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The Sonatas for Cello and Piano by Bohuslav Martinů and Francis Poulenc: A Possible Interpretation

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The act of musical performing, as ephemeral testimony, is a synthesis: by symbiosis, and through the act of performance, sound, space, and time lead to a unique, one-off sound outcome. Creating this composite involves three stages: virtual configuration; functional technique; transfer of vital energies under the form of sounds.

The artistic act presented by the performer is not a mere reading, but a recreation of the image of the respective score following successive analytical decomposition and synthetic reconstruction techniques. The performer's personal contribution is essential: the particular aural image they convey to the audience can make the difference between acceptance and rejection. Although the great musical works have an indisputable intrinsic value, they do not really come to life until a performer plays them. The intervention of the musician's personality reaches all levels of the artistic act, from the text's semiotics and semantics to the work's emotional, spiritual, axiological and moral level.¹

¹ About the configuration of a sound image, Pascal Bentoïu writes: "on the first level of the configuration, the psyche combines separate elements into a coherent whole. But for this act of synthesis, which is then brought into contact (through the senses)

The work's *ethos* – in the sense of a *fundamental spirit* – seems to have a distinct artistic construction for each listener, because it operates at a subtler and more abstract level than words do.² Absolute music is ideally listened to, perceived, reconstructed inwardly and relived thanks to its spiritual, emotional, intuitive associations. Growing from personal experiences – private life or intellectual progress –, the performer should be the absolute master of such associations.

In this context, besides the mental and physiological skills of each instrumentalist, their repertoire choice is also influenced by their temperament and their affinity for a certain musical discourse, both of which are often consequences of an intuitive approach to certain sounds that we musicians then try to rationalize by analyzing the score and the context in which it was written.

On a personal note, the fact that I feel bound to some works by invisible but all the more stronger strings, which cold reasoning couldn't explain, awakens my curiosity to better get to know their creator: thus, the composer becomes an important part of my world as a performer, and the biographical moment of writing a piece of music as well as other social and artistic circumstances can all become sources of inspiration for perfecting an artistic vision; this is a brittle, ephemeral product, always happening only on stage, here and now, but its building process is infinite, so that each performance can preserve, eliminate or add colors and shades to a concept defined within the lines imposed by the creator, recreated by the instrumentalist, and passed on to the audience.

MARTINŪ AND POULENC – TWO ORIGINAL PERSONALITIES

Regarding Bohuslav Martinŭ's first Cello Sonata (Martinŭ 1940) and Francis Poulenc's only sonata for piano-cello duo (Poulenc 1953), studying and

with the objective structure and which leads to memory storing a characteristic sound profile, and for its consequences (analysis, recomposition, associative activity) to take place, some particular qualities must exist as regards that objective structure. . . . [T]he (technological) value of the objective structure is determined by the configuration, and . . . we are in fact compelled to search, at this level of the uncertain (that is, of the configuration), justifications for the level of certain (that is, the structure). . . . The configuration of a musical image is justified by the participation in a meaning." (Bentoiu 1973: 40)

² The recreation of the sound universe of a work by a performer involves generating energies that go beyond the scope of reason: "One must be silent about what cannot be said . . . This is no doubt the inexpressible. It reveals itself, it is the mystical element." (Wittgenstein 1991: 124)

performing them within a joint project seems appropriate, due to an intertwining of diversities observed in their creators and in the historical context in which they were completed.

Contemporaries for most of their lives, Martinů's and Poulenc's artistic and compositional careers evolved under similar professional auspices: initially trained in fields other than music, they turned to it because of their uncommon talent as well as because of some great musicians' guidance, at an older age than many of their contemporaries. In the case of the Czech composer, after a rather weak start at the Prague Conservatory, he was supported and encouraged by Josef Suk before leaving for Paris to study composition under Albert Roussel. An introverted, unsociable and meticulous nature, Martinů possessed a special ease in score reading and analysis, having particular affinities with impressionist music, jazz, Eastern European traditional music, and Stravinsky's works.³

Francis Poulenc, on the other hand, born into a wealthy family, attended a school of economics, but, highly talented and with a solid musical education, he didn't conform to his family's plans, and decided to study music with pianist Ricardo Viñes, who became his long-time mentor and friend, encouraging him to learn and to develop his own musical language. Subsequently, he entered Erik Satie's artistic tutelage, which only intensified his irreverent and extravagant side within Les Six. Later, in keeping with his uninterrupted, lifelong spiritual pursuits, irony and flamboyance fade in favor of depth (Rogé 2008). It is particularly interesting that he and Martinů had common musical preferences, from Debussy and urban Parisian music (in those times a form of traditional music) to Stravinsky and jazz.

MARTINŮ:

CELLO SONATA NO. 1

Completed in 1939, Martinů's Cello Sonata No. 1 has three movements and is built on the fast-slow-fast contrasting principle. The distinct personality and particular thematic developments of each movement notwithstanding, the work as a whole is inspired by East European folk music. Mainly manifest in the morphology of the melodic lines and the irregular accents, this flavor

³ "His music displays a wide variety of influences: there are works heavily influenced by jazz and the Baroque Concerto Grosso orchestra. Other works are influenced by Czech folk music. He also admired the music of Claude Debussy and Igor Stravinsky, among other composers." (Šafránek 1961: 185)

extends to the upper levels, of the performer's vision, through suggestions of a rough, direct expression of feeling, and through the simplicity of the specific modules. They are supplemented by impressionist influences on the level of harmony, sometimes impregnating the aural fabric with blurred lines woven into the for that matter bright colors of the musical image by means of an original technique, that of exploiting the surprise factor.

Balance, especially as regards the musical image as a whole, dominates the construction of the work. In the context of a free interpretation of the traditional structures and of a subtle roughness, sometimes developed by dissonant harmonies (the result of a constantly changing modal organization), the sound edifice has a sober expression, well-adjusted and moderate. This aesthetic coordinate is combined with a great diversity of color, providing the discourse with the passion of emotional experiences and with the classical elegance of the sound gestures through which they are confessed.

First movement:

Poco allegro

The structure of the first movement highlights an original approach: owing to the number of new elements, the thematic material goes beyond the bi-thematic sonata form; the rhapsodic character intended by the author made it necessary to abandon traditional structure and to adopt a free arrangement, subject to no prior model. Its sections borrow thematic modules from one another, modifying their rhythmic-melodic aspect and/or the substance of the performance configuration. They are delimited and named according to the dominant thematic material, and are arranged following an atypical pattern, in accordance with the musical discourse and its associated direction and intentions.

Each of the key moments contains one or more leitmotif modules. These are concise, at the level of the cell, and have unlimited capacities for development; their combination renders the musical discourse unpredictable, and, by being semantically significant, they allow the listener to distinguish them regardless of the context. They are written on three expressive coordinates, defined by the character of each thematic module: the volitional coordinate – to which the rhythmic dominant cells, with strong extraverted aspects, belong; the rhapsodic aspect; the poetic ambiguity – in which the temperamental aesthetics of the metric and rhythmic plane is doubled by introverted, passionate, or improvisational coordinates.

Here are the main leitmotifs (see Ex. 1).



Ex. 1. Main leitmotifs in Martinu, *Cello Sonata No. 1*, 1st movement (mm. 1, 2, 4, 72-73, 119-120).

The sections are separated by changes in the thematic substance: the first section, A (mm. 1-40), is divided into two subsections – a and a_1 – which exploit the same musical idea in a minor mode with the final on Bb. After a twelve-bar transition, section B begins with a modulatory developmental area, characterized by a new leitmotif (mm. 53-68). In bar 69 the second developmental section, marked C (mm. 69-88), intervenes. Section D comprises bars 89 to 124 and is divided into two subsections: d and d_1 . It is followed by a transition (mm. 125-132) to section E (mm. 133-155); this could be included in the process of the transition to A's return, with the addition of a new thematic module.

Section A is reduced to subsection a (mm. 156-176) and is followed by a B' (mm. 177-192) and a compact C (mm. 193-204). A new section, F (mm. 205-256) starts with the main mode, develops, and resumes sections D (mm. 256-272) and E (mm. 273-291). The first movement ends with a conclusive form of section F (mm. 292-323).

Grouping A, B and C in an exposition-recapitulation type of architectural symmetry would also have been possible (considering sections D as transition and E as development), had the subsequent thematic groups functioned as a coda. Surprisingly, Martinu brings new discourse elements into sections F, D, E, F, whose semantic coordinates are so intense that they are treated as individual sections.

Musical language benefits from the same treatment that structure does. There are no sharps or flats after the clef, which leads to a modal perception

of the work; however, the evolution of events over time goes beyond such a structure. The harmonic-melodic frame is freely constructed: specifically tonal opening or closing sound structures occur, and sometimes the harmony develops an intervallic parallelism suggesting timeless acoustic spaces. The principle of modal unity is observed on certain subsections, governing the modulatory plane; there are also unexpected leaps, depending on the changes that the aesthetic substance of the musical image undergoes.

The 3/8 time signature is an indicator of discourse compression. The basic unit – the eighth note – appears in this ternary combination in East European traditional dances, and the vertical sound-spectrum appears to be straightforward. But, due to the particular approach of acoustic detail, melody and meter are rarely simple in this movement.

Second movement:

Lento

The slow movement has a ternary lied structure (ABA). Section A comprises bars 1 to 27 and is subdivided into three subsections: a, a₁ and a'. The middle section (B, mm. 28-36) is followed by a short transition of just two bars (37-39). Upon A's return, the subsections inverted: a₁ takes place between bars 39 and 47 and is followed by a transition (mm. 48-58) and by a', functioning as a conclusion.

Comparing the size of the sections, we notice a difference between section A (27 and 26 bars) and the middle section, which has the length of an extended phrase (9 bars only). From another point of view, B might be considered as a transition to the next section, its role being thus limited to a transitive one and transforming the structure into a binary form. An argument in favour of the ternary version might be the thematic material of each section, clearly different in B as compared to A.



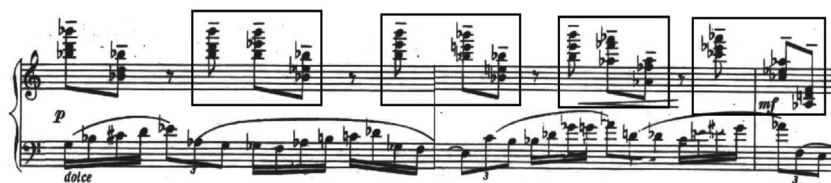
Ex. 2. *Martinu, Cello Sonata No. 1, 2nd movement, mm. 1-3, piano, left hand.*

The entire surface of the second movement is crossed by a set of related rhythmic leitmotif-like cells (see Ex. 2). Interestingly, these modules' melodic and harmonic profile is dominated by the rhythmic-metric aspect; the performer

has to follow their evolution throughout the movement in order to develop subtle aesthetic coordinates which change the character of their particular sound setting. Another constant in their exploitation is the timbral distribution: they are almost always played by the piano.

Semantically, the cell provides the musical image with a strict metric-rhythmic frame, as a basic structure organically sustaining all other structures. It begins by being crusic, its melodic profile either unfolding within an octave or being monotonous; later on, it develops, taking on an anacrusic or chordal cloak.

In the second stance, the cell highlights the aural image through harmonic colors. The registers employed are very diverse, so that the module loses some of its semantic strictness required by the first instance while retaining rhythmic rigor (see Ex. 3).



Ex. 3. Rhythmic leitmotif-like cells in Martinu, *Cello Sonata No. 1*, 2nd movement (mm. 7-9).

The entire second movement provides the listener with a slow, sometimes static discourse, yet crossed by elements of tension, rendering it dark and dramatic at times. The beauty of the discourse comes from the semantic and aesthetic interdependence of several registers which interactively shape their expression: the strictness of the metric-rhythmic module, the piano's sinuous melodic lines, the cello's predominantly sweet and *cantabile* color, with accents of introversion and pensiveness.

Third movement:

Allegro con brio

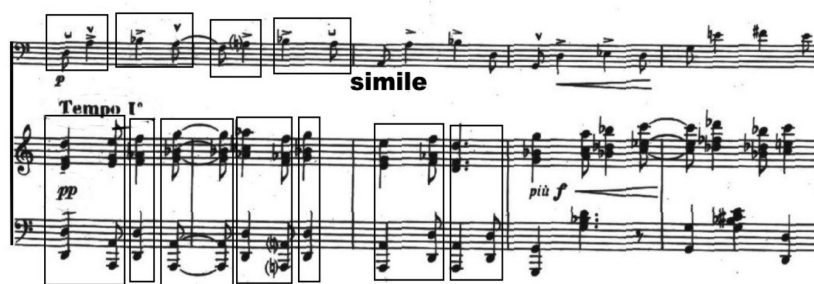
In the Sonata's last movement, in complete contrast to the previous movement, the music suggests an unmediated communication, its messages breathing vitality and strength. It is a type of primary energy which appeals to the less analytical, more intuitive areas of the performer's consciousness and, consequently, to the audience's global perception (Ex. 4).



Ex. 4. Martinu, *Cello Sonata No. 1*, 3rd movement, mm. 1-3.

The dominant feature of the movement is one of the specific coordinates of Martinu's writing style: a *perpetuum mobile* based on extremely concise, rapid, repetitive nuclei. The ability to play with polyrhythmic patterns and as such to create asymmetries requires the performers' ability to break free from conventional metric patterns (Ex. 5).

Like the second movement, the third is also in ternary form, the sections being rendered distinct by new thematic material and by a change in attitude and character. However, there are a number of particularities which bring it closer to the bi-thematic sonata form.



Ex. 5. Martinu, *Cello Sonata No. 1*, 3rd movement, mm. 67-71.

Section A is structured into three subsections: a (mm. 1-13) followed by a transition (mm. 14-18), a_1 (mm. 19-32) and a_2 (mm. 33-41). Next comes a middle section, marked B, divided into two subsections: b (mm. 42-65) and b_1 (mm. 66-74). The two expositional subsections are followed by an ample developmental section (E), divided into four subsections: e_1 (mm. 75-80), e_2 (mm. 81-106), e_3 (mm. 107-115) and e_4 (mm. 116-125). The recapitulation of A is identical, a (mm. 126-138) followed by transition (mm. 139-143). At bar

139, a_1 begins, succeeded by a_2 at bar 158. The entire section is completed by a two-phase coda (mm. 167-202): development (mm. 167-186) and conclusion (mm. 187-202).

Analyzing the relationships between the parts, we notice the special attention paid to the developmental sections. Martinů assigns 50 bars to the development and 35 bars to the coda. Both syntactic entities have a development-like profile, which justifies treating them as possible forms of sonata development in an architecture missing the second theme in the recapitulation. By extrapolation, in the exposition, A becomes the first theme, B, the second theme, the evolution becomes the development, and the recapitulation comprises an identical first theme and a coda development. If we view the work's architecture as a ternary form, we see that the middle section is too large and too thematically charged to be considered only a transition, and will therefore be generically called "development".

The tempo marking *Allegro con brio* points to the movement's general character: alert, rough, extraverted. Both instruments use a similar timbre: short sounds, with very clear contours, arranged in bright kinetic entities on a generous dynamic plane. The beat, continuously swaying between cello and piano, highlights the concept of uninterrupted motion; the cello uses heavily the *spiccato* technique, and the parallel lines in sixteenth notes on the piano played are *staccato* and in some cases, for a more convincing percussive effect, without the aid of the sustain pedal.

POULENC: CELLO SONATA FP 143

Written, like the Violin Sonata, between 1940 and 1948, the Cello Sonata saw the light of the print somewhat later, but circulated more. Dedicated to Pierre Fournier, it was a sore point for the author, owing to a personal mismatch with the character and the particular difficulties of string instruments, as Poulenc generally favoured winds. But Fournier's artistry, his sensitivity and ability to solve technical shortcomings, as well as their shared concert experience, persuaded him to keep it without any major changes, as had happened with the Violin Sonata (Poulenc preferred to play the piano himself, and he included the work on his tours with Fournier, testing its substantiality and its value in successful concerts) (see Caré 2013).

Among Francis Poulenc's chamber music works of, the Cello Sonata is unprecedented, being the only four-movement duo. As always, the title of each movement also points to a programmatic, albeit sometimes rendered ambiguous, underlying layer.

Based on modal arrangements with mutable degrees, the musical substance of the work features repeated tonal concluding or cadential moments inserted as a highly evolved harmonic form with flickers of cadential clarity intended as such by the composer in the modal fluidity of the discourse. The entire Sonata's center of gravity is E, by which the first and third movements are clearly defined, and on which the Finale's Introduction is placed. The second movement is, significantly, built on F# frequently drifting towards natural F, in a permanent regression and attraction back to the main note. The finale is, suggestively, built on an A, in a subdominant relationship with the main note, which surprisingly ends the Sonata. The thematic substance is extremely rich, new melodic modules being abundantly present throughout the work.

First Movement: *Allegro – Tempo di marcia*

The march is structured on clearly defined segments, with a variety of thematic modules in a frame-like form, where AB represents the frame and CDE the middle sections.

A	B	C	D	E	A	B
(mm. 1-50)	(mm. 51-115)	(mm. 116-148)	(mm. 149-190)	(mm. 191-207)	(mm. 208-235)	(mm. 236-261)

Fig. 1. Poulenc, *Cello Sonata*, 1st movement diagram.

The first sections, A and B, are well-developed and substantial (50 and 65 bars, respectively); by comparison, their correspondents in the Finale are concentrated, of a recapitulative and, in the case of the last section, conclusive character.

Section A expresses the “march” indicated in the title: it starts with an explosive signal, in a perfectly tonal four-bar phrase and a triumphant E major, and is immediately followed by a sudden two-phrase comment, both more lyrical and more restless (Ex. 6).

The whole section is based on these two thematic elements of slightly different characters but connected by a common vivacity. From the performer's point of view, it is important to observe the metronome marking indicated by the author (M.M. quarter note = 120), a perfect *allegro* but slightly too fast for a classic march; thus, accents and sudden changes in expression build a somewhat precipitated progress, lending the discourse an ironic and sometimes derisive air.

The same fluency is kept throughout the second section (B), which brings a new theme, intensely chromatic, with a depressive, descendant profile; the latter is countered by the cascades of broken arpeggios of the accompanying voices, regardless of the instrument.

Sans triller $\text{♩} = 120$

p subito

mf

pizz.

arcat

stacc.

Ex. 6. Poulenc, Cello Sonata, 1st movement, mm. 1-17.

The large section starts on a minor mode on F#, thus opposing in character section A, all modulatory leaps retaining the minor component of the theme (Ex. 7).

cédez un peu **5 a Tempo**

p

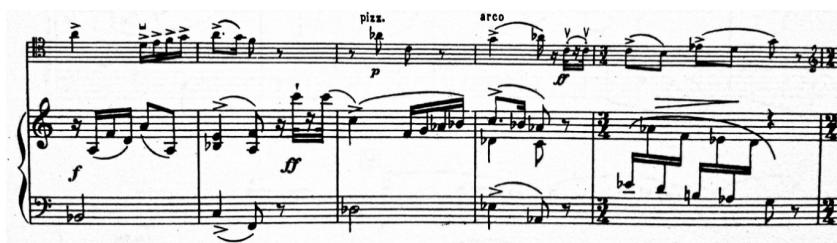
mf

pp

mf

Ex. 7. Poulenc, Cello Sonata, 1st movement, mm. 48-56.
Section B begins at m. 51.

The rhythmic flow and melodic profile are also fluid, without the dramatic register and intervallic leaps of A, so that the work enters another area of expression, softer and with milder shades, with sporadic interventions of march reminiscences from A (Ex. 8).



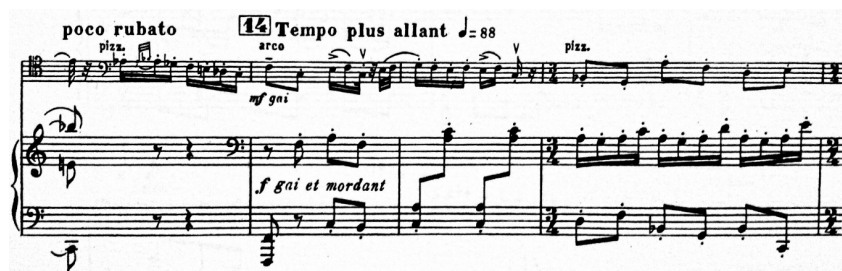
Ex. 8. Poulenc, *Cello Sonata*, 1st movement, mm. 67-71. The theme starts at the end of m. 68.

The middle sections C, D, and E (transition) belong to the lyrical, following a radical change in tempo, meter and expression (76-88 bpm, *Très sensiblement plus calme*, oscillating meter, from 2/4 or 3/4 to 3/8 and 6/8). Here, the nucleus represented by section D reinserts the march into the musical message, but in a different form as compared to A.

Ex. 9. Poulenc, *Cello Sonata*, 1st movement, mm. 116-123.

Section C proposes a serene, contemplative discourse, in a major mode chromatically built on Db, a darker color than the major mode on E from the first section, but brighter than the minor mode of section B; thus, besides the serene mood highlighted by the tempo and the dynamics, it also creates a state of ambivalence, yet softened by the extraordinary generosity and beauty of the melodic line that wanders effortlessly from piano to cello (Ex. 9).

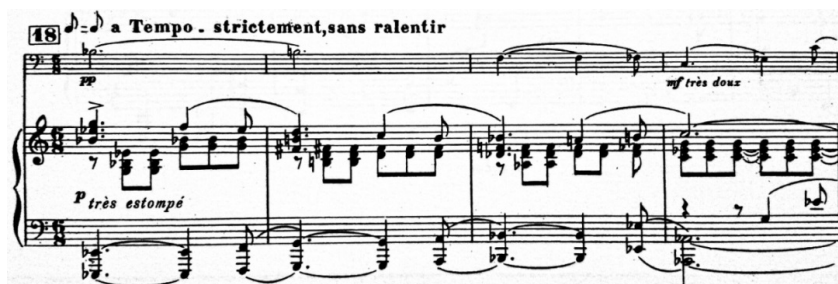
Section D deploys a cheerful and incisive march (*gai et mordant*) in a fitting tempo marking (M.M. quarter note = 88): thus, the bold character of steadily walking in step with others is suggestively highlighted, in a moderate-rapid instrumental atmosphere of short, dry and sometimes sarcastic execution, despite the joy suggested by the author (Ex. 10).



Ex. 10. Poulenc, *Cello Sonata*, 1st movement, mm. 148-151.

Extremely short, percussive piano touches are used here, completely eliminating the sustain pedal and combined with cello playing *au talon*, down bow, and a very tense *pizzicato*; the sound quality must have that residue of hammer strike and bow hair bite, in contrast to the previous fluidity provided by the legato manner of playing and the blurring of the sounds' contours through the soft touch of the bow and the combination of finger legato with the piano sustain pedal.

Beginning with bar 178, the percussive, marching quality of the discourse gradually gives way to a new, lyrical area, represented by the transition to the return of A (section E); although small (only 17 bars), this delicate, seraphic passage has its own melodic discourse, which makes it difficult to classify (as either a transition or expository section); regardless of the structural interpretation, the musical discourse seems to suggest here an infinite floating on an uninterrupted 6/8 beat, with sinusoidal melodies divided between the piano and the cello and placed over a deep bass with very long note values (Ex. 11).



Ex. 11. Poulenc, *Cello Sonata*, 1st movement, mm. 192-195.

The return of section A is, like many of this movement's events, sudden, featuring the same triumphant and rapid signal in E major. Condensed in just 28 bars, the section then makes room (just as suddenly) for B, which, after a few bars of withdrawal and ironic hesitations, ends the Sonata's first movement in an inconspicuous yet lively manner.

Second movement: Cavatina

The Sonata's slow movement relies on a major mode on F# which gives it a special color. In the classical-romantic period, F# major was granted with special attributes, being defined as a tone of spiritual beatitude, of Christian ritual solemnity. The number of the raising accidentals thus combined suggested a mystic dimension transcending the human one, so that Beethoven and Liszt used this key in some movements and sections of their works: Beethoven's Piano Sonata, Op. 11, Sonata in B minor, *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude* and other works by Liszt.⁴

It is unlikely that the above would have inspired Poulenc in choosing this movement's key; it nevertheless has the same serene profile, and the phrases' configuration on large spaces resembles the romantic soul. The structure of the movement is, as in the case of the first movement, frame-like, with a section A (this time of short dimensions) containing a well-developed middle part with four distinct thematic sections:

⁴ One of the references to the special significance of the F# major key in Liszt's Sonata is given by Alan Walker in the Grove Dictionary: "The great Andante sostenuto . . . occupies the same world of blissful contemplation as the slow movements of late Beethoven with which Liszt was so familiar. . . . The Andante is set in Liszt's 'beatific' key of F# major. Liszt's choice of keys was rarely the result of random selection, and is frequently determined by a higher expressive purpose, a wide topic still waiting to be explored. The 'Paradiso' section of the 'Dante' Sonata . . . , *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude* and *Les jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este* . . . all have religious connotations and are all cast in this same key." (Eckhardt, Charnin Mueller and Walker 2001)

A B C D E A + Coda
 (mm. 1-9) (mm. 10-21) (mm. 21-38) (mm. 39-53) (mm. 54-68) (mm. 69-84)

Fig. 2. Poulenc, *Cello Sonata*, 2nd movement diagram.

Section A, the beginning and the end of the movement, proposes an exciting piano chorale in *pianissimo*, interrupted by the very sweet cello comment, in a static, soothing atmosphere. The concluding section is much shortened, but the coda carries its seraphic atmosphere to the end (Ex. 12).



Ex. 12. Poulenc, *Cello Sonata*, 2nd movement, mm. 1-5.

In a slight contrast, the *Cavatina*'s middle sections represent the active principle of the static-dynamic duality, in common with Martinů's Sonata, where it is equally well developed, but on other affective levels. The movement (action) is subordinated to the general symbolism of contemplative beatitude, the melody remains calm and generous but is accompanied by more and more restless harmonic figurations throughout sections B and C. Poulenc creates here two culminations, one by accumulation, in section C, and one by a break in atmosphere, in the beginning of section E.

The themes become cyclical in section C, whose main melody is a migration of one of the themes from the first movement, this time in a mode on D (Ex. 13).

Perhaps one of the Sonata's most serene moments, the coda included in the last A brings together all the expressive components suggested in the texture of the second movement: the serenity, given by the major mode on F#, the calm, the slow motion (given by the eighth notes in an excessively tranquil tempo), the feeling of ascension to an apollonian peak (suggested by the gradually upwards-going piano registers), the stagnation – via the cello's melody which combines long durations (dotted half notes) with medium ones (quarter notes) and the sweet and rarefied sound color of the dynamic level, in particular (Ex. 14).



Ex. 13. Poulenc, *Cello Sonata*, 2nd movement, mm. 20-24. The migrating theme is given by the piano, m. 21.

Excessivement calme

ppp

pp

10

pp

ppp

pp très clair et doux

arco

enlève la sourdine

4' 30"

Ex. 14. Poulenc, *Cello Sonata*, 2nd movement, mm. 72-84.

Third movement: *Ballabile*

This movement offers extra vivacity to the musical landscape, as it is the work's dancing moment. Framed by a ternary ABA-type form followed by a Coda, it provides the listener with an extremely lively section, like a virtual dance, which encloses a quieter B, although specifically intended to be performed in the same tempo as A (as insistently indicated by the author: *A tempo – Surtout sans rallentir*).

The A theme is dotted, vigorous, masculine, suited to the percussive mechanics of the piano, to which the cello responds with *pizzicatos*, energetic *staccatos*, and a series of ascending sixteenth notes launched and then solved through a run of formulas in *marcato* and with a somewhat more particular rhythm (Ex. 15).

The image shows a musical score for the third movement of Poulenc's Cello Sonata, measures 4-11. The score is written for piano and cello. The piano part is in the upper staff, and the cello part is in the lower staff. The piano part features a dotted rhythm and is marked 'pizz.' and 'arco'. The cello part features a series of ascending sixteenth notes and is marked 'pizz.' and 'léger'. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Ex. 15. Poulenc, *Cello Sonata*, 3rd movement, mm. 4-11.

In B the texture changes, opposing the previous virility with more fluid rhythms, legatos on long breaths, and a swinging motion imposed by the piano on off-beat eighth notes formulas. The dynamics are also rarefied, and the cello resumes the *cantabile* valences in a warm and enveloping discourse (Ex. 16).

The recapitulation of section A is followed by an interesting Coda, which brings to the forefront the ethos of the middle section, by its melody and its soft touches demanded by Poulenc's expressive markings, but which ends the movement by a sudden turn of atmosphere, an ascending brilliant irony, meant to put a smile on the listener's face, like a magic show.



Ex. 16. Poulenc, *Cello Sonata*, 3rd movement, mm. 46-48.

Fourth movement: *Finale*

The Sonata's finale presents a harmoniously segmented structure: it begins with a slow, declamatory section (Introduction, mm. 1-10), followed by an extremely fast A (mm. 11-53), in *presto*, a substantial section with rushed accents and subtle ironies (Ex. 17).

Ex. 17. Poulenc, *Cello Sonata*, 4th movement, mm. 1-3 and 11-14.

From bar 54 new thematic modules appear, organized in a self-contained segment, with its own expressive profile, even if sharing the same musical pace (B – mm. 54-114); the earlier irony turns into a percussive sarcasm, sustained by short durations, a very rigorous tempo, and incisive dynamic eruptions. The next structural articulation is prepared within B four bars beforehand, its contour melting into a new expressive area: the change in temperament

(from the sarcastic, dotted rhythms to the lyrical and the pensive) is achieved by dynamic modification and *cantabile* highlighting, entering that special, seraphic atmosphere, so dear to Poulenc.

Bar 171 is the entry into a special area, composed of three sections (Transition – A – Coda), shorter than the previous ones, in ternary form, containing in the nucleus a remembrance of section A in concentrated form. It is surrounded by a distinct segment, with a very beautiful, extremely cantabile and sweet thematic melody, in contrast to the incisiveness of the sound substance of A (Ex. 18).



Ex. 18. Poulenc, *Cello Sonata*, 4th movement, mm. 169-173.

This extended Coda is meant to appease the musical discourse, as a counterweight to the extreme agitation of the sections in *presto*. The Finale concludes with a spectacular remembrance of the slow introductive section which thus becomes a conclusion of the entire Sonata.

CONTRASTS AND SIMILARITIES OF CHARACTER: A SUBJECTIVE INTERPRETATION

Before making a comparison between two works, a performer creates these works' sound world: the active virtual imagining of the signs and meanings on a written score and their actual execution, as a series of experiments of musical expression increasingly closer to the written text (or to what we imagine to exist inside it) and to the composer's intentions (or, again, to what we, the performers, imagine that the composer wants).

Both sound worlds – Martinu's and Poulenc's – were ahead of their time; both sonatas are created by adult composers, with an already well-developed, specific language, and a clear stylistic coherence: the listener will promptly identify them as belonging to Martinu or Poulenc.

Both works feature the already traditional principle that defines the sonata genre: contrasting movements, with the slow one framed by fast sections. There is also some idea of the cyclic aspect of thematic motifs that migrate from one movement to another. Both composers also, albeit to a lesser extent, adhere to the principle of tonal unity (or relation) of each movement, even though in both works the modal discourse prevails; this means that while most harmonic developments are built on modal structures and reveal traditional music- or jazz-influenced sonorities, most cadences at the end of the main sections are clearly composed in tonal form.

And now innovation comes in, first at the level of structure and then at the level of language and expressive relations. Neither of the two composers uses the traditional sonata form, and the only classical structures are those ternary forms: the slow movement in Martinů's Sonata (the second movement) and the scherzo in Poulenc's Sonata (the third movement); all the others are composite structures, based on a thematic richness that goes beyond the sonata's bi-thematic structure, so that the forms are tessellated, with sections which can sometimes be interpreted in multiple ways.

What brings the two works together, from the performer's point of view, is a complementarity of aesthetic dimensions (some of which the two have in common) and the way how the musician can shape them into creating sound worlds of a beautiful diversity. One can feel that the two composers were contemporaries, that they lived around WW2, that they used an aesthetic, ageless, significant language, which can be reconstructed by performers in any historical context whatsoever.

The common expressive ideas to be exploited, in order of dominance are: vivacity (restlessness), the lyrical, dance, and sarcasm.

Vivacity is dominant in both sonatas, given the preponderance of fast movements; for this reason, the audience perceives their global sound world as active, sometimes ironically or aggressively so, with rough sonorities. This trait is highlighted according to each composer's personality, its degree also depending on the performers' temperament:

- What is alert, with humorous and sometimes ironic accents with Poulenc, becomes fierce and sometimes mechanistic with Martinů;
- The sudden, surprising modulations can be interpreted as free-spirited, sometimes frivolous, in Poulenc; in Martinů we can see them as entries in other, clearly delimited sections, and such sudden leaps don't always involve a change of expression, whereas in Poulenc they are always accompanied by radical expressive changes;

- The clearly-layered discourse in Poulenc's fast movements, dominated by melody, is opposed by Martinů's block-like harmonic structures, often suggesting dense, agglomerated, moving conglomerates;
- The two composers also share a common use of leaps of register in opposite directions, both for covering a wide spectrum of color, and for painting a surprising timbre spectrum; leaps are used mostly in the fast movements, even in quick tempos, on the piano as well as on the cello;
- Within the same tempo register, the widest dynamic areas are also used, going up to *fortississimo* on culminations in Martinů; the performers will have to use harsh sounds, and the cello in particular is intensely exploited, with a very high pressure of the bow on the strings, in combination with the tumult of the piano, greatly helped by the sustain pedal;
- Restlessness is interpreted differently by the two authors: Poulenc proposes tempos unfit for a certain programmatic set (such as M. M. quarter note = 120 in combination with the march quality in the first movement, or the indications to keep the tempo when changing from *lively* to *lyrical*). Martinů, by contrast, imposes, through repeated leit-motif cells, a roller or *perpetuum mobile* motion, on a pace structure requiring precise execution; the suggestion is not of restlessness, but of a motion sometimes mechanical, like that of a machine.

The *lyrical* dominates an important part of the slow sections, be they included in the fast or in the slow movements. Their beauty leads the performers to extremely profound, introspective sound worlds which they then turn into their own virtual confessions. The lyrical also has a substantial place in the overall sound image, gaining dramatic valences, especially in the slow parts (the second movements). To the performer, the scores' ensemble of meaning inspires the following nuances:

- The second movement of Martinů's Sonata initially proposes, in the solo part of the piano, a static, emotionless world, as if carved in a hard material; although the melody's legato marking hints to a certain *cantabile* quality, the metric-rhythmic module of the left hand, later to be resumed in different stances, implies avoiding the sustain pedal and, thus, leads to a certain dryness. Only the cello's intervention and its evolution humanize this landscape, so that its partner, showing support, will change the touch into a velvetier tone;
- In the slow movement of Poulenc's Sonata, the atmosphere is far from emotionless; though static, it is at the same time contempla-

tive, with accents of mystical awe; in this context, the tone color of the two instruments is similar – sweet piano chorale and a sinuous melody on an extremely songlike cello;

- The lyrical is dominated by tension in Martinů: this comes from the extensive chromaticization of the discourse; there is thus an interesting play of lights and shadows, which renders the initial stillness somewhat ambiguous. The conception and development of the aural image must be accompanied by a background suggestion of this permanent anxiety which permeates the movement from its opening notes to the atypical end (the transition to the next movement);
- By contrast, in Poulenc the lyrical involves serenity and relaxation: the exaltation of the spirit, suggested by the modal colors specific to the F# key, comes from leaving behind all previous tensions; this interpretative argument is also supported by the conception (primarily with regard to melody) on large spaces, with seemingly endless breaths, naturally integrated in the aural ensemble. Even the culminations are majestic, not anguished, the piano touch is round, velvety, and the cello sound production is the result of soft, low-pressure bows.

Dance appears only episodically, predominantly in the third movement in Poulenc and in the Finale in Martinů. It is a common transient land, inspired by different sources – Italian ballet music (*Ballabile*) with Poulenc, East European dance rhythms with Martinů; however, although those structural segments are just episodic, they give the musical image a special elegance. If in Poulenc, dance is, through Parisian refinement and spirit, naturally integrated, in Martinů the asymmetric play of traditional dances syncopations represents an interesting break in the build-up of tense accumulations, of sudden culminations.

Sarcasm is common to both works, but manifests as a follow-up of other coordinates. With Poulenc it comes as a natural amplification of the irony that pervades almost the entire Sonata. From musical segments full of pep, he arrives at incisive extrapolations, such as some bits from the fourth movement, to be performed at such a fast tempo that at a first glance they seem extremely difficult to do. The thematic replies between the piano and the cello are so quick that they create the sensation of a ball bouncing back and forth, filmed and then played back at higher speed. There are also segments where the string instrument is asked for uncomfortable, extremely short, intervallic sound productions, so that they would integrate into a highly percussive piano discourse.

In Martinu, sarcasm is directly related to the expressionist features of certain aural areas: the dissonant collision sometimes mingles with a desperate-sarcastic expression, at times paroxysmal, suggesting evil roars or introverted gibbering; unlike in Poulenc, we encounter sarcastic areas also in the middle section of the second movement, in its climax, as a proof of the intensity of the tension going through the whole work.

This aesthetic coordinate is, however, what best connects, from a performer's point of view, the two works; in a public performance, although the other aesthetic registers are more extensive, the incisive, sarcastic aspect is the most prominent; maybe this is also the reason why, as regards the performers' temperament, if they can assimilate and render convincingly one of these two sonatas, they will certainly feel attracted to the language and the world of the other.

English version by Andreea Butnaru and Maria Monica Bojin

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