

Historical background, theoretical analysis, and practice guides for a violin recital

by

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Excerpts from Three Pieces for Two

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Abstract

This report examines how historical research, theoretical analysis, and targeted practice guides inform interpretive decisions and pedagogical outcomes in violin performance. Due to the author's lifelong connection with music and experience preparing degree recitals and teaching, this report uses close readings of selected repertoire—encompassing composer biography, historical context, and theoretical/structural analysis—with applied practice strategies developed during preparation and instruction. Through thorough analysis and reflection in performance and teaching scenarios, the author demonstrates that contextual knowledge influences expressive choices (articulation, tempo, phrasing, and character), while theoretical insights clarify phrase structure and harmonic function, further guiding interpretation. Practice guides extrapolated from these analyses provide concrete exercises and concepts that lead to efficient practice and transfer pedagogical knowledge to future violinists tackling similar works. The findings suggest that prior or simultaneous analytical study allows the performer to foster a deeper connection to the music, enhances audience engagement when contextual material is shared, and strengthens pedagogical scaffolding for developing musicians.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	v
Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction	1
Definitions of Terms	2
Implications/Limitations	3
Chapter 1 - <i>Midsummer Moon</i> and “Nocturne” from <i>Three Pieces for Two Violins and Piano</i> by Rebecca Clarke	6
Biographical Information.....	6
Theoretical and Structural Analysis.....	11
Practice Guide/Pedagogical Considerations	29
Chapter 2 - <i>Darshan</i> , III. “Charukeshi” by Reena Esmail.....	31
Biographical Information.....	31
Theoretical and Structural Analysis.....	36
Practice Guide/Pedagogical Considerations	40
Chapter 3 - Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major by César Franck	42
Biographical Information.....	42
Theoretical and Structural Analysis.....	48
Practice Guide/Pedagogical Considerations	56
Chapter 4 - Conclusion	60
Bibliography	61

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Rebecca Clarke <i>Midsummer Moon</i> beginning-measure 5	12
Figure 1.2 <i>Midsummer Moon</i> , measure 2	13
Figure 1.3 <i>Midsummer Moon</i> , measures 9-14	14
Figure 1.4 <i>Midsummer Moon</i> , measures 66-71	15
Figure 1.5 <i>Midsummer Moon</i> , measures 15-21	16
Figure 1.6 <i>Midsummer Moon</i> , measures 1-5	17
Figure 1.7 <i>Midsummer Moon</i> , measures 22-23	17
Figure 1.8 Ralph Vaughan Williams, <i>The Lark Ascending</i> , beginning cadenza	17
Figure 1.9 <i>Midsummer Moon</i> , measures 25-44	19
Figure 1.10 <i>Midsummer Moon</i> , measures 25 and 33-36.....	19
Figure 1.11 <i>Midsummer Moon</i> , measures 27-38	20
Figure 1.12 <i>Midsummer Moon</i> , measures 60-67	21
Figure 1.13 <i>Midsummer Moon</i> , measures 83-end.....	21
Figure 1.14 “Nocturne,” measures 5-7	22
Figure 1.15 “Nocturne,” measures 30-33	23
Figure 1.16 “Nocturne,” measures 40-44	24
Figure 1.17 “Nocturne,” measure 58	25
Figure 1.18 “Nocturne,” measures 59-62	26
Figure 1.19 “Nocturne,” measures 90-92	27
Figure 1.20 “Nocturne,” measures 93-96	27
Figure 1.21 “Nocturne,” measures 107-end.....	28
Figure 2.1 <i>Darshan</i> , III. “Charukeshi,” measure 2	36
Figure 2.2 <i>Darshan</i> , III. “Charukeshi,” measures 1-7	37
Figure 2.3 <i>Darshan</i> , III. “Charukeshi,” measures 22-23	38
Figure 2.4 <i>Darshan</i> , III. “Charukeshi,” measures 1-7	39
Figure 2.5 <i>Darshan</i> , III. “Charukeshi,” measures 51-end	39
Figure 3.1 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 1, measure 1-5	48
Figure 3.2 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 3, measures 1-4.....	49
Figure 3.3 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 3, measures 55-61	49

Figure 3.4 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 4, measures 65-72.....	49
Figure 3.5 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 3, measures 70-77.....	50
Figure 3.6 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 4, measures 132-158.....	50
Figure 3.7 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 2, measures 39-51.....	50
Figure 3.8 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 4, measures 99-106.....	51
Figure 3.9 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 2, measures 14-25.....	52
Figure 3.10 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 2, measures 46-59.....	52
Figure 3.11 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 2, measures 189-202.....	52
Figure 3.12 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 3, beginning-measure 16	53
Figure 3.13 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 3, measures 24-33.....	53
Figure 3.14 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 3, measure 37.....	54
Figure 3.15 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 3, measures 59-60.....	54
Figure 3.16 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 3, measures 95-111.....	54
Figure 3.17 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, measure 125 as ‘sprints’.....	58

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Introduction

As a child and throughout my teenage years, I always felt a deep connection to music without quite understanding why. My father, who is also a violinist, violist, and composer, had the greatest impact early in my life simply by demonstrating and sharing his love for and deeper knowledge of music. While I didn't fully understand it all, I began to sense that there were both extrinsic and intrinsic values in studying music. Through his example, I gathered basic research skills for creating program notes. While important, I later discovered in college that I wanted to expand my knowledge and go beyond surface-level items of information to share. The main avenues that encouraged this were preparing for my degree recitals and student teaching after those recitals were complete. Though minimal, I did research the history of the pieces I performed and taught, including gathering background knowledge on the composer and the significance of the piece. I also took time to do simple structural and melodic phrasal analysis to relay to the students I taught. I still felt there was more that I wasn't receiving on how to appropriately analyze and conduct research, and I knew I wanted to pursue a higher degree to conduct research and experience it firsthand. This understanding of connection to music through research, collaboration, improved practice strategies, and sharing experiences with other musicians, as well as influencing audience members, is among the reasons that I am pursuing deeper studies in music. By completing in-depth historical and theoretical analyses before or during the process of preparing pieces for a recital, a musician will be much more informed on how to interpret and apply that knowledge to create a more expressive performance. I have found that uncovering the historical context surrounding both the composer's life and the reasons they wrote the piece engages me more as a performer and as an audience member, especially when

the information is shared by the performer or can be found in program notes. The inclusion of these aspects provides a story and an image to focus on while a piece is being performed.

Discovering the historical background and conducting a theoretical analysis of each piece I've selected will inform phrase structures and characters for a well-rounded interpretation. Additionally, creating practice guides will contribute to pedagogical knowledge that future violinists can use when preparing these pieces, enabling them to apply what they learn to similar ones. In this report, I will attempt to answer the following questions: How does the exploration of the historical background of these works affect how I perform this repertoire? How does theoretical analysis influence my musical decision-making process? How will the knowledge discovered through the creation of practice guides enhance the learning process for future violinists approaching similar repertoire?

Definitions of Terms

Bitonality: Using two different keys simultaneously

Harmonic analysis: "...understanding how a chord is related to the key and to the other chords in a piece of music."¹ For this report, an analysis will be done as to how certain chords influence the mood or character of the piece.

Melodic phrase: A musical sentence, akin to language, that completes a musical statement. A melodic phrase can be found or heard when there is a point of rest or upon a resolution, and shorter phrases come together to form a longer phrase.² In this report, the study of melodic phrases will be used to enhance expressiveness in performance.

¹ Catherine Schmidt-Jones, "Chapter 5.5 Beginning Harmonic Analysis," EarMaster, November 14, 2013.

² Jack Perricone, "What Is Melody in a Song?" *Berklee Online Take Note*, October 4, 2022.

Phrasing: how musicians create sentences and flow to each piece they perform

Practice guides: compilation of methods that I executed that did and did not work while preparing these pieces, and recommendations for which tools to use for future violinists

Raag: Melodic framework for improvisation and composition in Indian Classical music; more than just a scale as the rising and falling of notes and emotional mood are defined by specific rules; often associated with times of the day or seasons.³

Rhapsody: one of the most expressive and free forms of music that is composed, as no formal structure is required.⁴

Implications/Limitations

After reading this report, the reader will gain a deeper understanding of each composer's historical background and the pieces on the program. Additionally, the theoretical analyses will assist me and others in making informed decisions when interpreting phrases and other musical ideas. Perhaps most importantly, the practice guides serve as a resource for aspiring violinists to reference when learning these pieces for the first time. One of the most important goals for this report is for it to serve as a resource for violinists. However, and just as important, is for those who aren't violinists to gather enough information to obtain a better understanding of the background, knowledge, and skills required to complete this type of research, and an overview of some of the challenges that come with that.

³ Jameela Siddiqi, "What Is Raga? More than a Tune, More than Melody," *Darbar*, June 20, 2025, <https://darbar.org/what-is-raga-more-than-a-tune-more-than-melody/>.

⁴ "What Is a Rhapsody? - Arabesque Conservatory of Music," October 29, 2025, <https://www.arabesqueconservatory.com/blog/what-is-a-rhapsody/>.

There were several challenges I faced when conducting research for this report. An example of a challenge I faced would be focusing the scope of this report to optimize the reader's experience. It is also important to keep in mind that this report is one person's research and perspective on how to approach these pieces. Practice is a nuanced and individualized process, and finding the best practice method will take a substantial amount of time and experimentation. For this reason, I chose to keep records of certain practice sessions to aid in preparing this report. As an early-career violinist, I'm still in the process of determining which practice methods work most efficiently for me, which I am still learning through lessons and practice sessions.

This report examines *Midsummer Moon* and "Nocturne" from *Three Pieces for Two Violins and Piano* by Rebecca Clarke, *Darshan*, III. "Charukeshi" by Reena Esmail, and Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major by César Franck. By keeping practice notes for the practice guides, my progress on the pieces grew exponentially in a relatively short amount of time. These findings can also be applied when other violinists or I are learning similar or more difficult pieces in the future.

Each chapter of this report will follow the same outline:

- Biographical Information
 - Historical Context of the Composer
 - Historical Context of the Composition
- Theoretical and Structural Analysis
 - Basic Form Structure

- Basic Harmonic Analysis
 - Melodic Phrase Analysis
- Practice Guides
 - Technique/Stylistic Considerations
 - Exercises/Efficient Practice Methods

Chapter 1 - *Midsummer Moon* and “Nocturne” from *Three Pieces for Two Violins and Piano* by Rebecca Clarke

Biographical Information

Born in 1886 to a German mother and American father, Rebecca Clarke was raised in England and had dual British-American citizenship from birth. While alive, she was mostly known as a touring violist and chamber music musician, but also had a worldwide reputation as a composer. Additionally, her musical studies were fully supported financially by her father and only encouraged by her mother and teachers. After taking lessons in her early childhood, she began violin studies at the Royal Academy of Music in 1903. However, her father abruptly withdrew her from the Academy in 1905 after her harmony teacher, Percy Miles, proposed marriage.⁵

Clarke began taking lessons with Sir Charles Stanford at the Royal College of Music in 1908, making her one of the first women to study composition with him. Unfortunately, once again, she was unable to finish her studies as her father suddenly banned her from the family house following a quarrel they had two years later.⁶ After this, she supported herself as a freelance violist by performing solo recitals, in chamber groups, and in orchestras. She also provided help to her good friend, cellist May Mukle, who frequently performed with her. Clarke frequently performed with all-women chamber groups in private homes and even gave a few solo

⁵ Janet Horvath, *Three Must-Hear Works by Composers Rebecca Clarke and Rita Stroh*, September 4, 2021, <https://interlude.hk/cello-music-by-women-composers-iii-rebecca-clarke-and-rita-strohl/>.

⁶ Christopher Johnson, “Life,” *Rebecca Clarke*, June 3, 2020, <https://rebeccaclarkecomposer.com/life/>

performances. She was not limited to all-women groups as she also performed concerts that included her own solos in both public and private settings. In 1913, Clarke auditioned for the Queen's Hall Orchestra and won a position as one of six women, and one of two violists, out of one hundred thirty-seven spots he had opened for women.⁷ The audition was extremely challenging as the auditioners had to sight-read Richard Strauss's *Don Juan*. This was perhaps an indicator of the progress towards integration of women into professional orchestras. Sir Henry Wood's initiative to allow women in his ensemble provides insight into his values. Clarke was one of the first women ever welcomed into the ensemble.⁸

After performing with that orchestra for a few years, she embarked on an international tour throughout Great Britain, Europe, and the United States. This tour helped her gain recognition as a standout soloist and as a pioneering advocate for the viola. In this respect, she was on par with fellow violists Lionel Tertis and William Primrose. As far as chamber music performance is concerned, she far outperformed them.⁹

This period of time was also particularly influential to Clarke's compositional career. It was during this first tour across the U.S. that "she wrote one of the greatest extended works for viola, her Sonata of 1919, which she entered in an anonymous competition sponsored by the

⁷ Excerpts from a manuscript by Christopher Johnson, provisionally entitled Rebecca Clarke, Viola-Player and Composer: A Life, Copyright © 2025, Christopher Johnson, rebeccaclarkecomposer.com. Used by permission.

⁸ Christopher Johnson, "Life," *Rebecca Clarke*, June 3, 2020, <https://rebeccaclarkecomposer.com/life/>.

⁹ Christopher Johnson, "Life," *Rebecca Clarke*, June 3, 2020, <https://rebeccaclarkecomposer.com/life/>.

renowned American patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge.”¹⁰ She tied for first place at Mrs. Coolidge’s Berkshire Festival. The jury was undecided whether Bloch’s Suite for Viola or Clarke’s Viola Sonata should win the prize, and Mrs. Coolidge was asked to break the tie. Bloch won, but the jury was very curious about who had composed the viola sonata and was left in shock when it was announced that a woman had composed it.¹¹ As Christopher Johnson shares, Mrs. Coolidge informed Clarke later that afternoon, following the competition, “You should have seen their faces when they saw it was by a woman.”¹² As a result of her placing highly in this competition and word getting out that a woman composed such a masterwork, she became well-known around the world. Lionel Tertis was eager to perform this piece, and J. & W. Chester published it only two years after it was composed.¹³ This further established her reputation as a composer, even though her catalogue was somewhat small at the time. The viola sonata nearly instantly became a standard piece in the repertoire for the instrument, and by 1925, she was able to sell out London’s Wigmore Hall with a concert full of her own compositions as well as have most of the program repeated for a live broadcast completed by BBC studios.¹⁴

¹⁰ Christopher Johnson, “Life,” *Rebecca Clarke*, June 3, 2020, <https://rebeccaclarkecomposer.com/life/>.

¹¹ Christopher Johnson, “Life,” *Rebecca Clarke*, June 3, 2020, <https://rebeccaclarkecomposer.com/life/>.

¹² Christopher Johnson, “Life,” *Rebecca Clarke*, June 3, 2020, <https://rebeccaclarkecomposer.com/life/>.

¹³ Christopher Johnson, “Life,” *Rebecca Clarke*, June 3, 2020, <https://rebeccaclarkecomposer.com/life/>.

¹⁴ Christopher Johnson, “Life,” *Rebecca Clarke*, June 3, 2020, <https://rebeccaclarkecomposer.com/life/>.

Composed in 1924, *Midsummer Moon* is a short, impressionistic tone poem for violin and piano. It is a light miniature with a fluttering violin melody that often mimics a songbird, much like Ralph Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending*. *Midsummer Moon* premiered just three years after *Lark* at London's Wigmore Hall, where Clarke performed with Adila Fachiri, to whom she dedicated the piece. This piece is also much "...like *Morpheus* [in that] there is a strong French element to its language, but this, like the 'English' modality, has by now been subsumed into a wholly personal idiom whose high ecstatic violin line and glittering piano writing suggests parallels with, if anything, *Mythes* [by] Szymanowski."¹⁵

Adila Fachiri and her sister, Jelly, were Hungarian violinists who met Clarke in England, as they were all active participants in the London concert scene. The sisters, Clarke, and Guilhermina Suggia formed a string quartet in association with the Classical Concert Society. Percy Such and May Mukle eventually became cellists of this quartet. Fachiri asked Clarke to write her a piece for an upcoming recital of hers, and she complied, "using some old scraps [she] started a couple of years ago."¹⁶ Though there seems to be more focus on Jelly, Adila's skills are not to be underestimated. In fact, their great-uncle was the renowned violinist Joseph Joachim, and she was one of, if not his only, private students outside of a school or university setting.¹⁷ She "studied at Budapest's Liszt Academy of Music with Jenő Hubay [and...] made her debut in

¹⁵ Calum MacDonald, "Rebecca Clarke's Chamber Music (I)." *Tempo*, no. 160 (1987): 24, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/944788>.

¹⁶ Excerpts from a manuscript by Christopher Johnson, provisionally entitled Rebecca Clarke, Viola-Player and Composer: A Life, Copyright © 2025, Christopher Johnson, rebeccaclarkecomposer.com. Used by permission.

¹⁷ Robert E. Eshbach, "Joachim's Students," Joseph Joachim, November 4, 2014, <https://josephjoachim.com/2014/11/04/joachims-students/>.

Vienna performing the Beethoven Violin Concerto in 1906 on a Stradivarius violin bequeathed to her by Joachim.”¹⁸

During her time as a student at the Royal College of Music, it is possible that Sir Charles Stanford, her teacher, suggested using instruments she was comfortable playing (violin, viola, and piano) to begin experimenting with in her compositions. In fact, it was also Stanford that prompted her to switch to the viola, stating that if she did switch, she would be “right in the middle of the sound, and can tell how it’s all done.”¹⁹ Through these lessons, Clarke strengthened her ability to write for stringed instruments, making them some of her best and most well-known pieces, such as the Viola Sonata. Although the movements titled “Prelude,” “Danse Bizarre,” and “Nocturne” were fully completed and revisions have been made for the Sleepy Puppy Press edition, the fourth movement of the *Three Pieces for Two Violins and Piano* was either left as an unfinished assignment she began with Stanford, or the remaining pages were separated and lost as “Clarke believed the manuscripts were lost, but in 2000 they were found in a box in the back of a closet.”²⁰

¹⁸ Janet Horvath, *How Did These Violinist Sisters Uncover Schumann’s Violin Concerto by Seance?*, July 15, 2022, <https://interlude.hk/influencers-hungarian-violinists-and-sisters-jelly-and-adila-daranyi/>.

¹⁹ Christopher Johnson, “Life,” *Rebecca Clarke*, June 3, 2020, <https://rebeccaclarkecomposer.com/life/>.

²⁰ “Clarke, ‘Three Pieces’ for Two Violins and Piano,” Sleepy Puppy Press, accessed March 11, 2026, http://www.sleepypuppypress.com/store/p132/Clarke%2C_%22Three_Pieces%22_for_two_violins_and_piano.html.

Theoretical and Structural Analysis

Midsummer Moon is structured as a loose ternary form with a coda at the end marked *molto piu lento*. Clarke uses the contrast between tonal vs. atonal and dissonance vs. harmony to create unsettling moods throughout the piece, which was a major goal and value of impressionism in this era of music. It seems she was also reflecting on the work of Debussy and Ravel, as evidenced by her use of aural contrasts between tonalism and dissonance to evoke the character and mood she intended. In the first theme, Clarke frequently uses dissonance, juxtaposes tonality with atonality, and employs suspension and resolution to create a somewhat dire or anxious feeling. The first example of this is the violinist's melody in measure 3 (as seen in Figure 1.1). Even without accompaniment, the double stop of a seventh from E-flat to D is dissonant but quickly resolves. When the piano enters on beat 3, the harmony is quite interesting, as the violin is playing B-natural and F in conjunction with B-flat, D, and G-sharp in the accompaniment. She uses the same chord in the next measure; this time, the notes are reversed between piano and violin.

Poco andante REBECCA CLARKE

The musical score is for Rebecca Clarke's 'Midsummer Moon' beginning-measure 5. It is written for Violin and Piano. The tempo is 'Poco andante'. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The time signature is 4/4. The Violin part begins with a high E (E5) and a melodic line. The Piano part begins with a dominant five chord (F#4, C#5, G#4, D#5) and an arpeggio. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings like 'p' (piano) and 'poco rit.' (poco ritardando).

Figure 1.1 Rebecca Clarke *Midsummer Moon* beginning-measure 5

At the very beginning, the listener is left unsure of the key area. If we examine only the violin part, which begins on a high E, it appears that Clarke is using the dominant of A minor, the work's key signature, to begin the melody. That may be true, but the piano part before the violin enters suggests we may not be in any particular key. However, upon further examination, she does, in fact, open the piece with a dominant five chord until the violin line descends to a D# rather than a diatonic note corresponding to the potential key signature of A minor in measure 2. She uses Bb to add a more colorful sound to the arpeggio in contrast to if she chose not to

include it and maintained the dominant chord (Figure 1.2).



Figure 1.2 *Midsummer Moon*, measure 2

Another device Clarke uses to quickly shift modalities is chromaticism. Although some of these changes are sudden, she transitions seamlessly from one modality to another by using this compositional device. Although not used consecutively, the accidentals clearly lead us from an F# major chord to an A major chord between measures 10 and 14 (Figure 1.3). These lowest notes (F# and A) are hard to hear due to range and because they are surrounded by an F#9 chord in measure 9, a C#°7 chord is prevalent in measures 13 and 14, and with the addition of A in the bass, creates an A9 chord. The choice to include C-natural in measure 12 is also interesting.



Figure 1.3 *Midsummer Moon*, measures 9-14

This A major chord doesn't last long, but the way she has set up this change allows flexibility for the next time Clarke switches modalities. Clarke employs similar transitions later in the piece, such as in measures 66-71, when this theme comes back (Figure 1.4).



Figure 1.4 *Midsummer Moon*, measures 66-71

Measure 15 remains as an A major chord but quickly departs to an Eb dominant seventh chord in the last half of the measure. This is interesting as the Eb dominant seventh is non-tonal. This, and further examples to come, demonstrate Clarke's own harmonic language. Clarke again briefly uses chromaticism and octave displacement in measure 16 to return to an A major chord. The chord remains until the middle of measure 17, when it again switches modalities. Upon first examination, it doesn't appear to be this chord; however, if the F# and A# are analyzed as non-chord tones, it is a C major chord. Clarke is exploring the breadth between an F# and C major

chord. This dissonance is noticeable to the ear and is the result of a F#ø9 chord. It is interesting that the violin line is holding a C and then repeats it as a triplet right before the climax in measure 18, putting extra emphasis on C. Following the climax, it's interesting that Clarke uses dissonant chords underneath the violin's E and makes the listener wait for harmony until the end of the next measure. She even marks the arrival of tonal chords with accents and a crescendo to emphasize their importance.



Figure 1.5 *Midsummer Moon*, measures 15-21

The first theme, which returns in measure 62, at Tempo I, almost exactly as it was in the beginning, starts high in the violin's range and establishes a contemplative mood. It descends a half step from E to D#, followed by a large skip of a descending augmented fifth down to a G. Following this is another large descending leap in range that goes down to a D. To conclude the opening phrase, the notes remain in a high register, but the contour of the melody does not jump around nearly as much. All of this is shown in Figure 1.6 below.



Figure 1.6 *Midsummer Moon*, measures 1-5

A final feature of this theme is the inclusion of rhapsodic elements. The performer has considerable freedom in the execution and phrasing of the following motive in measures 22 and 23 (Figure 1.7). This closely resembles *The Lark Ascending* by Ralph Vaughan Williams, as it shares a similar musical landscape due to Clarke's use of rhapsodic and free material. Figure 1.8 demonstrates the similarity.



Figure 1.7 *Midsummer Moon*, measures 22-23

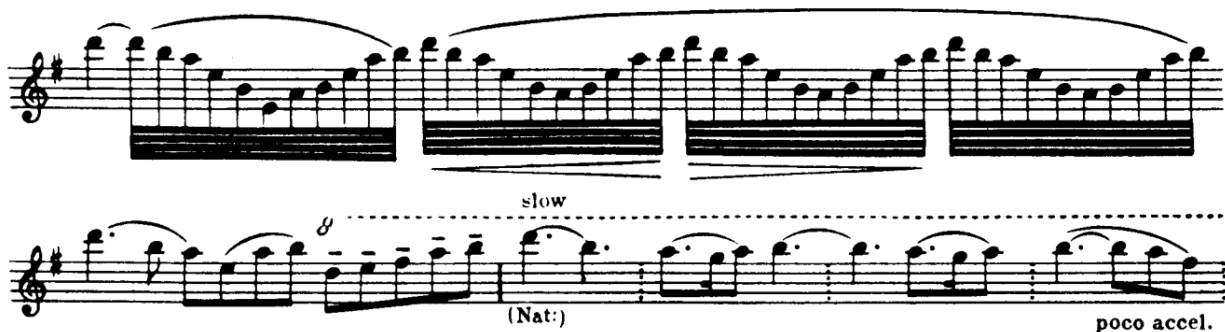


Figure 1.8 Ralph Vaughan Williams, *The Lark Ascending*, beginning cadenza

The second theme is more stately, emotionally driven, and, in some ways, more rhythmically organized. The dynamic is marked a few levels louder than the beginning and near the bottom of the violin's range. This is in stark contrast to the opening theme. The melodic phrase has a smaller range than the beginning, and to increase the emotional range and depth of the piece, Clarke has the violinist shift up high onto the G and D strings to create a dark timbre (Figure 1.9). In measure 33 and the subsequent measures, the harmonic rhythm increases, and so does the tempo until the arrival of the *piu lento*. It is also interesting to compare the introduction of the second theme at measure 25 with its repetition at measure 33 and beyond. Clarke transposes the melody higher with each repetition, which also contributes to the stronger emotions exhibited here. Clarke compresses the intervals and takes a fragment from the beginning of the second theme in measures 33-36. First, she starts the fragment higher, on an F, and then goes up to an Ab, which is only a distance of a minor third in comparison to a fifth in measure 25. She keeps the descending fifth in measure 34 like in measure 26. Measure 35 begins on a G# and goes up to a B, another minor third. Interesting, in the subsequent measure, she adjusts the falling interval to perfect fourth (C# and G#), instead of a fifth, like it was the previous times (Figure 1.10). Clarke adds further intensity by accelerating the rhythm and tempo, evoking a feeling of anxiety. Up to the accelerando in measure 37, the piano part features more stable rhythms in juxtaposition with the first theme. Instead of chords and seven and nine-tuplets, she uses triplets and sixteenth notes to counteract the increasing emotions in this theme (Figure 1.11).



Figure 1.9 *Midsummer Moon*, measures 25-44



Figure 1.10 *Midsummer Moon*, measures 25 and 33-36

27 Sul G. *mf*

32 *p subito* *cresc.*

36 *poco accel.* *f p poco accel.*

Figure 1.11 *Midsummer Moon*, measures 27-38

After another climax in measure 41, the rhythm and tempo still increase in speed, but the melodic phrase calms down more quickly this time, and when the *piu lento* is in effect, the piano graciously eases the listener into a transition that includes a slight variation on the second theme. This transitional material features some of the earlier types of gestures, bringing forth eleven- and twelve-tuplets instead of nine- and eleven-tuplets, as well as rhythms reminiscent of bird calls. Clarke uses sixteenth note triplets and familiar thematic material to bring us back to the first theme in measure 62. There are a couple of differences when the first theme returns. First, it

begins on the down beat as opposed to beat 2, like the beginning. Second, the E is only a half note tied to the first note of a triplet rather than a half note tied to a quarter note and the first note of a triplet.



Figure 1.12 *Midsummer Moon*, measures 60-67

Clarke adjusts the melodic phrase in measure 70 by transposing it up an octave compared to how it's originally presented. Additionally, in measure 81, she exaggerates the allargando by changing the rhythm to simple eighth notes rather than the previously used nonuplet (nine-tuplet). The *molto piu lento* can be analyzed as a coda. By calling for the violin to be muted, Clarke creates a more atmospheric mood in the coda. Fragments of both themes can be seen here, but the rhythm is augmented. There is one last bird-like call from the piano in the penultimate measure, and the piece concludes with the violin in harmony with itself, but the piano in dissonance, leaving the audience somewhat unsettled.



Figure 1.13 *Midsummer Moon*, measures 83-end

The third movement from *Three Pieces for Two Violins and Piano*, “Nocturne,” is the other piece by Clarke that I examine in this report. Unlike *Midsummer Moon*, this piece is structurally and harmonically simpler and more rhythmically organized. In terms of form, it is established almost identically as a ternary form with a coda. The violins begin, with mutes, in octave unison in the first measure, the piano joining with accompanimental rhythm that outlines each chord, starting in A minor. An example is shown below (Figure 1.14).

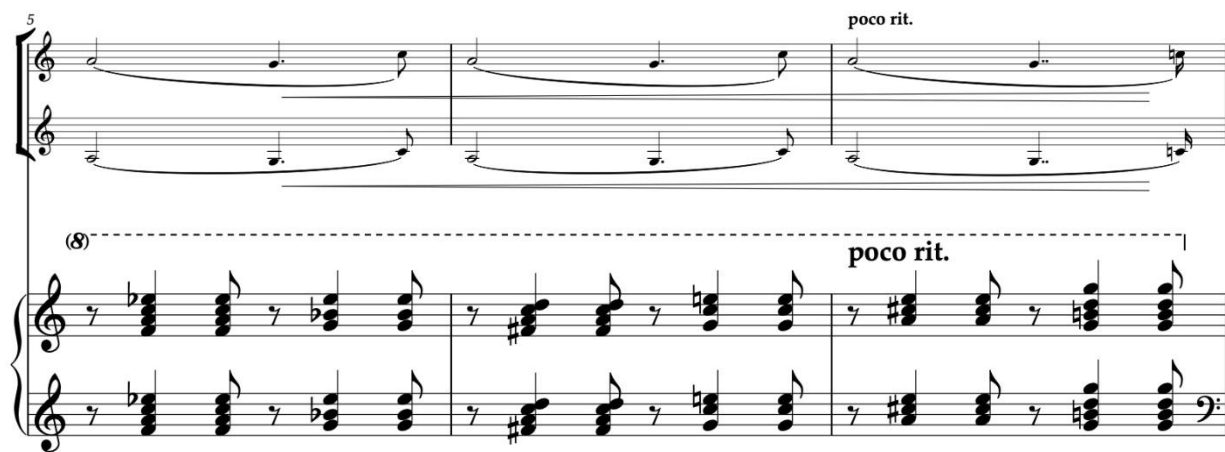


Figure 1.14 “Nocturne,” measures 5-7

The melody passes to the piano in measure 8 while the violins rest. This is also where the rhythm of the accompaniment changes to triplets and introduces variations on the first theme. Once the violins return at measure 11, repetitions of the first theme continue, with some variation, until measure 26. From here until measure 30, the material serves as a transition to the second theme.

The second theme is more rhythmically active, switching from half notes, quarter notes, and eighth notes to quarter notes, eighth notes, triplets, and sixteenth notes. The violins are now almost entirely independent, except for the first four bars, before the theme evolves into more contrapuntal and conversational phrases (Figure 1.15). To add to this, the range becomes more

expansive, especially in the first violin. When there is rhythmic unison between the violins, there is also harmony instead of unison octaves. The piano part serves a similar function as before, with the exception being at measure 41, when the rhythm changes from triplets to sixteenths (Figure 1.16). At measure 58, the second violin makes a ‘call’ to the first violin; a response is given, but at a higher pitch (Figure 1.17). Mutes also come off at these measures, marking the musical significance of these passages (Figure 1.18).

tempo
*See editorial note
legato

30

p

legato

p

tempo

p

8va

pp

Figure 1.15 “Nocturne,” measures 30-33

The image displays a musical score for measures 40 through 44 of a piece titled "Nocturne." The score is written for piano (p) and violin (v) staves. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The time signature is 3/4.

Measures 40-44:

- Measure 40:** The piano part begins with a half note B-flat, followed by a half note A-flat, and a half note G. The violin part begins with a half note B-flat, followed by a half note A-flat, and a half note G. The dynamic marking is *f* (forte).
- Measure 41:** The piano part continues with a half note F, followed by a half note E, and a half note D. The violin part continues with a half note B-flat, followed by a half note A-flat, and a half note G. The dynamic marking is *f* (forte).
- Measure 42:** The piano part continues with a half note C, followed by a half note B-flat, and a half note A-flat. The violin part continues with a half note B-flat, followed by a half note A-flat, and a half note G. The dynamic marking is *f* (forte).
- Measure 43:** The piano part continues with a half note G, followed by a half note F, and a half note E. The violin part continues with a half note B-flat, followed by a half note A-flat, and a half note G. The dynamic marking is *f* (forte).
- Measure 44:** The piano part continues with a half note D, followed by a half note C, and a half note B-flat. The violin part continues with a half note B-flat, followed by a half note A-flat, and a half note G. The dynamic marking is *f* (forte).

Tempo and Dynamic Markings:

- rit. (ritardando):** Indicated above the piano staff in measures 40 and 41.
- tempo:** Indicated above the piano staff in measures 42 and 43.
- f (forte):** Indicated below the piano staff in measures 40, 41, 42, 43, and 44.

Figure 1.16 "Nocturne," measures 40-44



Figure 1.17 “Nocturne,” measure 58



Figure 1.18 “Nocturne,” measures 59-62

The last items I examine in this piece are the return of the first theme in measure 78 and the coda in measure 90. Clarke sneaks in the return of the first theme in the second violin in a moment that is still calming down. She juxtaposes this dynamically and texturally from the beginning, as no mutes are being used and the volume is marked *forte*. After the second violin finishes the recap of the first theme, the first violin enters at measure 90 with a mute, a very quiet volume, and with material from the second theme (Figure 1.19). Clarke uses some cyclical aspects beginning at measure 95 (Figure 1.20) as the violins come together in rhythmic unison, but once again, in harmony (chapter 3 describes cyclical techniques in more detail). The piece

concludes similarly to how it began, with references to the opening theme, albeit this time the violins remain in harmony, and the piano part plays a more active role (Figure 1.21).

This musical score shows measures 90 to 92. The top system consists of two staves: the upper staff is for the Violin (Viol.) and the lower for the Piano (Pn.). The Violin part begins with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic and an *espressivo* marking, featuring a melodic line with a triplet in measure 91. The Piano part starts with a *pp* dynamic and includes a *[con sordino]* (with sostenuto) marking. The bottom system shows the continuation of the Piano part, which becomes more active with chords and moving lines in measures 91 and 92. A *Red.* (Reduction) marking is present at the beginning of the bottom system.

Figure 1.19 “Nocturne,” measures 90-92

This musical score shows measures 93 to 96. The top system continues the Violin (Viol.) and Piano (Pn.) parts. The Violin part features a melodic line with a triplet in measure 93. The Piano part begins with a *p* (piano) dynamic and includes a *8va* (octave) marking. The bottom system shows the continuation of the Piano part, which becomes more active with chords and moving lines in measures 94, 95, and 96. A *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic is marked in measure 95.

Figure 1.20 “Nocturne,” measures 93-96

107

poco rit. tempo

poco rit. tempo

ppp

110

molto rit.

molto rit.

3

3

*See editorial notes

Figure 1.21 “Nocturne,” measures 107-end

Practice Guide/Pedagogical Considerations

The technique needed to create a light atmosphere that allows the phrases to flow in *Midsummer Moon*, while also not overthinking how to make the gestures happen, is perhaps the biggest challenge when practicing this piece. It requires a certain freedom of bow usage that can be difficult to manage. Using the bow unevenly, yet smoothly, is troublesome when these gestures are also meant to be performed at a somewhat quick pace. In the second and third measures of the piece, it's important to lighten up the bow weight and increase the speed so that the double stops that move on a slur aren't "choked" or "crunchy" sounding. Within the opening phrase, intonation is challenging due to Clarke's use of dissonance and chromaticism. Rather than playing the rhythm that is written, play the notes as slow quarter notes or half notes and slowly practice the shifts and intervals to have accurate intonation. Next, I found that taking away the notes and practicing the string crossing gestures on open strings is an easier first step. Once flow is developed in the right hand, the left hand can follow, but in chunks. To do this, I began with the first note of each gesture, and then added one at a time until all 9 (or 11 on the second page of music) were played accurately in succession. Then, I would play one grouping of notes and the first of the next group to ensure that I was correctly placing the bow change and was prepared to do the inverse bowing and fingering that directly follows. In measures 19 and 20, the large slurs should be broken after each grouping of 9 notes, as it will be nearly impossible to play them all in one bow. In the pickup to measure 26 and the following measures, where *sul G* is indicated, the shifts became easier when I first practiced the notes in first position. Next, I found guide notes (notes not in the music that inform where my fingers are placed in a new position) between positions when shifting up and back down on the G-string. This helps the

fingers “map” the path of the melody, allows for muscle memory to kick in, and improves aural (listening) skills regarding both intervals and intonation.

Similar methods were applied when practicing “Nocturne” from *Three Pieces for Two Violins and Piano*. There are no rhythms that are out of the ordinary, but planning out how to use the bow was of the utmost importance. As often as seemed appropriate, I divided slurs into multiple bows for sound production, clear tone, and accurate intonation. I usually placed these divisions once a bar or at the half-bar, instead of over two bars like Clarke often wrote. A few exceptions were made, such as at measures 66 and 67. I used a stagger bow so that the following crescendo had the correct amount of bow to sustain it. I also used a double-up bow at the end of measure 93 to better support the next phrase and to create a pick-up gesture into a downbeat. All shifts and intonation work were practiced similarly, if not the same as in “Midsummer Moon.”

Chapter 2 - *Darshan*, III. “Charukeshi” by Reena Esmail

Biographical Information

Born in 1983, Indian-American composer Reena Esmail works between the worlds of Indian and Western classical music, bringing communities together in shared musical spaces. Her life and music were profiled on Season 3 of PBS's Great Performances series, *Now Hear This*, which premiered in April of 2022. During the same month, she was on *Frame of Mind*, a podcast from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In February of 2025, she was Composer-in-residence for the NOW Festival, hosted by Capital University, where her music was featured primarily in the concerts.

Esmail divides her attention evenly between orchestral, chamber, and choral work. She has written commissions for ensembles including the Los Angeles Master Chorale, Seattle Symphony, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, and Kronos Quartet, and her music has been featured on multiple Grammy-nominated albums, including *The Singing Guitar* by Conspirare, *BRUITS* by Imani Winds, and *Healing Modes* by Brooklyn Rider. Many of her choral works are published by Oxford University Press, while most of her other works are published by A Piece of Sky Music. Esmail was Composer-in-Residence for Street Symphony (2016-18) and is currently an Artistic Director of Shastra, a non-profit organization that promotes cross-cultural music connecting music traditions of India and the West.²¹

She holds degrees in composition from The Juilliard School (BM'05) and the Yale School of Music (MM'11, MMA'14, DMA'18). Her primary teachers have included Susan

²¹ *Bio*, n.d., accessed November 21, 2024, <https://www.reenaesmail.com/bio/>.

Botti, Aaron Jay Kernis, Christopher Theofanidis, Christopher Rouse, and Samuel Adler. She received a Fulbright-Nehru grant to study Hindustani music in India. Her Hindustani music teachers include Srimati Lakshmi Shankar and Gaurav Mazumdar, and she currently studies and collaborates with Saili Oak. Her doctoral thesis, entitled *Finding Common Ground: Uniting Practices in Hindustani and Western Art Musicians*, explores the methods and challenges of collaboration between Hindustani musicians and Western composers.

Esmail's journey to becoming a composer is a story of a dream and hard work to achieve her goals. It was not until high school that she explored and discovered her unequivocal love for music. During her teen years, Esmail's family took a trip to New York City that inspired and motivated her to pursue music as a career. Upon one glance at The Juilliard School, she knew she had to attend the school and would do whatever it took to get herself there.²² The years following that trip consisted of dedication to improving her piano and composition skills as a way to achieve her goal. She reluctantly applied to Juilliard with warm encouragement from her father, and was accepted.

Her arrival at Juilliard sometimes left her with more questions than she had answers, and with a feeling of embarrassment when asked if her compositions would combine Western and Indian classical music.²³ Interestingly enough, even though her mother came from a part of India that was colonized by Portugal, Esmail grew up listening primarily to Western classical music. It was not until she met Hindustani and Carnatic singers that she realized it was not so much the sounds of Indian classical music she was attached to, but rather the people the sounds came

²² reenainindia, "Two Rings."

²³ reenainindia, "Two Rings."

from.²⁴ She fell in love with the cultural values they shared with her and began working more and more with Indian musicians, leaving her feeling more naturally connected to the people than the culture she grew up with. This is how she grew to love the Indian style of music. When she visited India for the first time in 2006, she had the same feeling she did when she first visited New York: “This country feels like home. I will live here.”²⁵ Shortly after returning from her trip, she made a visit to a local store that sold items imported from India. Esmail glanced at a ring that reminded her of one she saw when she was in Jaipur, and as it turns out, was indeed, actually imported from Jaipur. Once she put on this ring, she vowed to herself that she would find her way back to India through music.²⁶

Esmail worked diligently to ensure her work in music would get her back to India. Through meetings and collaborations with more Indian classical musicians, she found herself both impassioned and homesick for a country in which she had never lived. There was an organization that was working with her to get her and her music to India, but unfortunately, both projects attached to the organization fell through. This did not discourage her, and her ideas still lingered in the back of her mind.²⁷

There was a moment of intense, yet affirming, realization that Esmail had when applying for the Fulbright Program. In 2008, she applied to the Yale School of Music and was in limbo regarding the results of her application. As worry began to set in, she decided to start an application for the Fulbright. As it turns out, there was a simple delay in the composition

²⁴ reenainindia, “Two Rings.”

²⁵ reenainindia, “Two Rings.”

²⁶ reenainindia, “Two Rings.”

²⁷ reenainindia, “Two Rings.”

department's decision, but she was granted an audition and was accepted into Yale. In her blog, Esmail describes her challenges applying to different schools, but how the experience was almost the opposite for the Fulbright Program. While some challenges were deeper when applying for the Fulbright, she also did not feel as though she had to mold herself into a more desirable version of herself.²⁸ This experience was a new one to Esmail, and even she felt open enough to share facts about herself that did not seem to matter on other applications, such as her being a first-generation Indian American. It was these experiences, amongst many more, that inspired, cultivated, and deepened Esmail's connections to others, her culture, and how she weaves that into her music.

Darshan was composed in 2018 and translates to "seeing" in Hindi. Though meant in a religious sense, it can also be stated as finding the divine in someone, something, or an event. While the first movement, "Bihag," is more uplifting and provides encouragement that leads to a world of possibility, the third movement, "Charukeshi," explores themes of grief and how it can affect us in unexpected ways.²⁹ This work has a special meaning and connection to Esmail as she dedicated it to her husband, Vijay Gupta (a violinist), who also commissioned, collaborated with her on, and premiered this piece with the Taos New Music Group in Taos, New Mexico, on September 22, 2018. In the composer's words, "This piece... is the space where both of our creative ideas meet one another, where Hindustani raag meets Western violin technique, where mellifluous melody meets unlikely color and texture, and where our artistic visions interweave. We create a new movement every few years, and each time, we find new points of

²⁸ reenainindia, "Two Rings."

²⁹ *Darshan*, May 9, 2019, <https://www.reenaesmail.com/catalog-item/darshan/>.

creative resonance, new worlds to explore.”³⁰ One of the features I respect most is the clarity and ease with which Esmail blends Western Classical Music while paying homage to her culture. There are currently only two movements of *Darshan*, with three more to be composed and published.

³⁰ Reena Esmail, “Program Notes,” in *Darshan for Unaccompanied Violin*, comp. Reena Esmail (A Piece of Sky Music (ASCAP), 2019-2021).

Theoretical and Structural Analysis

The form, as mentioned in the composer's audio guide³¹, is based on the raag Charukeshi and blends improvisatory features within a Western Classical structure. This particular raag begins as a G major scale for the first 5 scale degrees, and ends in natural minor. Mixing the major and minor modalities leaves the listener with a feeling of darkness from the minor and hope from the major. The melody is based on a Bandish from Hindustani vocal music, even though it is highly improvisatory. To follow this in the music, Esmail indicates the melodic notes with bold note heads. The goal is to always keep those notes as melodic as possible, leaving the other notes to be executed more ornamentally (as seen in measures 3-5 in Figure 3.1). Esmail writes out the sections in the raag that are usually improvised in a way that gives the performer space to use rubato and make it their own, even though the movement is through-composed. In her performance notes, she even clarifies how these motives should be presented. In the image below, the beams begin solid and flare out as if to be played like 32nd notes, creating an effect of speeding up. This example is from measure 2:



The opening melody undergoes several transformations throughout the piece, but has a clear return at measure 51 (Figures 2.2, 2.4, and 2.5) that is slightly different from its initial presentation. The first time the theme is presented, the phrase is five measures long (Figure 2.2) and is repeated beginning in measure 6, with some thematic development, and the phrase is extended by two measures. Esmail continues to moderately develop the theme until measure 22, where there is a more distinct change. Up until this point, she seldom used the note B to linger in the darker side of the raag. She takes a fragment of the original theme and modulates it for just a couple of measures, then further modifies the rhythm in measure 25. Following this, she alternates between the previous melodic variation and the triplet variation observed in 25 (Figure 2.3). She switches between these two melodies all the way through measure 51, where we once more hear the original theme; this time, the melody differs slightly, as the high A in the opening chord is omitted. The ending leaves the listener awestruck, yet hopeful and contemplative, as the violin executes harmonics that are played as dissonant double stops (Figure 2.5).

Reena Esmail

Grave

Figure 2.2 *Darshan*, III. “Charukeshi,” measures 1-7

flourish - out of time (♩ ca. 58, but think in ♩₈)

22 *p* *mf* *accel.*

25 *f* *mp* *f* (sim.)

29

31 (sim.) *mp*

Figure 2.3 *Darshan*, III. “Charukeshi,” measures 22-23

Grave

Reena Esmail

1 *mf*

3 rit. sul pont. *pp*

5 normale *mf*

Detailed description: This block contains the first seven measures of the piece. Measure 1 starts with a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. It features a half note G4, a quarter rest, and a half note F#4. Measure 2 continues with a half note E4, a quarter note D4, and a half note C4. Measure 3 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (B4, A4, G4) followed by a quarter note F#4. A 'rit.' (ritardando) marking is placed above the staff. Measure 4 contains a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 5 starts with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 6 continues with a half note E4, a quarter note D4, and a half note C4. Measure 7 ends with a half note B4 and a quarter note A4. The piece concludes with a 'sul pont.' (sul ponticello) instruction and a piano-piano (*pp*) dynamic.

Figure 2.4 *Darshan*, III. “Charukeshi,” measures 1-7

8 51 *p*

54 a tempo 3 rit.

58 a tempo rit. poco a poco allargando 8^{va}

Detailed description: This block contains measures 51 through the end of the piece. Measure 51 starts with a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a piano (*p*) dynamic. It features a half note G4, a quarter rest, and a half note F#4. Measure 52 continues with a half note E4, a quarter note D4, and a half note C4. Measure 53 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (B4, A4, G4) followed by a quarter note F#4. Measure 54 starts with a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 55 continues with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 56 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 57 starts with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 58 continues with a half note E4, a quarter note D4, and a half note C4. Measure 59 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (B4, A4, G4) followed by a quarter note F#4. Measure 60 starts with a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 61 continues with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 62 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 63 starts with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 64 continues with a half note E4, a quarter note D4, and a half note C4. Measure 65 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (B4, A4, G4) followed by a quarter note F#4. Measure 66 starts with a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 67 continues with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 68 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 69 starts with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 70 continues with a half note E4, a quarter note D4, and a half note C4. Measure 71 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (B4, A4, G4) followed by a quarter note F#4. Measure 72 starts with a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 73 continues with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 74 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 75 starts with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 76 continues with a half note E4, a quarter note D4, and a half note C4. Measure 77 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (B4, A4, G4) followed by a quarter note F#4. Measure 78 starts with a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 79 continues with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 80 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 81 starts with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 82 continues with a half note E4, a quarter note D4, and a half note C4. Measure 83 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (B4, A4, G4) followed by a quarter note F#4. Measure 84 starts with a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 85 continues with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 86 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 87 starts with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 88 continues with a half note E4, a quarter note D4, and a half note C4. Measure 89 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (B4, A4, G4) followed by a quarter note F#4. Measure 90 starts with a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 91 continues with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 92 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 93 starts with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 94 continues with a half note E4, a quarter note D4, and a half note C4. Measure 95 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (B4, A4, G4) followed by a quarter note F#4. Measure 96 starts with a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 97 continues with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 98 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (E4, D4, C4) followed by a quarter note B4. Measure 99 starts with a half note A4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F#4. Measure 100 continues with a half note E4, a quarter note D4, and a half note C4. The piece concludes with a 'poco a poco allargando' (ritardando) instruction and an 8va (octave) marking.

Figure 2.5 *Darshan*, III. “Charukeshi,” measures 51-end

Practice Guide/Pedagogical Considerations

At first glance, the score and its unusual notation can be a bit daunting. To ease this, focus on playing the arpeggios as double stop ‘chords’ to focus on intonation, and then, as the stems indicate, begin the arpeggio slowly, then speed it up to lead to the next beat or measure. As mentioned in Esmail’s audio guide³² on how to practice and perform this movement, the main goal is to sustain the longer notes or those that have tenutos on them and treat those as the melody. This is often done with greater bow speed, less weight, and in the upper half to create an ethereal, reflective atmosphere or character.

When executing the dictated slides, I tried to use the same finger when going from the lower note to the higher note to hear as many overtones as possible. When that was not possible, shifting to a new string was also helpful to execute what Esmail indicated. An exception was made at measure 35 in favor of a simpler, more conventional fingering. I began the pickup into 35 on a third finger as opposed to a second finger, which was my original plan. I then shifted to a third finger on the D instead of staying in the third position so that my fingers felt more stable. Another shift to Eb on a third finger was made after that, which allowed for the descension to become much easier.

In the measures labeled *sul ponticello*, this can be taught and practiced by the student/prospective performer, placing their bow on the bridge and then lifting and moving the bow directly in front of and parallel to the bridge. To create the desired sound effect, a lot of bow speed, light bow weight, and consistent bow placement are necessary. Maintaining the correct placement of the bow to ensure the consistent effect of the *ponticello* was challenging at first. I

³² Darshan, May 9, 2019, <https://www.reenaesmail.com/catalog-item/darshan/>.

overcame this by memorizing the measures that included this technique and kept my eyes on my bow to make sure it stayed in the correct place. I also relied on my ears to guide me if the placement was correctly maintained.

The harmonics at the beginning of page 2 and on the last page were another challenge in a couple of different ways. One challenge was the technique of executing them. Similar to how to execute the *sul ponticello*, a fast bow somewhat near the bridge is required for the coordination of finger placement on the fingerboard and tone created from the bow. The exact placement and pressure of the fingers were also crucial to get harmonics to speak. The slightest adjustment of finger placement resulted in exactly the correct or exactly the incorrect note, which is why it is important to have a “road map” of where your fingers are going.

Chapter 3 - Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major by César

Franck

Biographical Information

César Franck was born in Liège, Belgium, on December 10, 1822, and was a Romantic Belgian-French composer who sought to make French music as prominent as that of his German contemporaries. He unconventionally accomplished his goal. Although he mostly adhered to Germanic structures, many of his compositions used impressionistic tonal elements. Because of his experience as a church organist and choir master, his compositions are often improvisational, distinguishing him from other composers of the time.

In contrast to his contemporaries, Franck had a weaker sense of nationalism due to his upbringing. His mother, Marie-Catherine-Barbe Franck, was a German. She taught César to speak German and about the culture. His father, Nicolas-Joseph Franck, on the other hand, was a Frenchman who was born and raised near the German border.³³ As such, he spoke French and lived with French traditions. Before César's birth, Liege was under the rule of the Austrian Netherlands. Between 1789 and 1815, Belgium underwent several changes in authority and culture due to the French Revolution, but ultimately, Liege was placed under Germanic rule shortly before César was born.³⁴ Because of the wide range of educational styles and other traditions, folk music and culture in Liege featured an eclectic blend of German and French influences.

³³ George Grove, Stanley Sadie, John Tyrrell, and Margot Levy, "Franck, César," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, (Macmillan Publishers, 2001), 177.

³⁴ Laurence Davies, *Cesar Franck and His Circle*, (Barrie & Jenkins, 1970), 40.

This juxtaposition of cultures Franck grew up with left him indecisive on how to proceed with the style in which he would compose his music. Although he claimed to be a Frenchman, his compositions were an amalgamation of impressionistic features while maintaining many traditional Germanic structures and forms. Unlike other French composers, he did not use modal harmony or incorporate folk songs.

As his father had wanted to be musical as a child but felt he lacked the skills, he ensured his children had more musical opportunities than he did. Both César and his brother entered the Liège Conservatory, the former at the age of eight. During his time here, he demonstrated incredible growth on the piano, for which he won a prize in 1834, as well as a prize for solfege in 1832.³⁵

The Franck family moved to Paris in 1835 after a performance tour of the city with Cesar and his brother as the performers.³⁶ César was the featured performer at these concerts and was even labeled as a child prodigy. It was also during this year that he began studying composition with Anton Reicha. After Reicha died in 1836, he studied piano and organ with Pierre-Joseph-Guillaume Zimmermann and François-Benoist at the Paris Conservatory. He was unable to officially enroll at the conservatory until his family's naturalization papers were complete. This did not happen until October 4th of 1837.³⁷ After several years of study and earning first prize for his piano playing in 1838 and for counterpoint in 1840, and second prize for his organ

³⁵ Nicolas Slonimsky, "Franck, César," in *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, Centennial edition / Nicolas Slonimsky, Editor emeritus (Schirmer Books, 2001), 1169-1170.

³⁶ George Grove, Stanley Sadie, John Tyrrell, and Margot Levy, "Franck, César," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, (Macmillan Publishers, 2001), 178.

³⁷ George Grove, Stanley Sadie, John Tyrrell, and Margot Levy, "Franck, César," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, (Macmillan Publishers, 2001), 178.

playing in 1841, it was evident that he had a promising career as a composer. Despite these successes, his father was unhappy that he didn't win first prize for his organ skills and had Cesar prematurely removed from the Paris Conservatory in 1842.³⁸

The family moved back to Belgium after he was pulled out of the music school, and César continued to perform recitals to please his father for the next couple of years. They had a falling-out over his musical path, and while they all moved back to Paris in 1845, César left his family in 1846 to pursue his true passion: composing.³⁹ To support himself, however, he continued to perform, began teaching, and also played organ for church services. This was a formative period in Franck's career, allowing him to shape his future while honing his skills as a well-rounded musician.

The 1850s served as a stepping stone for the rest of Franck's life. In 1851, he was appointed as the organist of St. Jean-St Francois in the Marais. After being inspired by the organ there, he sought a new phase of his career and in 1858, was appointed organist of the Church of Ste. Clotilde.⁴⁰ Franck worked here for over 30 years until he passed. Both of these experiences, but especially from 1851-1858, allowed him to demonstrate his competence in teaching, performing, and composing. As a result, he was appointed organ professor at the Paris Conservatory in 1872, succeeding his former teacher, Benoist.

³⁸ George Grove, Stanley Sadie, John Tyrrell, and Margot Levy, "Franck, César," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, (Macmillan Publishers, 2001), 178.

³⁹ George Grove, Stanley Sadie, John Tyrrell, and Margot Levy, "Franck, César," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, (Macmillan Publishers, 2001), 178.

⁴⁰ George Grove, Stanley Sadie, John Tyrrell, and Margot Levy, "Franck, César," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, (Macmillan Publishers, 2001), 178.

To provide a deeper understanding of how the organ influenced his writing, insight into his duties at the church is necessary. Franck's main task was to accompany the choir. To do this, he had to stretch his improvisational techniques by incorporating music that would "showcase" the religious texts being sung. Additionally, he would improvise more during slower parts of large services with complex, virtuosic solo organ passages. His compositions reflect the influence of improvisation through sudden shifts to distant keys.⁴¹ There are multiple tonal shifts in a row, but they never last a long time before coming back to the tonic. There are still hints of the original key during these shifts, which allows for a feeling of being grounded in a time of uncertainty. It is worth mentioning Franck's use of "cells," also known as small motives. He often presents a brief motive early in a musical movement. Then he adjusts the rhythm, dynamics, or other musical devices when the "cell" is reutilized in the same movement or in later movements. This allows for a sense of originality, even though Franck recycles these cells across multiple movements.⁴² By using cells and drawing on his improvisational experience, Franck created many cyclic works.

Lastly, it is important to describe the relevance of Franck's co-founding of the *Société Nationale de Musique*. It was established in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War in November of 1871 and was meant to be a "revivified school of instrumental composition, producing a series of chamber and symphonic works which are now regarded as the most, if not

⁴¹ Andrew Thomson, "César Franck: Mind, Flesh and Spirit," *The Musical Times* 131, no. 1774 (1990), 639–41.

⁴² *César Franck - Classical Music Composers*. n.d. Accessed April 2, 2026.

<https://www.pcmsconcerts.org/composer/cesar-franck/>.

the only, valuable part of his output."⁴³ The school's goal was to promote and premiere new French compositions, and Franck was a major supporter of the organization, writing many works for the *Société Nationale*'s performances.

There was a debate regarding Franck's true nationality. As mentioned earlier, his father naturalized him as a French citizen when he was a child. He did not realize, however, that he would have to do this again as an adult to reestablish citizenship, legally making him a Belgian citizen until 1873.⁴⁴ Even after his death, there was a discrepancy as to where Franck's writing fit in the Romantic split of composition school. Shortly after Franck died in 1890, Saint-Saëns opened up about his legacy, stating that his effect on French music was "not pleasing."⁴⁵ Some also complained that Franck's use of chromaticism and modulating to distant keys was too German-influenced, paying respect to Richard Wagner.

As said succinctly by Peter Jost:⁴⁶

Franck's works, seemingly at first glance late Romantic owing to their modern harmonies within the framework of traditional genres, do indeed show avant-garde traits. These include unusual, individual formal solutions or the upsetting of actually functional harmony through constant modulation into a free colourfulness of sounds not so far removed from that of a Debussy. Franck's music defies clear classification – sometimes seeming classicist, sometimes romantic, sometimes hypermodern, with the tone often alternating between extremes of static restraint and highly dramatic pathos. Considering the 'expressive' directives in instrumental music, such as 'recitativo', 'con fantasia', 'passionato' or 'drammatico', the question also arises as to whether personal confessions are hidden here under cover of absolute music in sonata form.

⁴³ John Horton, *The Musical Pilgrim: Cesar Franck* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 8.

⁴⁴ G. Henle Verlag, "Between Two Stools – a Portrait of César Franck on His 200th Birthday."

⁴⁵ G. Henle Verlag, "Between Two Stools – a Portrait of César Franck on His 200th Birthday."

⁴⁶ G. Henle Verlag, "Between Two Stools – a Portrait of César Franck on His 200th Birthday."

Though controversial and difficult to place into one side of the Romantic split of composers, Franck blends the style of both of his nationalities into his unique voice, making him stand out.

Franck did not become a prolific composer until the last ten years of his life, when he was already established as a teacher and performer while also still continuing to hone his musical writing skills. His best works include the Symphony in D minor, choral works such as *Ruth* and *Les Beatitudes*(oratorios), the Piano Quintet, the String Quartet, and, of course, the Violin Sonata. The inclusion of transcendent melodic lines, specific dynamics, character and mood shifts, and cyclic writing makes it a desirable piece to perform to this day.

Written in 1886, Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major is one of Franck's most well-known pieces. It is a prime example of his compositional and stylistic evolution. A couple of other compositions he completed around the same time that represent his style were Symphony in D minor, written between 1886 and 1889, and String Quartet in D major, composed in 1889. The Sonata was written as a wedding gift for the world-renowned violinist, Eugène Ysaÿe. The score was presented to Ysaÿe on the day of his wedding—September 12, 1886—and he even performed it for his wife that very day, becoming the premiere performer of the piece. Additionally, Ysaÿe made every effort to promote the piece and ensure its popularity by performing it multiple times throughout Europe shortly after his wedding.

Theoretical and Structural Analysis

One of the most appealing aspects of this piece is Franck's use of "cyclic" writing. This technique, built on expertly composed short melodic motives, allows for a sense of unification between all movements. He does this by introducing the themes in one movement and including them, or fragments of them, in the following ones. It is because of this compositional technique, the piece's historical significance, technical demands, and emotional depth that it has withstood the test of time and is still often played today.

Cyclic writing is presented right away with the first theme in the first movement. This provides a foundation for its use in later movements, where he uses similar melodic motion and rhythm. When examining the third movement, the piano part very closely resembles the first theme from the first movement, as seen in Figures 3.1 and 3.2 below.

Allegretto ben Moderato.

Violon.

Allegretto ben Moderato.

Piano.

pp

molto dolce

pp

César Franck.

Figure 3.1 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 1, measure 1-5



Figure 3.2 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 3, measures 1-4

Multiple cyclic events occur between the third and fourth movements of the piece. Further, it is between these two movements that the vast majority of the cyclic writing is portrayed. The first example of this occurs when the *tranquillo* and *cantabile* themes are presented in their respective movement as seen in the next set of figures.



Figure 3.3 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 3, measures 55-61



Figure 3.4 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 4, measures 65-72

With the arrival of the last theme presented in the third movement comes the use of another cyclical theme. Like the previous theme, this one is also echoed in the fourth movement (See Figures 3.5 and 3.6).



Figure 3.5 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 3, measures 70-77



Figure 3.6 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 4, measures 132-158

Another clear example of Franck's cyclic style is found, once again, in the fourth movement; this time in a transition, or bridge, between themes. This example echoes the second movement and its similar transitional material, albeit drawn from different melodies and structural contexts. Franck was an expert at finding elegant ways to reuse material from previous movements to create organization for the listener while also placing new structural emphasis on it. Figures 3.7 and 3.8 exemplify this below.



Figure 3.7 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 2, measures 39-51



Figure 3.8 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 4, measures 99-106

This report would become far too long if every example of the motivic imitations Franck used were included. It goes without saying, however, that a multitude of ideas are used to provide cohesion, strengthening his cyclical writing and bringing a sense of unity across movements. When discussing the recurring themes and motives, analysis can primarily focus on the fourth movement for those interested in learning more about its theory. It's impressive how much Franck builds on the previously stated themes, despite somewhat limited musical material, making the fourth movement stand out. He manages to maintain cohesion without the music becoming overly repetitive or dull.

In addition to the discovery of cyclic motives, an understanding of movement structure is important. Franck mostly adheres to Germanic formal designs, except for extended developmental sections, sudden shifts to unexpected keys, and the strange use of arrivals at certain sections.

The first movement begins in A major and is essentially in sonata form. In a typical fashion, the sonata begins with an exposition, and the recapitulation is presented about halfway through the movement. A unique feature is the length of the development section. Franck surprises us with no true development. Instead, he uses modulation, fragmentation, and motivic repetition to sneakily arrive at the development.

The second movement is in the subdominant minor key. While also in sonata form, the structure is much clearer regarding the exposition, development, and recapitulation. Two themes

are presented: the first with a fiery, rhythmic drive (Figure 3.9), and the second in juxtaposition, as it is lyrical (Figure 3.10). Transitions and modulations occur as expected and within the framework of sonata form. Before the coda, there is a brief cadenza that transitions into it, as seen in Figure 3.11.



Figure 3.9 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 2, measures 14-25



Figure 3.10 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 2, measures 46-59



Figure 3.11 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 2, measures 189-202

The third movement is the one that truly stands out from the others. In the middle of a duo-sonata, Franck presents a beautiful recitativo-fantasia. Instead of loosely adhering to the Classical forms like in the other movements, he uses this structure as a way to freely express his emotions. This is most evident in measures 4-10 and 25-30 (both are seen below in Figures 3.12

and 3.13, respectively) and as he draws from opera influences, allowing the violin to ‘sing’ with as much freedom and expression as felt in the moment by the performer.



Figure 3.12 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 3, beginning-measure 16



Figure 3.13 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 3, measures 24-33

It's also interesting and important to point out that he uses many more musical directions, such as *sempre legatissimo* (measure 37), *dolcissimo espressivo* (measure 59), and *molto largamente e drammatico* (measure 101-103), when compared to the other movements. This provides more evidence of this movement's emotional depth.



Figure 3.14 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 3, measure 37



Figure 3.15 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 3, measures 59-60



Figure 3.16 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, Mvt. 3, measures 95-111

As for the final movement of this sonata, it is somewhat in a loose sonata-rondo structure. Themes are canonically passed between the piano and violin. As stated earlier, this development, being longer than any of the others, borrows many thematic materials from all prior movements. By examining the final movement, a clear understanding of cyclical writing is exhumed.

Overall, César Franck's Sonata in A major for Piano and Violin is a masterful example of cohesion when using a variety of compositional techniques and styles. He eloquently incorporates Classical styles and structures while maintaining the emotional depth required to

perform late Romantic works. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, his cyclical writing offers innovative qualities in opposition to the traditional formats used.

Practice Guide/Pedagogical Considerations

In the first movement, it is very important to subdivide throughout, especially since the piano primarily plays chords at the beginning. Practicing with a metronome that includes subdivisions is an efficient way to cement the subdivisions in the performer's ear. The first theme returns in the third movement, where Franck augments the rhythm and adjusts it to the common time signature. A character change is needed in measure 77 to guide us to a climax. In contrast to the lighter, more innocent character at 63, Franck hints at a change in character through his markings: *sempre dolcissimo* and *piu forte e con calore*. To further this motion, he marks *con tutta forza* in measure 86 that directly ties to the climax. In measure 89, it will be crucial to use quite vigorous bow speed to open the sound as much as possible and let the vibrato be as wide as it can, since this is a cadential climax and the end of the development before the piano leads us to the recapitulation. To make a final and impactful statement, it is important to start the last phrase with a "click" from the bow that is initiated with the right pointer finger.

In the second movement, placing the rhythm in time with the piano is notoriously challenging. Once again, a metronome is perhaps the best tool, especially when first exploring this movement. To create a variety of colors, I recommend staying on one string as much as possible in the beginning. For example, in measure 15 and the subsequent measures that are similar, it is ideal to shift up on the G string, rather than cross over to the D string for a deeper timbre and more intense character. The pickup to measure 30 is marked *pianissimo* and should involve a shift in vibrato, bow weight, and speed. This established a character that starkly contrasted the beginning of the movement. Measure 33 is more stately and passionate. To execute this, I shifted up on the A string rather than crossing between the A and E string, which provided a darker tone in support of another character shift. Between measures 55 and 56, I had

to rapidly change the placement, angle, weight, and speed of my bow to support both the *pianissimo* dynamic and *dolce* character. The transition from 66 to 67 was a bit difficult at first to pace in a tasteful way. I treated the whole note almost as if it had a fermata on top of it, so I felt the freedom to truly take my time to set up the special character of the *poco piu lento*. When similar markings return later in the movement, such as between measures 180 and 191, I executed them in the same manner as I did earlier in the movement. A couple of strategies I used between measures 115 and 130 were: adding a note, ‘sprints,’ and rhythmic variation. ‘Sprints’ helped build a connection between beats as you begin with one beat, and the downbeat of the next. I used this in measures 115, 122-123, 125-126, and 129 and Figure 5.7 demonstrates this using a music notation software. It should be practiced with as much time between each ‘sprint’ as needed and not in time like the Figure suggests. I also frequently used rhythmic variation to solidify this passage of mostly sixteenth notes. I began with long-short, then did the opposite, short-long. Then I would make the first note of each group long, and the other three short. I repeated this process, but then made the second, then the third, then the fourth notes long, and the rest of the grouping of notes short. I then paired this with ‘sprints’ to solidify each of these passages. Lastly, at measure 201, although not marked, I did slow down the tempo to set up a vastly different character to support the *pianissimo* and animato *poco a poco*. To do this, I first added a breath between those two measures and lengthened the use of the bow while also adjusting my bow placement, angle, weight, and speed.



Figure 3.17 Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Major, measure 125 as ‘sprints’

For the third movement, the biggest challenge were the measures marked *con fantasia*. To phrase those measures eloquently, it required a deep understanding of bow usage and melodic contouring (sometimes referred to as text painting by singers). I often experimented with tempo and where I wanted to emphasize certain notes when in the practice room. Instead of stressing about this during my recital, I let my mind flow with whatever it wanted to do in the moment, which was very freeing. I recommend experimenting with similar aspects and not being afraid of doing something new each time you practice or perform this movement. Measures 34-43 were practiced in the same fashion as the second movement, where the same rhythm occurs. At measure 53, I explore a couple of different tempos that would support bow usage. I settled at 88 beats per minute for the quarter note, which allows this section to have forward motion without losing the character or tone quality. From measure 111 until the end, I gave myself the image of someone mourning over something. The crescendos and decrescendos were timed on the correct note, as Frank clearly indicates. Once again, careful planning of bow distribution was the most

helpful tool here. It was important to heavily emphasize the Eb in 115 and immediately release weight to enhance the decrescendo, as well as speed up the vibrato to carry the soft sound.

The final movement was practiced in the same way as all other movements. My biggest challenge was hearing where Franck modulates to distant key areas, such as the pickup into measure 52. During lessons with my professor and individual practice sessions, I would play a simple one octave scale in that key to help my ears adjust to the new tonality. Measures 99-105 were also quite challenging. Getting a good fingering and bowing from my teacher helped, but I still practiced slowly, and in the balance point of the bow to elicit the correct style. I then sped up sequentially by increments of five on the metronome to obtain my goal tempo. I adjusted the fingering at 131 to a simpler one in favor of one that was more difficult, and created a warmer tone. To help my ear listen for intonation in the high range of measures 143-168, I practiced the octave down, and then the higher octave in which it is written. When feasible, I also added double stops to map out where my fingers needed to be in relation to one another.

Chapter 4 - Conclusion

Through my work on this report, I discovered many things about the historical backgrounds of pieces, completed analyses of these works, and offered practice tips for other violinists and musicians. I also learned and improved the way I research and write, and I look forward to doing more of it in the future. I want to continue to improve and build upon all the skills I built while working on this report, such as applying the research skills to other pieces or subjects (perhaps at an even deeper level), an even better understanding of the application of my analysis, and becoming a more refined violinist and pedagogue so that I can share my findings with others through lessons or lectures. In the distant future, I do have hopes of pursuing my D.M.A. or Ph.D. This is where I will be able to refine the skills I mentioned earlier, and where I will hopefully realize my truest calling.

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