

Present Affections

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for Violin and Piano
(2000-2003)

- I. Recitativo (*cantus firmus*)
- II. Sleep-deprived (*aria languida*)
- III. Multitasking (*variazioni frenetiche*)
- IV. Dressed to Kill (*gavotte à la jazz*)
- V. Significantly Otherless (*musetta lacrimosa*)
- VI. Burnout (*gigue psychotique*)

Program Notes

By the end of the 17th century, most writers held that the purpose of music was to arouse the "affections," discrete and rationalized states of the human psyche; these states were musically rendered by various manipulations inspired by the principles of rhetoric. In his last published work, *Traité des passions de l'âme* (Passions of the Soul, 1649), Descartes puts forth his list of the essential affections ("*passions*"): wonder, love, hate, desire, joy and sadness. The influential German composer and theorist Johann Mattheson, in *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (The Complete Music Master, 1739), built on the work of Descartes and drew analogies between the affections and certain dance types, e.g. the gavotte manifesting "jubilant joy" and the gigue "hot and hurried eagerness." Composers generally restricted a section or movement of a work to the expression of one affection, resulting in the single-mindedness typical of a movement in the Baroque style. *Present Affections*, loosely modeled on a Baroque solo sonata, takes a similar approach-- evoking, with a touch of humor, some common contemporary human states that have earned colorful mass-media labels. The six movements are played without break.

I. Recitativo (*cantus firmus*) This violin solo with minimal accompaniment begins with a 4-note motto (G-Ab-G-F) which will appear frequently in subsequent melodies and prominent bass notes. This is followed by a sequence of seven short phrases; the

rhythm is loose and inflected by the performer, typical of *recitativo*. These seven phrases, in order, are resources of melodic material for the rest of the work, 2 or 3 per movement-- a sort of *cantus firmus*. Movements III through VI each begin with a reprise of the phrases that will contribute their melodic materials.

The "affections" rendered here might be those endured by a single person in a 24-hour period; the themes of the *recitativo* itself might be taken as the mind that will later find itself in these various states.

II. Sleep-deprived (*aria languida*) The melodic content of this lush and enigmatic ode to drowsiness is taken from the first two phrases of the *recitativo*. It is in a modified *da capo* form typical of *aria*. The harmonies presented in this movement, especially in the first section, provide the basis of the harmony in the remaining movements.

III. Multitasking (*variazioni frenetiche*) The melodic content for this movement is taken from the 2nd and 3rd phrases of the *recitativo*. The notes G-E-Ab embedded in the middle of the second phrase are those of the famous "Muß es sein?" ("Must it be?") motive from the last movement of the Beethoven *String Quartet in F*, op. 116. This frenzied and occasionally violent movement imagines a fatigued and over-scheduled parent, trying desperately to keep up with car pools and homework, wondering "Must it be???" It concludes with a lengthy quotation of the ending of op. 116 .

IV. Dressed to Kill (*gavotte à la jazz*) Ready for a night on the town, in both evening wear and attitude. In rounded binary form, like most stylized dances, this crazed boogie takes its melodies from the 3rd, 4th, and 5th phrases of the *recitativo*. There are many showy, leaping lines for the violin, and the appearance of the *Big Spender* theme removes all doubt as to the elemental nature of this affection. The mood of the opening theme is altered drastically at its return in the second half, with somber, jazzy harmony and floating melodic rhythms negating the earlier seductive confidence; perhaps this movement foreshadows the next.

V. Significantly Otherless (*musetta lacrimosa*) There is some irony in turning a pastoral dance for the bagpipes into a study in melancholy, but the typical droning 5ths in the bass seemed a suitable embodiment of unwanted solitude. The 5th and 6th phrases of the *recitativo* provide the melodic material, with the bass ostinato derived from the G-Ab-G-F motto. In rounded binary form, this movement is essentially a piano solo with the violin, playing the role of the absent companion (largely in canon), playing only on the repeats of each section. In the contrasting middle section, the mood of quiet, static frustration erupts briefly into angry self-pity.

VI. Burnout (*gigue psychotique*) This typical closing dance of a Baroque suite, vivacious and imitative, here embodies the relentless momentum of external forces that are out of control and lead to the only possible conclusion: cracking up. The long theme of this movement is assembled from phrases 6 and 7 of the *recitativo*, with lots of repeated notes and syncopations to suggest the unraveling of an adult reduced, by the end, to a confused and petulant child.

Performance Suggestions

I. The violin should play very expressively and dramatically, as if these are important thoughts that will be considered again (they will). The occasional lines leading up to cadence notes are not full *glissandi*, but rather short *portamenti*. In the places calling for "fade to *sul pont.*," make the *sul ponticelli* as thin and raspy as possible, even to the point of having the notated pitch disappear.

II. The violin here is still warm and expressive, but within a narrower dynamic and tonal range. The brief section at 22 should remain light and misty (its return at 53 is more agitated and the energetic high point of the movement). In the middle section beginning at bar 34 (with mute removed), metrical rhythm is abandoned and the approach is more like that of the first movement. All six movements are played without break.

III. After the violin intro much like the 1st movement, this movement is frantic and metrically strict. Much of it is light and scherzo-like, with occasional outbursts; there should be a sense of agitation even when the dynamic is soft. The occasional *molto espressivo* phrases are not lyrical, but rather melodramatic and over the top-- another sort of outburst under stress.

IV. After another *recitativo*-like intro, a strict pulse and seductive swing rhythms take over. As with jazz rhythm generally, there is a tendency for phrases to end and accents to fall off the beat, usually on the last 3rd (i.e. the last 8th of a dotted-quarter pulse). The piano occasionally intertwines on an equal footing with the violin, but more of the time it provides a sort of barroom background while the violin shows off. A wavy line over a long note in the violin, as in all other movements, indicates a very wide vibrato. At the rounding of the binary form in bar 72, the mood shifts completely, with dejection replacing the previous brashness.

V. The transition to this movement, written at the end of the previous, begins with another *recitativo*-like portion followed by some repeating figures. While playing these, being careful not to synchronize with the piano, the violin walks slowly offstage where it will perform the entire movement. Set up another music stand that is not too far away-- out of sight but not out of ear; the violin may need to play the dynamics a bit louder than indicated. The violin plays only on the repeats. In bars 1-26 and 42-55, the piano should use as much pedal as necessary to make the sound lush but avoiding any blurring of the bass ostinato. This is the one movement that is free of any humorous undertones.

VI. In this last movement the piano takes over the introductory "review" role. At measure 9, the violin begins the gigue rhythm with the theme and walks back out on the stage while playing it-- which will require memorizing these few bars. This movement is steady and energetic all the way through; there is room for both performers to add inflections of phrasing to the various lines that are relatively unmarked. The end is a fadeout, with the violin finishing just before the piano. The pianist may wish to prepare by marking the needed strings inside the piano.