirama*, the composer starts incorporating elements of French music, particularly that of César Franck and Debussy, as well as the influences of Strauss and exoticism. These stylistic traits also manifest themselves in compositions such as his *Sinfonia drammatica*, the Violin Sonata in B Minor and, most importantly, *Fountains of Rome*. However, the amalgamation of styles in works from this period produces very different results. While *Sinfonia drammatica* reflects the heavily chromatic side of Strauss and Franck, the B-Minor Sonata incorporates elements of impressionism and the Baroque period within a late Romantic style.

During this period, Respighi's compositional activity starts focusing more on orchestral and vocal music, including opera, choral works, and songs for voice and piano. Although he does not abandon chamber music entirely, the number of works produced in this genre from this point until the composer's death is few compared to the previous years. However, each of the works is the product of a mature, fully developed style. Between 1910 and 1920, The Violin Sonata in B Minor stands out as the only instrumental chamber piece.

Starting in 1919 with *Three Preludes on Gregorian Melodies* for piano, Respighi focuses on incorporating church modes and Gregorian chant into his compositions. These pieces exhibit elements of impressionism, lyricism, and Gregorian style within continuous one-movement structures. Notable instrumental works of this style include the

*Concerto gregoriano* for violin, the *Concerto in modo misolidio* for piano, and the *Quartetto dorico*, Respighi's last string quartet. The use of modes and archaic influences in such works continues until the end of the composer's life, as evidenced by his last orchestral piece from 1930, *Metamorphoseon XII modi*.

Respighi's activity as a transcriber also continued in the 1920s until the end of his life, inspiring again original compositions as in the previous decade. The instrumental works show a more mature neo-Baroque style than in previous years resulting from a better integration of Respighi's compositional influences. Such examples include the *Concerto a cinque* and the *Toccata* for piano and orchestra. In contrast, the more lighthearted *Suite della tabacchiera* (1930) for six woodwinds and piano four-hands is closer to the neo-classical style of Stravinsky.

As mentioned earlier, Respighi's stylistic eclecticism developed throughout his life. His assimilation of compositional influences, however, did not produce only one distinctive style common to all of his works, not even to works of the same genre. Instead, each piece seems to have a unique stylistic formula in which one or more influences can be perceived as dominant while the others play a background role and can only be detected under closer examination. The complex individuality of each work therefore requires thorough considerations of stylistic influences in order to understand its meaning and make appropriate performance decisions.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE VIOLIN SONATA IN B MINOR: STYLE AND STRUCTURE

#### History of the Sonata's Composition

The Sonata in B Minor was finished in 1917 and dedicated to a violinist and Respighi's longtime friend, Arrigo Serato. The other dedicatee of the sonata, Ernesto Consolo, was a pianist who had accompanied the composer earlier that year on a concert tour with Serato and the singer Chiarina Fino-Savio. Respighi was pleased with the work both during its compositional process and after its premiere. In a letter to Fino-Savio he wrote: "I have finished the first movement of a violin sonata: I work with much ardor and inspiration," and upon completing the work, he said: "I have finished the Violin Sonata and I am very satisfied with it."<sup>15</sup> The sonata was successfully premiered in 1918 by Federico Sarti, Respighi's former violin teacher, and the composer himself at the piano.

The motivations for writing a work for violin and piano are more unclear. With the compositional achievement of *Fountains of Rome* the previous year, Respighi had discovered his own path out of the multi-movement tradition.<sup>16</sup> In addition, his previous chamber work, the String Quartet in D Minor, was written more than eight years earlier and remained unpublished like most of his other chamber works. It is likely that the writing of a work for violin and piano was partially motivated by a renewed contact with his friend Serato. However, there is a more personal reason for Respighi's choice of the

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<sup>15</sup> Elsa Respighi, *Ottorino Respighi: dati biografici* (Milano: Ricordi, 1954), 97-102.

<sup>16</sup> Christoph Flamm, *Ottorino Respighi und die italienische Instrumentalmusik von der Jahrhundertwende bis zum Faschismus* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2008), 71.

two instruments of his childhood, and for the dramatic and gloomy character of the sonata. In 1916, his mother died and with her, the last connection to his home, Bologna.<sup>17</sup>

In April of that year, Respighi wrote:

Now I feel so lonely; it is as if my right arm has been cut off ... My beautiful house is so quiet, so sad that I dare not return ... My house is destroyed. There is no longer my mother, the good genie of the house waiting for me! No one can ever replace her, no one ever!<sup>18</sup>

Suffering from neurasthenia over the loss of his mother, Respighi had to temporarily stop teaching and took refuge in a hermitage in the Bologna Apennine hills. Considering the lighter tone of the other works that followed this tragic period, the B-Minor Sonata is the only piece that can be understood as a reflection of Respighi's extreme emotional crisis.<sup>19</sup>

### Style and Structure

To understand the stylistic compound of the B-Minor Sonata, one might be tempted to turn to examples in the genre from previous decades. The predominantly Romantic influences in this and Respighi's previous chamber compositions invite the listener to categorize the B-Minor Sonata as a more mature work in the same style. However, the Romantic quality of this work has fewer connections to the earlier chamber pieces than to the more recent orchestral compositions. The variety of influences that can be found in the B-Minor Sonata range from the gestures and forms of the Baroque and Classical periods to the chromaticism of Wagner and Strauss, the impressionistic textures and harmonies of Debussy, and the orchestral textures of his symphonic works.

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<sup>17</sup> Flamm, 72.

<sup>18</sup> Respighi, 92.

<sup>19</sup> Flamm, 72.

Although the predominant style of the B-Minor Sonata can be described as Romantic, it is well differentiated from that of his earlier chamber works. Its highly chromatic quality can be heard from the onset of the primary theme, with a rather early half-step modulation down to B-flat Minor and a melody full of chromatic tones and dissonant intervals.



Example 1. Ottorino Respighi, Violin Sonata in B Minor, First Movement, mm. 1-17.

Another characteristic that sets the sonata apart from earlier chamber works is its thematic connection between movements, which can be attributed to the influence of Franck.<sup>20</sup> As Christoph Flamm points out, the motivic cells that comprise the primary theme of the first movement reappear fragmented in climactic moments of the second movement and again in the third movement's passacaglia theme, thus unifying the thematic content of the sonata cycle.<sup>21</sup> Respighi's earlier sonatas and chamber works, in contrast, have no theme recurrences and hardly reveal a motivic connection between

<sup>20</sup> Alberto Cantù, *Respighi compositore* (Torino: EDA, 1985): 69-76. Cantù emphasizes the influence of Franck in his discussion of the sonata.

<sup>21</sup> Flamm, 74.

movements.<sup>22</sup> However, the thematic connection between the movements of the B-Minor Sonata is less conspicuous than in the violin sonatas of Franck and Debussy, where theme recurrences between movements are more explicit. Instead, Respighi uses the melodic and/or rhythmic profile of short four-note motives from the primary theme to generate entire passages or thematic ideas in all three movements. With the exception of the reappearance and sequencing of the primary theme's first two measures at the climax of the second movement, the motivic connection between themes and movements of the B-Minor Sonata only becomes clear under close examination.

The influence of Respighi's own recent orchestral works in the B-Minor Sonata can be perceived in a variety of ways. Flamm emphasizes its formal connection to *Sinfonia drammatica* by its use of motives connecting the movements. However, the sonata's link to Respighi's orchestral writing comes mainly from the sonority of the work itself, achieved through thick multilayered textures in the piano as well as extreme registers and gestures evocative of orchestral music. One example is the persistent use of tremolos in the low register of the piano (Example 2).



Example 2. Ottorino Respighi, Violin Sonata in B Minor, First Movement, mm. 84-87.

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<sup>22</sup> Flamm, 73.

In this passage, the listener could imagine orchestrating the piano part with its trills or tremolos for the low strings and the melodic material for the woodwinds and upper strings. In fact, the suggestive writing in the piano part throughout the whole piece, closer to the style of orchestral transcriptions than to piano works, encourages the listener to think of orchestral writing even in the less evocative passages. Flamm refers to Variation XII in the Passacaglia as the “trombone-choir” variation and relates the wide-ranged arpeggiated chords of Variation XV to the sound of the harp.<sup>23</sup> Although Respighi did not state his intentions to write a chamber work that evokes the sound of the orchestra, it is important to note that his symphonic writing made its way into the piece.

The subtle impressionistic influences in the sonata are evident in the second movement. The arpeggiated quintuplets create a rocking motion, resembling a berceuse.

The image shows a musical score for the first system of measures 1-8. It consists of a Violino part and a Piano part. The Violino part is marked 'Andante espressivo' with a tempo of quarter note = 78. The Piano part features arpeggiated quintuplets in both hands, marked 'p molto espress.' and 'cres.' leading to 'mf'. The lower system includes markings 'dolce', 'p', 'legato', 'pp', 'cres.', and 'f'.

Example 3. Ottorino Respighi, Violin Sonata in B Minor, Second Movement, mm. 1-8.

<sup>23</sup> Flamm, 91.

However, the constant syncopations at the beginning and middle of the bar cause an ambiguous sense of beat placement, creating an airy and dream-like character. Different authors have related the style of this movement to Debussy. The connection to the French composer's harmonic language can be perceived through Respighi's use of parallel fifths in m. 6, recalling the technique of planing, or parallel voice leading.

Another element that recalls impressionism is the choice of unusual chord qualities and unexpected resolutions within traditional chord progressions to create contrasts of color in the harmony. In the first passage below, mm. 94-102, Respighi alternates between half-diminished seventh chords and minor and major triads. This provides striking contrast between the chord qualities while preserving smooth voice leading. Although the chords resolve unexpectedly, the passage still suggests a functional harmonic progression in which the traditional dominant seventh is replaced by a half-diminished seventh chord.

94 95 96-97 98-99 100-101 102

g<sup>°7</sup> c<sup>#</sup>m<sup>6</sup> (vi) b<sup>°6</sup>/<sub>5</sub> 7 (V) EM (I)

117 118 119-121 122 123 124

B7 (V7) g<sup>#</sup>m C<sup>#</sup><sup>9</sup>/<sub>7</sub> (V/F<sup>#</sup>) F<sup>#</sup>7 (V/V) EM<sup>6</sup>/<sub>4</sub> (V<sup>6</sup>/<sub>4</sub>)

Example 4. Ottorino Respighi, Violin Sonata in B Minor, Second Movement. Harmonic reduction of mm. 94-102 (above) and 117-124 (below).

The second passage above, mm. 117-124, is a harmonic reinterpretation of mm. 15-22 and features a prolonged C#-Major chord with an added seventh and ninth in mm. 119-122. Since this unexpected chord replaces the more traditional relative minor of E Major heard in m. 17, Respighi chooses to emphasize it by extending it for four measures. This C#M<sup>9</sup> chord resolves as expected to an F#<sup>7</sup> chord, but the V/V<sup>7</sup> resolves unexpectedly and directly to a V6/4. Throughout this passage, Respighi plays with the listener's expectations by including unexpected chords and unconventional resolutions while still maintaining a functional sense of tonality.

The passages discussed above are examples of how Respighi uses harmony to recall the style of impressionism in the B-Minor Sonata. However, the second movement cannot be considered strictly an impressionistic work since the lyricism of the main theme and the tragic middle section make strong references to the Romantic style. Therefore, the impressionistic style only surfaces in this work as an allusion and not as a dominant stylistic influence.

The last movement has stronger ties to the Baroque period. The choice of the passacaglia was directly influenced by Respighi's own Baroque transcriptions, one of them also a passacaglia from 1917. Given his ample knowledge of Baroque music, the composer could have chosen a form traditionally associated with grief to express his emotions over the tragic loss of his mother. However, the Baroque elements in this movement go beyond the form and the serious tone of the passacaglia. The dotted rhythms in the bass theme recall the solemn quality of the French overture, and of a funeral march. Meanwhile, the style of a chaconne, specifically the one featured in J. S. Bach's Partita for Solo Violin in D Minor, is strongly suggested because of the triple

meter, the characteristic rhythm, and the emphasis on the second beat. This can be heard already in the third measure of the bass theme as well as in the violin theme at m. 11 and the countermelody in the right hand of the piano in Variation I (Example 6).



Example 5. J. S. Bach, Partita for Solo Violin in D Minor, Chaconne, mm. 1-5.



Example 6. Ottorino Respighi, Violin Sonata in B Minor, Third Movement, mm. 21-25.

Moreover, the melodic shape of the bass theme resembles that of many keyboard passacaglias from the Baroque period, such as Bach's Passacaglia in C Minor, BWV 582.

The forms of the three movements can be easily identified as sonata, large ternary, and passacaglia. At first, Respighi's treatment of form seems "academic," as described by Cantù.<sup>24</sup> However, Flamm's analysis of the work proves that the composer goes beyond the normative use of these traditional forms. While maintaining clarity in the overall structure, Respighi's creativity lies in the motivic relationship between themes and movements, the seamless transitions, and the grouping of variations in the passacaglia.

<sup>24</sup> Cantù, 69-72. The author implies that the treatment of form in each movement follows the most standard traditional models.

Table 1 provides a form analysis of the first movement, showing formal sections, thematic material, key areas, and tempo. An in-depth motivic and structural study of the work can be found in Flamm's *Ottorino Respighi and Italian Instrumental Music from the Turn of the Century until the Fascist Period*.<sup>25</sup> Tables 2 and 3 show analyses of the second and third movements based on Flamm's study. However, I use sonata-form terminology derived from Jan LaRue's *Guidelines for Style Analysis*<sup>26</sup> and William E. Caplin's *Analyzing Classical Form*.<sup>27</sup> As shown in Table 1 below, the use of key areas in the exposition and recapitulation are rather traditional. All of the themes are derived from motivic cells of P1, and both the development and coda feature combinations of the main two themes P1 and S1.

It is important to note that Respighi's frequent changes of tempo, a unique feature of this work, are used structurally to mark the beginning of new themes or sections. The exception is the smooth, almost unnoticeable return of P1 in the recapitulation achieved without a tempo change. This effect is enhanced by the absence of a dominant chord leading back to B Minor and by the continuation of the accompanimental figure from the previous section.

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<sup>25</sup> Flamm, 70-98.

<sup>26</sup> Jan LaRue, *Guidelines for Style Analysis* (Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 1992), 154. The borrowed labeling system for thematic material includes P (primary material), T (transitional material), S (secondary material), and K (closing material).

<sup>27</sup> William E. Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 422. The terms "pre-core" and "core" in the development are borrowed from Caplin's textbook.

Table 1: Analysis of Ottorino Respighi's Violin Sonata in B Minor, First Movement

Section	Theme	Measures	Tempo	Key	Material
Exposition	P1	1-17	Moderato ♩ = 88	Bm	Two-measure introduction; P1.
	P2	17-27	Movendo		P1 in diminution.
	T	27-47	A Tempo	BM→DM	P1; scalar motion in m. 35 anticipates arrival of S1.
	S1	47-63	♩ = 108	DM	Derived from m. 4.
	S2	64-84	Poco meno – Tempo I°	CM→DM	Derived from mm. 3-4; S1.
	K	84-95	A Tempo	DM	P1/S1
Development	Pre-Core	96-100	Agitato ♩ = 108	mod.	P1/S1
	Core	101-114	Più vivo ♩ = 88	F#m	P1/S1
		115-124	Agitato come prima ♩ = 126	mod.	P1/S1
		125-133	Animando sempre	CM	P1
		134-145	Più vivo	C#m	P1
		146-155	I° Tempo (Moderato) ♩ = 88	Cm	S1
	RT	156-163		B pedal (V/Em)	S1 in violin and piano.
Recapitulation	P1	164-178		Bm	P1 with accompaniment from previous section and new countermelody in the violin part.
	P2	178-188	Movendo		Violin and piano switch material.
	T	188-200	A Tempo	BM	Shortened version. The violin part is deleted as well as mm. 39-46.
	S1	200-208	♩ = 104		Shortened version using only the first eight measures.
	S2	208-228	Largamente	BM (IV)	Parallel to Exposition.
	K	228-240	A Tempo	BM	P1/S1
Coda		240-258	Calmo e molto meno mosso ♩ = 76		P1/S1 and second phrase of P1 (mm. 11-16).

Table 2: Flamm’s Analysis of Ottorino Respighi’s B-Minor Sonata, Second Movement<sup>28</sup>

Section	Measures	Tempo	Key	Material
[Main Theme]	A	1-4	Andante espressivo ♩. = 72	EM Lullaby theme as ostinato accompanimental figure.
	A1	5-12		First melodic material in the piano, then expanded to gestures.
	A2	13-23	B <sup>7</sup> → C#m, mod.	Second melodic material in the violin.
		24-33	G# <sup>7</sup>	Almost improvisatory development of the theme.
[Interior Theme]	B	34-53	Appassionato ♩. = 88	D <sup>b</sup> M, mod Lyrical outburst: new (thematic) figure in the violin, then in the piano in parallel sixths.
	A3	54-66	Tempo I	CM, mod. Third melodic material: rising fanfare-like motive.
	C	67-81	Poco più mosso ♩. = 96	C#m → EM → C#m, mod. New motive, cascade-like outburst, followed by a large-scale intensification.
	“X”	82-93	Largo	[unstable key] F# <sup>7</sup> → Am → C#m → B <sup>b</sup> m Catastrophic culmination: return of [P1] from the first movement.
	(A)	94-101	Tempo I (un poco più lento) ♩. = 69	mod. Lullaby figure: Return to the [main theme].
[Return of the Main Theme]	A	102-106	Tempo I	EM [Return of MT] = mm. 1-4 = mm. 5-12 = mm. 13-21
	A1	107-114		
	A2	115-123		
	A2	124-127		Phrase repetition (violin and piano switch roles).
	A	128-132		Cadential extension, “swinging” figure.

Based on its harmonic structure, the form of the second movement can be classified as a large ternary form. However, the thematic content of the interior theme (IT) shows deviations from standard models and challenges this interpretation.<sup>29</sup> The

<sup>28</sup> Flamm, 88.

<sup>29</sup> Caplin, 566. The terminology used for the sections of the second movement’s large ternary form in this and the next chapters comes from Caplin’s textbook. These terms and their abbreviations are shown between brackets in Table 2, as they are different from Flamm’s terminology.

middle section presents a wide variety of thematic material, which is shown by Flamm's labeling of themes (Table 2). Within the IT, the lullaby figure in the piano, A, reappears twice and accompanies new thematic material before the formal return of the main theme. In addition, themes B and C do not come back, leading instead to a reappearance of the first movement's P1 theme. Because of these anomalies, Flamm rejects the label of ternary form; however, he does not offer an alternative interpretation. His labeling of the thematic material of mm. 54-66 as A3 and of the transitional section in mm. 94-101 as (A) is based on the return of the lullaby figure. By looking at Flamm's labeling, one could entertain the idea of a rondo form with themes B and C functioning as episodes. However, the lullaby figure alone fails to function as a refrain in the middle section because both times, it is immediately interrupted by new material. The overall interpretation of a large ternary is therefore supported harmonically and thematically despite the allusions to rondo form. The outer sections are stable with emphasis on the home key of E Major, and show complete statements of A, A1, and A2. In contrast, the IT is characterized by continuous modulation, and the interjections of the lullaby figure never bring back the home key or any of the A themes in their full form.

The passacaglia is perhaps the most original of the three movements in its treatment of form. The ten-bar bass theme A is followed by a secondary theme B. However, theme B is not just a variation or a melodic elaboration of the harmony implied by the bass theme. Instead, it has equal importance, sometimes being combined with theme A and other times standing alone without it. While most of the variations are signaled by tempo changes, this musical element is not as structurally important as in the

previous movements. Instead, the change of mode, tonic, and overall character of the variations determine larger sections within the passacaglia, as discussed below.

Flamm talks about allusions to sonata form and the four-movement structure of a sonata or symphonic work through the grouping of variations (see Table 3 below).<sup>30</sup> In his analysis, the themes and variations I through IV correspond to the first key area of a sonata-form exposition. The next block, V through VII, corresponds to the secondary key area and development because of their shift to the major mode and modulation process from B Major to A Major. The sonata-form structure is then interrupted by a scherzo movement represented by variations VIII to X. After the abrupt interjection of the scherzo variations, the sonata form process continues with Variation XI, which mirrors a thematic recapitulation by having the two themes return in their original form and key. Variation XII serves as a transition to a slow third movement suggested by variations XIII to XV. The fourth movement, Variation XVI to the end, is a three-part finale with a slow introduction, fast section, and coda.

Flamm's analysis is the only one to propose any sort of organization between the variations, and provides a very plausible stylistic interpretation. By being aware of the four-movement structure suggested in the passacaglia, the performers can map the variations in an easy and logical way. This facilitates making well-defined choices of character for each variation and large section of the passacaglia. Finally, this type of organization helps performers plan large-scale phrasing goals through several variations and choose climax points throughout the movement that will highlight the formal structure.

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<sup>30</sup> Flamm, 91.

Table 3: Flamm's Analysis of Respighi's Violin Sonata in B Minor, Third Movement<sup>31</sup>

		Variation	Measures	Tempo	Key	Piano	Violin	
<b><u>Movement I</u></b>	<u>Exposition</u> First Key Area	Theme	1-10	Allegro moderato ma energico ♩ = 100	Bm	A (bass theme)	–	
			11-20			B (secondary theme)		
		I	21-30			LH: A; RH: "B"	B varied	
		II	31-40	Più mosso		LH: A; RH/violin: B triplet variation		
		III	41-50	Ancora più mosso		A, partially dissolved in 8th-notes	B varied	
		IV	51-60	A, freely varied		A		
	<u>Development</u> Second Key Area	V	61-70	Allegro molto e appassionato ♩ = 138	[BM]	A, triplet var.	–	
		VI	71-80	(a Tempo)	[EM]	Harm. support	A (from Var. V)	
		VII	81-90	Appassionato e meno Allegro	[AM]	A, passed between both instruments. The melody is highlighted between 16 <sup>th</sup> -note arpeggios in the piano		
	<b><u>Movement II</u></b>	Scherzo	VIII	91-95	Vivacissimo ♩ = 92	Bm	A, diminished (passed between vln/pno)	
			IX	96-105	Più presto ♩ = 144		staccato	A (spiccato 16 <sup>th</sup> -notes)
			X	106-110	♩ = 96		Ascending line in octaves	A (slightly varied)
<b>(Movement I)</b>	<u>Recapitulation</u>	XI	111-120	Più sostenuto (come al principio) ♩ = 92		LH: A RH: B	Free and virtuosic paraphrase	
	transition	XII	121-130	Lento	(Gm)	B "trombone chorale" in pno., then vln.		

<sup>31</sup> Flamm, 94.

Table 3 (con't)

		Variation	Measures	Tempo	Key	Piano	Violin
<b><u>Movement III</u></b>	Slow Movement	XIII	131-140	Andante espressivo	Bm	A in parallel sixths over tonic pedal	B
		XIV	141-150	(a Tempo)		Slightly varied repetition	Slow scalar ascent
		XV	151-160	→ Largamente		A in pno. (see Var. XIII), then in vln; broad arpeggios in pno	
<b><u>Movement IV</u></b> <b>Finale</b>	Introduction	XVI	161-170	Lento e pesante	Bm	A (original form)	A, varied substantially: new "theme" C
		Trans.	171-174			see m. 6, rhythm	Sustained tonic pedal
	Allegro	XVII	175-190	Molto Allegro e agitato ♩ = 100		A at double speed	Counter-theme C in quadruple augmentation
		Trans.	191-194	Più presto		Mm. 171-174	–
	Coda	XVIII	195-199	Largamente ♩ = ♩.		B (1st half) with rising chords	B freely varied
			200-204	Allegro vivo ♩ = 160		B (2nd half) in unison	
		Coda	205-213	a Tempo - Largo		A (head-motive), head-motive of Movement I	

## CHAPTER 4

### THE VIOLIN SONATA IN B MINOR: PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS

The previous chapters provided essential information regarding the history and compositional style of the B-Minor Sonata. Awareness of the multiple stylistic influences in this piece, its formal structure, and its connections to the composer's life can help performers produce a more effective interpretation, as will be discussed in this chapter. Respighi believed in the interpretation of the performer as a necessary part of the musical creation: "There can be various different performances of the same work but they all combine to form the ideal image of the composer's intention, an image which he could only fix imperfectly and express partially."<sup>32</sup> According to Respighi, the freedom of a performer lies in the ability to highlight different aspects of a composition. However, this requires that the performer is aware of the important characteristics of the work based on its compositional style and structure. The performer should possess sufficient knowledge about the piece, its historical background, and the composer's style before interpreting it or taking artistic liberties. Thus, appropriate performance choices cannot be made without a previous thorough study of the composer and the work.

This chapter provides performance suggestions for the B-Minor Sonata based on the stylistic and structural discussions of the previous chapters. The covered topics include sound production, vibrato, articulation, and rubato. In addition, issues of tempo, ensemble, and technical challenges for the violin are discussed for each movement. The

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<sup>32</sup> Phyllis Linnea Skoldberg, "The String Quartets of Ottorino Respighi: An Analytical Study," (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1967), 13.

offered suggestions do not cover every section of the work but rather the most stylistically relevant and technically problematic passages.

### First Movement – Moderato

#### **Stylistic Considerations**

The overall approach to sound production in the first movement, and in the whole sonata, should be that of a late Romantic work. The long lyrical lines require continuous intensity in the sound, which can be achieved by planned and controlled bow distribution, smooth bow connections and string crossings, and connected vibrato. While this applies to most of the lyrical passages with dynamics of mezzo forte and louder as well as to long crescendos, phrases with soft dynamics should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The beginning of themes P1 and S1 in the exposition start soft and dolce. Therefore, I recommend using a smooth attack and small amounts of vibrato. For the high register and shimmering quality of S1 in the exposition, I would also suggest a change of color with a thinner sound and narrower vibrato. Non-vibrato can also be used on certain notes. In the last note of the movement, for example, vibrato can be gradually reduced after the first measure to non-vibrato so as to achieve a homogenous sound with the piano.

The use of rubato is encouraged, especially to achieve smooth transitions between the frequent tempo changes that characterize the first movement. Within long phrases such as theme P1, rubato can also be used to emphasize the various small-scale dynamic changes such as hairpin crescendos. However, in more static moments like the long diminuendo at the end of the closing section (K) or the end of the coda, the use of rubato should be kept to a minimum in order to achieve a calmer and more contemplative

character that contrasts that of the other sections of the movement. Instead, the ritardandos and diminuendos should be played gradually.

### **Performance Issues**

The frequent changes of tempo in the first movement pose a performance challenge for the ensemble. While Respighi's metronome markings in the other movements present some inconsistencies that will be discussed later, the tempo markings in this movement are coherent and emphasize the structure of the form. Therefore, they should be followed as closely as possible. In most cases, Respighi's metronome indications alternate between 88 and 108 beats per minute, which are the tempos of themes P1 and S1 respectively. However, he switches the tempo of S1 to 104 in the recapitulation and 76 in the coda as these presentations show different characters than in the exposition. While the initial tempo choice can vary slightly, the relationship between different tempos should remain proportional.

Less explicit tempo indications, such as the ten-measure *Movendo* of theme P2, can be interpreted with more liberty. In this case, the *Movendo* should be played either by speeding up gradually throughout the section or as a rubato in which the tempo can be pushed and pulled but with the overall goal of moving forward. However, there are instances where the change of meter in both parts makes it difficult to decide on a tempo. Such examples occur at mm. 123 and 132 of the development. In the first example, the dotted quarter note in the 9/8 should become the quarter note in the 2/2 so that the beat remains constant and the triplet at the end of m. 124 can be played as a pickup already in 9/8. In the second example, the eighth note should remain constant between the 9/8 and

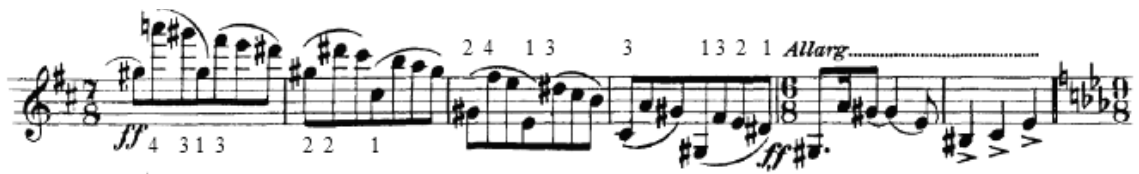
the 5/8 because of the conflicting groupings into 3+3+4 in the violin and 5+5 in the right hand of the piano in mm. 132-133.

The thick texture of the piano part occasionally poses ensemble challenges. The piano should always be sensitive during long crescendos that lead into violin entrances so as not to cover the violin. The violin, on the other hand, should always be aware of the moving notes in the piano part, especially when they are not strictly accompanimental and when the passage does not allow for rubato such as at the end of the coda, mm. 249-256. In regard to multiple subdivisions of the beat, e.g. mm. 140-145, the septuplets can be played with some freedom as long as the two instruments line up on each downbeat. This suggestion is also valid for any part of the sonata where the piano has subdivisions of 7, 11, and 14. However, at the *allargando* of mm. 144-145 in the first movement, the two parts should be stretched evenly and avoid lining up until the downbeat of m. 146.



Example 7. Ottorino Respighi, Violin Sonata in B Minor, First Movement, mm. 142-146.

The passage below is one of the most technically challenging in the violin part in terms of fingerings and string crossing. The following fingering is suggested:



Example 8. Ottorino Respighi, Violin Sonata in B Minor, First Movement, mm. 140-145.

In the preparation of this passage, the violinist should aim for clarity, evenness, smooth string crossings, and continuous sound intensity going towards the lower register. These four bars can be practiced at a slow tempo, in double stops wherever possible, and at a faster tempo with different rhythmic patterns.

### Second Movement – Andante espressivo

#### **Stylistic Considerations**

In regard to the second movement's allusion to impressionism, the sound of the arpeggiated quintuplets should be thin and soft on both instruments. The two performers should strive for smooth legato lines. Moreover, when the quintuplet motive is in the violin at mm. 124-127, it should be played with a minimal amount of vibrato. The use of rubato in this motive should be limited when other voices are active and moving in quarter notes or smaller values, especially if they have different beat subdivisions.

The melody in 4/4 should have a stronger sound and be always in the foreground. Nonetheless, the entrance of the violin at m. 13 should not be aggressive, in spite of being marked forte. I suggest matching the volume of the piano and also its quality by playing the decrescendo rather quickly and emphasizing the note with bow speed instead of vibrato. After that, vibrato can be added gradually, thus creating a smooth transition between the timbre of the piano and the violin.

#### **Performance Issues**

In this movement, metronome markings and tempo changes are more problematic than in the first. The indication of 72 for the dotted quarter note creates confusion since

none of the parts are in compound meter. Moreover, if the value of a dotted quarter note refers to the 10/8 meter, it would result in a much faster tempo than *Andante espressivo*. It is likely that the dotted quarter note is an editorial misprint or a mistake by the composer, considering that at the return of Tempo I (*un poco più lento*) in m. 94, Respighi uses the quarter note as the beat value. In any case, the performer must decide between a tempo of 72 for the quarter note of the 4/4 or of the 10/8. The latter would result in a slower tempo of 57.6 for the quarter note of the 4/4. While I prefer the faster tempo, both of them are stylistically appropriate and allow for different liberties regarding the use of rubato. The faster tempo gives a better flow to the quintuplets. The slower tempo, on the other hand, allows for more use of rubato. Finally, the tempo of the quintuplet material should be consistent throughout the movement unless otherwise noted in the score. Therefore, the *allargando* of m. 52 should lead back to the initial tempo in spite of not being written.

The conflicting time signatures between accompaniment and melody present obvious ensemble difficulties. In the preparation of this movement, it is important for both players to know exactly how the two lines fit with each other before attempting to use rubato. Ensemble problems can also be encountered in the middle section, as they relate to balance and tempo changes. Beginning at m. 54 with A3, a thirteen-bar long crescendo leads to a fortissimo. However, the next section stays fortissimo for another fifteen bars. It is important that the ensemble plans this crescendo carefully and gradually, using phrase beginnings such as mm. 70 and 74 to drop the dynamics and resume the crescendo.

### Third Movement (Passacaglia) – Allegro moderato ma energico

#### **Stylistic Considerations**

As suggested in the previous chapter, the performers can emphasize the structure of this movement by highlighting the character of each block of variations. The robust and serious character of the passacaglia calls for a deep and powerful sound in most of its variations. For this reason, the more lyrical variations in the major mode as well as the playful scherzo variations should use a contrasting much lighter sound. The lyrical variations that allow for a change of color in the violin are XIV-XVI. In Variation XIV, the ascending line in the violin has the function of supporting a middle voice within the piano texture. Therefore, I recommend using a thinner sound and *poco vibrato*, emphasizing the note changes slightly. The unisons between the violin and the piano in Variation XVI, as well as the sustained notes, can also be played without vibrato, saving the intensity for the small crescendos.

Dynamics should be treated freely within the context of forte. Since Respighi's dynamics range between mezzo forte and fortissimo all the way to the end of Variation VII, performers can use more contrast to achieve better balance and differentiation between variations. A careful planning of dynamics can also help in the phrasing of large blocks of variations and in highlighting the climaxes of each structural section.

Rubato in this movement is limited by the strong rhythmic character. Some liberties can be taken, however, within the lyrical variations in the major mode and the slow Variation XII, as well as in the dramatic final variation and coda. A suggestion regarding rhythm in this movement is to exaggerate the dotted rhythms of the theme

slightly. This avoids having triplets and dotted rhythms sound alike and, at the same time, it evokes common Baroque performance practice.

### Performance Issues

Tempo markings are inconsistent in some of the variations and almost too fast to play in others. Additionally, a lot of variations do not offer metronome indications even when a significant change of tempo takes place. Table 4 shows my tempo suggestions for all of the variations. Those not provided by Respighi are placed in brackets.

Table 4: Tempo Suggestions for Respighi's Violin Sonata in B Minor, Passacaglia

Variation	Measures	Tempo	Variation	Measures	Tempo
Theme A	1-10	♩ = 100 [or 92]	XII	121-130	♩ = 60]
Theme B	11-20		XIII	131-140	♩ = 76]
I	21-30				
II	31-40	♩ = 110]	XIV	141-150	a Tempo ♩ = 76]
III	41-50	♩ = 120]	XV	151-160	♩ = 64]
IV	51-60	♩ = 130]	XVI	161-170	♩ = 60]
V	61-70	♩ = 138	Transition	171-174	
VI	71-80	♩ = 138]	XVII	175-190	♩ = 100
VII	81-90	♩ = 105]	Transition	191-194	♩ = 70-80]
VIII	91-95	♩ = 92	XVIII	195-199	♩ = ♩. ♩ = 70-80]
IX	96-105	♩ = 144		200-204	♩ = 160
X	106-110	♩ = 96	Coda	205-213	♩ = 58]
XI	111-120	♩ = 92 [ or 88]			

The Più presto in m. 191 is one of the most problematic tempo markings in the last movement. Since the metronome indication for the previous section was 100 for the

dotted half note, mm. 191-194 would be impossible to play faster or even at the same speed. The tempo thus has to slow down considerably. However, if the whole note is instead perceived as the beat in Variation XVII, the perceived tempo of the beat would increase from 50 to 70 in the *Più presto*, creating the feeling of a faster tempo. This interpretation is based on the fact that the melody of the violin in Variation XVII is an augmentation of the previous variation. Since the quarter note in Variation XVI becomes the whole note in the new variation, the listener can perceive the whole note as being the new beat, an effect supported by the dynamics in the piano.

In Variations III and IV, the violin chords should be played without breaking in order to match the articulation of the piano whenever possible. However, the vertical accents on beat two at mm. 42 and 43 should still be stronger than the chords so as to emphasize the chaconne rhythm. This can be achieved by leaving space between the chords and the notes on the second beat, emphasizing these with vibrato and length.

Variation XI features the most technical challenges of the violin part. The following example offers fingering suggestions:

**Più sostenuto** (*come al principio*)

The musical score for Variation XI consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a tempo marking 'Più sostenuto (come al principio)' and a dynamic marking 'ff'. The music is in 3/4 time and features a complex melodic line with many slurs and ties. Fingering suggestions are indicated by numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 above or below notes. The second staff continues the melodic line with similar fingering and includes a 'III' marking above a triplet. The third staff shows a more rhythmic section with slurs and ties, and includes a 'III' marking below a triplet. The fourth staff concludes the variation with a final melodic phrase and a 'III' marking above a triplet.

Example 9. Ottorino Respighi, Violin Sonata in B Minor, Passacaglia, mm. 111-120.

In order to improve the string crossing in this variation, the above passage can be practiced in double stops at a slow speed. When practicing slow and up to speed, it is important to stay somewhere between the middle and upper part of the bow and to not use large amounts of bow. Additionally, the whole variation can be performed at a slower tempo and at a dynamic of mezzo forte without compromising its character. If the variation is performed at a slower tempo, the relationship between its tempo and that of the beginning should remain close. This would require slowing down the initial tempo slightly. In this case, I suggest playing the themes and Variation I at 92 instead of 100 in order to keep a closer relationship with the tempo of Variation XI. The rest of the variations can still follow the suggested metronome markings, which would result in a clearer differentiation between the initial tempo and the indication of *Più mosso* at m. 31.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Ottorino Respighi's Violin Sonata in B Minor is a unique example in the composer's oeuvre and in the violin repertoire. Aside from being one of the last Romantic violin sonatas to be written, the work showcases a wide array of stylistic influences not commonly found in most late Romantic sonatas. Unlike Respighi's early chamber works, the B-Minor Sonata is the first example in the genre to convey the style of his symphonic compositions and the only one to achieve such extreme contrasts of mood. For these reasons, the work provides great opportunities for the two performers to exhibit a wide range of expression and the highest level of ensemble playing. It is a piece that requires musical maturity, refined taste, and advanced technical abilities.

As stated previously, the performance preparation of Respighi's works requires a full consideration of his compositional influences. The eclectic style of the composer must then be analyzed carefully in each work before its interpretation. In Respighi's own words, "the performer is in a way the composer's collaborator as well as a reproducer."<sup>33</sup> This study of the B-Minor Sonata has shown ways in which Respighi's music can be represented in a more convincing way through the use of informed performance decisions. The goal of this research is to inspire future similar approaches to performance studies of the composer's works and, in particular, of his often overlooked violin and chamber repertoires.

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<sup>33</sup> Phyllis Linnea Skoldberg, "The String Quartets of Ottorino Respighi: An Analytical Study," (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1967), 13.

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## APPENDIX

### LECTURE-RECITAL SCRIPT

#### **Slide 1 (title of the lecture-recital and portrait of Ottorino Respighi)**

Good afternoon. Welcome and thank you for coming to this lecture-recital, titled “Stylistic Interpretation and Performance Issues in Ottorino Respighi’s Violin Sonata in B Minor.” Today I will discuss one of Respighi’s most famous violin works, focusing on stylistic aspects of its performance. First, I will talk about the background of this piece.

#### **Slide 2 (Respighi’s Compositional Legacy)**

Ottorino Respighi’s compositional legacy is remembered today mainly through his numerous orchestral works, including the tone poems known as the “Roman Trilogy:” *The Fountains of Rome*, *The Pines of Rome*, and *Roman Festivals*. His output in other genres, however, is often overlooked. **(Slide 3)** As a composer of chamber music, Respighi wrote many works for strings, woodwinds, and piano. While these works were admired during the composer’s life, they did not preserve their popularity after his death. Thorough studies of the stylistic influences in Respighi’s chamber music did not begin to appear until almost thirty years after the composer’s death in 1936. Prior to this research, studies about performance practice of such works do not exist. The temporary lack of interest in Respighi’s chamber pieces can be attributed to the international success of his orchestral works and to the heavy scholarly focus on the influences of the Second Viennese School and Stravinsky during the first half of the twentieth century.

#### **Slide 4 (Sonata for Violin and Piano in B Minor: Current Research)**

The Violin Sonata in B-Minor, composed in 1917, is one of Respighi's most performed and recorded chamber pieces. It has grown steadily in popularity since Jascha Heifetz produced one of the most famous recordings of the piece in 1950. The work has not only been played and recorded more often in recent years, but also praised in several reviews and scholarly writings about Respighi's music. It has thus gradually entered the standard violin repertoire as a great example of twentieth-century violin sonatas.

Several analyses of Respighi's chamber works by musicologists such as Alberto Cantù and Christoph Flamm, discuss the B-Minor Sonata with emphasis on general compositional procedures and formal structure. Although these authors mention important stylistic characteristics of the sonata, none have taken steps to explain this piece so as to help performers interpret it in a way that reflects their observations. My research offers advice on making stylistically appropriate decisions and conquering technical and ensemble issues in the sonata. I will now provide a brief historical background on the composer and the piece in order to provide a basis for my stylistic observations and suggestions. After that, I will discuss the most salient characteristics of the sonata's compositional style and structure, followed by selected performance suggestions. Finally, I will finish with a performance of the entire work.

**Slide 5 (Biography: bullet points; Respighi's portraits)**

Ottorino Respighi is celebrated today as a composer of symphonic works and as a transcriber of numerous Italian compositions from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At a time when musical culture in Italy was largely influenced by nineteenth-century Italian opera, Respighi became one of the main figures to revive national instrumental music and to achieve international recognition for these works.

**(Slide 6)** Respighi was born in Bologna, where he began his piano studies with his father at an early age. As a child, he also took violin lessons before becoming a student at the *Liceo Musicale* in 1891. There he studied violin and viola with Federico Sarti and composition with Luigi Torchi and Giuseppe Martucci. Torchi, a renowned musicologist specializing in early music, was the first to inspire Respighi's life-long interest in Italian music of previous centuries. Martucci, on the other hand, influenced the Romantic style of his early compositions.

**(Slide 7)** Between 1901 and 1903, Respighi visited Russia, where he was employed for several months as a violist while studying composition with Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. In 1913 Respighi was appointed professor of composition at the Academy of St. Cecilia in Rome, where he kept this position for over a decade. During his tenure at St. Cecilia, Respighi's reputation as a composer grew exponentially due to the international success of his orchestral works.

**(Slide 8)** After 1926, Respighi traveled extensively through Europe, the United States, and South America premiering his compositions as a conductor, piano soloist, and accompanist. Having been diagnosed with a heart disease in 1931, Respighi's health deteriorated during the last five years of his life. He wrote no new original compositions after 1933, and his last work, the opera *Lucrezia*, had to be completed after his death in 1936 by his wife Elsa and his student, Ennio Porrino.

### **Slide 9 (Respighi's Works for Violin and Piano; Other Chamber Works)**

Respighi composed chamber music throughout his entire career. However, most of his chamber works were produced between his formative years and his first mature

period of composition, namely between 1895 and 1910. As a result, a large number of these pieces were student compositions and some of them still remain unpublished.

In this period, Respighi shows preference for small ensembles, particularly for the violin and piano. The Violin Sonata in D Minor from 1897 was his first chamber composition. He also wrote other works for violin and piano, including eight Baroque transcriptions, as you can see on this slide. Adding the B-Minor Sonata, these works comprise Respighi's entire repertoire for violin and piano. **(Slide 10)** Other important chamber works written before 1910 include six string quartets, a woodwind quintet, a double string quartet, and a piano quintet.

#### **Slide 11 (Works Written Between 1910 and 1920)**

After 1910, Respighi's works start incorporating elements of French music, particularly that of César Franck and Claude Debussy, as well as the influences of Richard Strauss and exoticism. Each of his pieces shows a different amalgamation of styles. The Violin Sonata in B Minor incorporates elements of impressionism and the Baroque period within a late Romantic style.

#### **Slide 12 (Violin Sonata in B Minor; History)**

Let us now turn to the history of the Sonata in B Minor. The work was finished in 1917 and dedicated to a violinist and Respighi's longtime friend, Arrigo Serato. The other dedicatee of the sonata, Ernesto Consolo, was a pianist who had accompanied Serato and the composer earlier that year on a concert tour. Respighi was very pleased with the work both during the compositional process and after its premiere, which took place in 1918 with the composer himself on the piano and the violinist Federico Sarti, who was Respighi's former teacher.

Respighi's reasons for writing a work for violin and piano are more unclear. It is likely that the writing of the sonata was partially motivated by a renewed contact with his friend Serato. However, there is a more personal reason for Respighi's choice of the two instruments of his childhood and for the dramatic and gloomy character of the sonata. In 1916, his mother died and, with her, the last connection to his home, Bologna. Considering the lighter tone of the other works that followed this tragic period, the B-Minor Sonata is the only piece that seems to be a reflection of Respighi's extreme emotional crisis.

**Slide 13 (Style and Structure)**

Respighi's assimilation of compositional influences throughout his life did not produce a single distinctive style common to all of his works. Instead, each piece has a unique formula in which one style can be perceived as dominant while the others play a background role and can only be detected under closer examination. The complex individuality of each work therefore requires thorough considerations of stylistic influences in order to make appropriate performance decisions.

The variety of influences that can be found in the B-Minor Sonata range from the gestures and forms of the Baroque and Classical periods to the chromaticism of Wagner and Strauss, the impressionistic textures and harmonies of Debussy, and the textures of his orchestral works.

**Slide 14 (Example 1. First Movement: Primary Theme, mm. 1 - 17)**

Although the predominant style of the B-Minor Sonata can be described as Romantic, it is well differentiated from that of his earlier chamber works. Its highly chromatic quality, more advanced than in his previous chamber works, can be heard from

the onset of the primary theme, with a rather early half-step modulation down to B-flat Minor and a melody full of chromatic tones and dissonant intervals.

**(Slide 15)** Another characteristic that sets the sonata apart from earlier chamber works is its thematic connection between movements. The motivic cells that comprise the primary theme of the first movement reappear fragmented in climactic moments of the second movement and again in the third movement's passacaglia theme. Respighi uses the melodic and rhythmic profile of short motives from the primary theme to create entire passages and themes in all three movements, thus unifying the thematic content of the whole sonata.

#### **Slide 16 (Influences of Orchestral Writing)**

The B-Minor Sonata's link to Respighi's orchestral writing comes mainly from the sonority of the work itself, achieved through thick multilayered textures in the piano as well as extreme registers and gestures evocative of orchestral music. One example is the persistent use of tremolos in the low register of the piano. **(Slide 17)** In the closing theme of the first movement, the listener could imagine orchestrating this passage with its trills or tremolos for the low strings and the melodic material for the woodwinds and upper strings. **(play closing theme)**

#### **Slide 18 (Impressionistic Influences, Example 3. Second Movement: mm. 1-8)**

The subtle impressionistic influences in the B-Minor Sonata are most evident in the second movement. The arpeggiated material introduced by the piano creates a rocking motion, resembling a berceuse. However, the constant syncopations at the beginning and middle of the bar cause an ambiguous sense of beat placement. This effect is enhanced by conflicting subdivisions of the beat between accompaniment and melody. Different

authors have related the character of this opening to Debussy's music due to elements of harmony and voice leading. For example, the parallel fifths in measure six recall the technique of planing, or parallel voice leading, often used by Debussy. However, the second movement is not strictly an impressionistic work. The lyricism and tragic character of the middle section still make strong references to the Romantic style.

**Slide 19 (Baroque Influences; Examples 5 and 6)**

The last movement, in contrast, has stronger ties to the Baroque period. The choice of a passacaglia as a finale was directly influenced by Respighi's own transcriptions of Baroque works. Given his ample knowledge of Baroque music, Respighi could have chosen a form traditionally associated with grief to express his emotions over the tragic loss of his mother. However, the Baroque elements in this movement go beyond the choice of form and the serious tone of the passacaglia. The dotted rhythms in the bass theme recall the solemn quality of a French overture. Meanwhile, the style of a chaconne, specifically the one featured in Bach's Partita for Solo Violin in D Minor, is strongly suggested because of the use of triple meter, the characteristic rhythm, and the emphasis on the second beat. This can be heard from the third measure of the bass theme as well as in the countermelody of the right hand of the piano in Variation I.

**Slide 20 (Form of the Violin Sonata in B Minor; bullet points)**

The forms of the movements can be easily identified as sonata, large ternary, and passacaglia. At first, Respighi's treatment of form seems traditional. However, Christoph Flamm's extensive analysis of the work proves that Respighi's creativity lies in the motivic connection between themes and movements, the seamless transitions between sections, and the grouping of variations in the passacaglia. It is important to note that

Respighi's frequent changes of tempo, a unique feature of this work, are used structurally to mark the beginning of new themes or sections in all three movements.

**Slide 21 (Passacaglia; themes A and B)**

The passacaglia is perhaps the most original of the three movements in its treatment of form. The ten-bar theme A is followed by a secondary theme B. However, this secondary theme is not just a variation of the theme in the bass. Instead, theme B is of equal importance, sometimes being combined with theme A and other times standing alone without it.

**Slide 22 (Grouping of Variations in the Passacaglia)**

Flamm talks about allusions to both sonata form and to the four-movement structure of a sonata or symphonic work through the grouping of variations. In his analysis, the themes and variations I through IV correspond to the first key area of a sonata-form exposition. The next block, V through VII, corresponds to the second key area and development because of their shift to the major mode and modulation process. After that, the implied sonata-form structure is interrupted by variations VIII to X, which resemble a second movement scherzo. Variation XI represents a thematic recapitulation of the first movement by having the themes return in their original form. This placement of the recapitulation is rather unusual since it happens after the implied second movement. Variation XII serves as a transition to variations XIII to XV, which group together as a slow third movement. Finally, variations XVI to the end represent a fourth movement finale with a slow introduction, fast section, and coda. Flamm's analysis is the only one to suggest any sort of organization between the variations. This interpretation

can help performers emphasize the structure of the movement by choosing clearly defined characters and phrasing goals for each block of variations.

**Slide 23 (Performance Considerations)**

Respighi believed in the interpretation of the performer as a necessary part of the musical creation. **(Slide 24)** As stated in his own words, “there can be various different performances of the same work but they all combine to form the ideal image of the composer’s intention, an image which he could only fix imperfectly and express partially.” The freedom of a performer then lies in the ability to highlight different aspects of a piece by making informed decisions based on a previous study of the composer, the work, and all aspects of its compositional background.

Based on the stylistic and formal discussions provided so far, I will now offer performance suggestions for the B-Minor Sonata.

**Slide 25 (First Movement: Stylistic Considerations)**

The overall approach to sound production in the first movement, and in the whole sonata, should be that of a late Romantic work. The long lyrical lines require continuous intensity in the sound, which can be achieved by planned and controlled bow distribution, smooth bow connections and string crossings, and connected vibrato. Phrases with soft dynamics, however, should be considered on a case-by-case basis. For example, the beginning of themes P1 and S1 in the exposition start soft and dolce. Therefore, I recommend using a smooth attack and small amounts of vibrato for the beginning of these phrases.

The use of rubato is encouraged, especially to achieve smooth transitions between the frequent tempo changes. Within long phrases such as the main theme P1, rubato can also be used to emphasize the various small-scale dynamic changes on the score.

**Slide 26 (First Movement, mm. 17-27)**

The frequent changes of tempo in the first movement pose a performance challenge for the ensemble. Less explicit tempo indications, such as the ten-measure *Movendo* of theme P2, can be interpreted with liberty. The *Movendo* should be played either gradually throughout the section or as a rubato in which the tempo is pushed and pulled with the overall goal of moving forward.

**Slide 27 (First Movement: Measures 138-146)**

In regard to multiple subdivisions of the beat, like in measures 140 to 145, the septuplets can be played with some freedom as long as the two instruments line up on each downbeat. However, at the *allargando* of measures 144 and 145, the two parts should be stretched evenly and avoid lining up until the downbeat of measure 146.

**(play example)**

**(Slide 28)** The previously discussed passage is technically challenging in the violin part in terms of fingerings and string crossings. In the preparation of this passage, the violinist should aim for clarity, evenness, smooth string crossings, and continuous sound intensity towards the lower register. These four bars can be practiced at a slow tempo, in double stops wherever possible, and at a faster tempo with different rhythmic patterns.

**Slide 29 (Second Movement)**

In regard to the second movement's allusion to impressionism, the sound of the arpeggiated quintuplets should be thin and soft on both instruments. The two performers should strive for smooth legato lines and, when the quintuplet motive is on the violin part, it should be played with a minimal amount of vibrato.

The melody in 4/4 should have a stronger sound and be always in the foreground. **(Slide 30)** Nonetheless, the entrance of the violin at measure 13 should not be aggressive in spite of being marked forte. I suggest matching the volume of the piano and also its quality by playing the decrescendo rather quickly and emphasizing the note with bow speed more than with vibrato. After that, vibrato can be added gradually, thus creating a smooth transition between the timbre of the piano and the violin.

**(Slide 31)** In this movement, metronome markings are more problematic than in the first. The indication of 72 for the dotted quarter note creates confusion since none of the parts are written in compound meter. It is likely that the dotted quarter note is an editorial misprint, considering that, at the return of Tempo I, Respighi uses the quarter note as the beat value. In any case, the performer must decide between a tempo of 72 for the quarter note of the 4/4 or of the 10/8. The latter results in a slower tempo between 57 and 58 for the quarter note of the 4/4. While I prefer the faster tempo, both of them are stylistically appropriate and allow for different liberties in the use of rubato.

**Slide 32 (Third Movement, mm. 1-10)**

The robust and serious character of the passacaglia calls for a deep and powerful sound in most of its variations. For this reason, the more lyrical variations in the major mode as well as the playful scherzo variations should use a contrasting and much lighter sound. In addition, dynamics should be treated freely within the context of forte. Since

Respighi's dynamics range between mezzo forte and fortissimo all the way to the end of Variation VII, performers can use more contrast to achieve better balance, phrasing, and differentiation between variations. A suggestion regarding rhythm in this movement is to exaggerate the dotted rhythms of the theme slightly. This avoids having triplets and dotted rhythms sound alike and, at the same time, it evokes common Baroque performance practice.

### **Slide 33 (Variation XVII and Più presto)**

Tempo markings are inconsistent in some of the variations and almost too fast to play in others. The Più presto in measure 191 is one of the most problematic tempo markings in the last movement. Since the metronome indication for the previous section is 100 for the dotted half note, this Più presto would be impossible to play faster or even at the same speed. However, if the whole note is instead perceived as the beat in Variation XVII, the tempo of the beat could be perceived as increasing from 50 to around 70 in the Più presto, creating the feeling of a faster tempo. **(Slide 34)** This interpretation is based on the fact that the melody of the violin in Variation XVII is an augmentation of the previous variation. Since the quarter note in Variation XVI becomes the whole note in the new variation, the listener can perceive the whole note as being the new beat, an effect supported by the dynamics in the piano. I will now play the first four bars of Variation XVI and then the first eight bars of Variation XVII. **(play examples)**

### **Slide 35 (Variation XI)**

Variation XI features the most technical challenges of the violin part. In order to improve the string crossings in this variation, the above passage can be practiced in double stops at a slow speed. When practicing slow and up to speed, it is important to

stay somewhere between the middle and upper part of the bow and to not use large amounts of bow. Additionally, the whole variation can be performed at a slower tempo and at a dynamic of mezzo forte without compromising its character. If the tempo is slowed down, the relationship between this tempo and the tempo of the beginning should still be close.

**Slide 36 (Conclusion, portrait of Ottorino Respighi, quote)**

Respighi's Violin Sonata in B Minor is a unique example in the composer's oeuvre and in the violin repertoire. Aside from being one of the last Romantic violin sonatas, the work showcases a wide array of stylistic influences not commonly found in most late Romantic sonatas. Unlike Respighi's early chamber works, the B-Minor Sonata is the first example in the genre to convey the style of his symphonic compositions and the only one to achieve such extreme contrasts of mood.

As stated previously, the performance preparation of Respighi's works requires a full consideration of his compositional influences. The eclectic style of the composer must then be analyzed carefully in every work to be performed. **(Slide 37)** In Respighi's own words, "the performer is in a way the composer's collaborator as well as a reproducer." This study of the B-Minor Sonata has shown ways in which Respighi's music can be materialized in a performance with accuracy and through the use of informed performance decisions. The goal of this research is to inspire future similar approaches to performance studies of the composer's works and, in particular, of his often overlooked violin and chamber music repertoires.

Thank you for your attention, and now please enjoy our performance of Respighi's Violin Sonata in B Minor.