THE SOLO PIANO WORKS OF JOHN CORIGLIANO:

ETUDE FANTASY (1976) AND FANTASIA

ON AN OSTINATO (1985)

DISSERATION

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Beverley Simms, B. M., M. M.

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John Corigliano (b. 1938) is a contemporary American composer who has in the last twenty years established himself as a composer whose versatility and accessibility are appreciated by a wide range of audiences. He has labeled himself an eclectic composer who unashamedly borrows from other musical styles and periods in an effort to create works that appeal to a variety of listeners. He has been mentioned along with George Rochberg, George Crumb, and Jacob Druckman as an advocate of the post-modern movement in contemporary American music, a trend that has been crucial to the development of contemporary concert music.

The purpose of this study is to examine the two solo piano works of Corigliano in terms of style, structure, and musical influences.

The *Etude Fantasy* (1976) is a set of five etudes, performed without pause. The etudes are unified through an elaborate use of thematic transformation in which a row-like idea generates most of the material. The keyboard writing is
varied and dramatic, with similarities to Debussy, Bartok, Prokofiev, and Copland.

**Fantasia on an Ostinato** (1985), commissioned for the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, is an atmospheric tone poem that transforms the theme from Beethoven's *Symphony no. 7* (second movement). The rhythmic and harmonic structure of this theme are retained through much of Corigliano's work. Full quotations and fragments of the symphony are combined with newly-composed material influenced by Beethoven's theme. Influence of minimalist techniques associated with Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass is apparent throughout the work; rhythmic phasing, repetitive patterns, and musical stasis are used extensively in the second section.

A comparison of the *Etude Fantasy* and *Fantasia on an Ostinato* confirms the eclectic characteristics of Corigliano's style. In both works, the composer borrows freely from a variety of musical traditions, combining and modifying traditional and avant-garde techniques. It is this intelligent combination of elements, along with expert craftsmanship, that has become Corigliano's trademark and have earned him an important place in contemporary American music.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the past two decades, American music has undergone revolutionary changes in both style and aesthetic. Prior to the 1970's, avant-garde composition was largely associated with serial, atonal, and other highly intellectualized devices, and therefore claimed limited recognition outside elite musical circles. However, the mid-1970's witnessed a revival of interest in works with wider musical appeal. By reexamining their aesthetic goals, many composers found it possible to balance twentieth century innovations with traditional techniques, thereby bringing contemporary music out of academia and into the concert hall. Many composers who began their careers writing only serial or atonal music modified their styles; and a host of younger composers, who accepted the new aesthetic of accessibility, appeared.

John Corigliano has, in the last twenty years, established himself as one composer whose versatility and accessibility are appreciated by a wide range of audiences, and who is eager to discuss his own music and that of his contemporaries. In his writings about contemporary music,
and in interviews with other composers and musicians, Corigliano has labeled himself an eclectic composer who unashamedly borrows from other musical styles and periods in an effort to create works that are appealing to many different listeners. He has taken issue with so-called "intellectual" composers, among them Pierre Boulez, Elliot Carter, and Milton Babbitt, whose works are specifically intended for sophisticated listeners. Instead, he aligns himself with Aaron Copland, George Rochberg, and other composers whose styles reflect a revival of tonal idioms, virtuosity, and sensuality. Corigliano has been mentioned along with George Rochberg, Philip Ramey, George Crumb, Jacob Druckman, and others as an advocate of the post-modern movement in contemporary music, a trend that has been crucial to the development of contemporary concert music.

Most of the literature concerning Corigliano's works focuses on the instrumental concerti, vocal works, violin sonata, and orchestral works. The solo piano compositions, however, have not been dealt with in detail. Perhaps this is because Corigliano's output in this area has been relatively small. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the two solo piano works, Etude Fantasy, and Fantasia on an Ostinato, in terms of style, structure, and musical influences.
There are several reasons these compositions have been selected for examination. First, they present contrasting styles and methods of composition, and serve as representative works of Corigliano's keyboard output. Second, although both works are fantasies and exhibit many of the elements commonly associated with the traditional keyboard fantasy, Corigliano's compositional approach and use of style are different in each work. Third, these compositions are separated by a nine-year period, and a comparison of them may provide some insight into the composer's musical development.
CHAPTER II

JOHN CORIGLIANO

Born in New York City on February 16, 1938, John Corigliano is the son of the late John Corigliano, Sr., concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic from 1943-1966; and of Rose Corigliano, a pianist and teacher. Although both his parents were professional musicians, Corigliano was not encouraged to pursue music as a career. His early musical instruction, therefore, was somewhat haphazard, and he was largely self-taught. He learned orchestration, for instance, by listening to recordings and examining scores. It was during these early years that Corigliano developed his appreciation for the music of Aaron Copland, a composer he still greatly respects:

My mother offered me the choice of a contour chair or a hi-fi. I took the second. It was a new toy, and I bought a few records—like Pictures at an Exhibition—just for the sound. On one of them was the gunfight scene from Copland's Billy the Kid. I fell in love with the 7/4 time, the irregular rhythms, the flatted fifth in the harmony, the spacey sounds. I began imitating them on the piano and going to the library to get more Copland records. That's how I learned orchestration—listening to records with the score.¹

Corigliano began seriously pursuing his musical studies at Columbia University, where he studied composition with Otto Luening. Further study was done at the Manhattan School of Music with Vittorio Giannini, and privately with Paul Creston. Upon graduation from Columbia in 1959, Corigliano joined the ranks of numerous young American composers who were unable to earn a living by composing. During these early years, Corigliano held a number of different jobs, all of them music-related, but not necessarily involving composing. He was a writer and director for radio stations in New York City; he arranged rock music for Kama Sutra and Mercury Records, and produced recordings for Columbia Masterworks; he assisted Leonard Bernstein with the CBS Young People's Concerts, and directed the Corfu Music Festival. These positions in the music industry provided Corigliano with experience in a variety of areas, and led him to serious consideration of the problems facing young composers. He also learned the importance of resourcefulness and self-promotion as career skills:

When I left college in 1960, I bought my time to compose by working at other jobs. I was music director of WBAI, I worked on all the CBS-TV music specials and Young People's Concerts for twelve years. I produced records for Columbia, I ran the Corfu Music Festival. Right now I teach at Lehman College and the Manhattan School of Music. I spent a lot of . . . years hustling my work, finding a niche for myself. A composer must be
aggressive, a self-promoter. You cannot expect the world to come to you. . . . 2

Corigliano's career as a composer was launched in 1964 when his Sonata for Violin and Piano (1963) was selected as the winning composition in the Spoleto Festival Competition for the Creative Arts. Since then, he has received a steady flow of commissions from such prestigious sources as the New York Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Chicago Symphony, the Metropolitan Opera, the Van Cliburn Foundation, flutist James Galway, and pianist James Tocco. He has also received numerous awards and honors, among them a Guggenheim Fellowship, grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, and an Academy Award nomination for his film score, Altered States.

Corigliano's works to date can be divided into two periods: early works composed before 1975, and works composed after 1975. The early works are generally tonal, although often quite dissonant, and are characterized by the use of traditional forms treated in unorthodox ways. Corigliano describes the style of these works as "a tense, histrionic outgrowth of the 'clean American sound' of Samuel Barber, Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, and William Schuman." 3

2William Hoffmann, "John Corigliano on Cracking the Establishment," Village Voice (Feb. 21, 1979), 68.
Representative compositions from this period include the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* (1968) and the *Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1963). Both are virtuoso works set in largely tonal, although dissonant, twentieth-century idioms. Elements of late nineteenth-century lyricism contrast with percussive instrumental techniques associated with earlier twentieth-century composers such as Bartok and Prokofiev. Unorthodox handling of traditional forms is particularly evident in the first movement of the piano concerto, a sonata form in which the contrasting themes of the exposition are gradually transformed during the development section until they assume each other's qualities.4

Since 1975, Corigliano's style has become more consequentially eclectic: While his earlier works possess a relative degree of stylistic consistency, the later ones exhibit a startling variety of styles. Style is, in fact, used as a compositional tool, and may change drastically from one work to the next, or even within a single a work. The result is a conscious eclecticism in which the composer draws upon many sources for inspiration, including music from earlier historical periods:

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4Ibid., 4.
I don't think of style as the basic unifying factor in music like many composers do today. I feel very strongly that a composer has a right to do anything he feels is appropriate, and that stylistic consistency is not what makes a piece impressive. ... I also appreciate the more recent idea of mixing different styles in one piece, of using style as a technique that, like orchestration, provides the composer with a wider expressive palette.5

Corigliano also identifies important twentieth-century composers, particularly Stravinsky and Copland, who have used style in this manner. Both composers wrote music in a variety of styles and idioms: Stravinsky's style ranges from dissonant tonality and nationalism to neoclassicism and serialism. Similarly, Copland's style includes neoclassicism, serialism, and American nationalism. Yet, because of the strength of his musical personality, each composers' music remains characteristically unique. In an interview for Soundpieces, Copland himself alludes to this quest for variety in compositional practice:

One likes to be known for all the different things one does. One doesn't like to be pigeon-holed, and credited for being able to do one thing in music well, and have other pieces which you think are quite different in nature ignored ... I wouldn't want to be thought of as

a mere purveyor of Americana, for example, nice as that may be from one aspect.  

Corigliano's move towards eclecticism was not sudden; Traces of it are present in his early works. The Concerto for Piano and Orchestra and Gazebo Dances for piano, four-hands (1972), for example, exhibit radically different musical styles, although composed within only four years of one another. The Concerto, although predominantly Bartokian in effect, also contains atonal and serial elements. The Gazebo Dances, on the other hand, are a set of four whimsical pieces in a clearly neoclassic idiom. Cast in simple, traditional forms, and using characteristic dance rhythms and modal inflections, these pieces look not only to the eighteenth century for inspiration, but to other twentieth-century neoclassic dance sets, notably those of Ravel, Hindemith, and Poulenc.  

Corigliano's works since 1975 have continued to exhibit strikingly varied styles and compositional methods. Some works, among them the Etude Fantasy (1976), retain the virtuosity and percussive dissonance associated with his

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6Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1982), 111.

7Important works include: Ravel's Le Tombeau de Couperin (1917); Paul Hindemith's Suite, "1922," op. 26; and Poulenc's Suite Francaise after Claude Gervaise, Sixteenth Century (1935).
earlier compositions. Others, notably the Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra (1977), Fantasia on an Ostinato (1985), and Promenade Overture (1986), make use of musical material borrowed from other composers: Giovanni Gabrieli, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Joseph Haydn, respectively. Many works are programmatic and theatrically conceived; and others, such as the Pied Piper Fantasy (1981) display a wide variety of compositional techniques and styles within a single work.

Corigliano has also produced works in a wide variety of genres. In addition to instrumental concertos (for piano, clarinet, oboe, and flute), piano works, and both orchestral and film scores (all of which cover a huge variety of musical styles), he has made major contributions to the vocal repertoire. His Dylan Thomas Trilogy (1960-70), for chorus, orchestra and soloists, presents a unique overview of the composer's evolving style over a ten-year period. More recently, Corigliano has explored the operatic genre with A Figaro for Antonio, commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera in 1985. Continuing the tradition of Mozart and Rossini, this comic opera is based on the third Beaumarchais play in the Figaro trilogy.

According to Corigliano, the breadth of musical styles and genres that characterizes his output can be attributed to a desire to write music of high quality and accessibility.
He views the availability of various styles as a rich source of compositional possibilities from which works of excellent quality may be produced. Convinced of this, he feels no need to search for stylistic consistency:

If I have a style, it's unknown to me. Most people think of style as something to latch on to and continue doing. I find that limiting and I think it's a leftover from that horrible nineteenth century complex—the idea that the goal is to sound like no one else. Well, let me tell you something: that's no goal. The goal is to write music, and good material, not style, is what holds a piece of music together.  

Another writer, in a review of Corigliano's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, congratulates this compositional flexibility:

The road to Hell may be paved with good intentions, but the road to originality in music will be found, in almost every meaningful instance, to be paved with the building blocks of the best examples of the past. As Corigliano shows the independence of mind to select the elements of those he admires in proportions fitting to his own purpose, the outcome is . . . decidedly more representative of him than of them.

Corigliano shares this musical aesthetic with a growing number of contemporary composers, many of whom were at one

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time strict serialists. George Rochberg, Luciano Berio, George Crumb, and David del Tredici, for example, recognize the need to take inventory of the vast array of experimental techniques developed in this century, and find workable, appealing ways to use them. They realize that the continual search for "the new" that characterized the earlier twentieth-century avant-garde movement does not in and of itself yield worthwhile musical products. Their efforts to rejuvenate avant-garde music by blending it with other styles have produced a movement in contemporary American music that some writers have referred to as post-modernism.

The term "post-modernism" originated in the mid-1970's and was first associated with American architecture. In architecture, it refers to a decisive break with the main goals of the twentieth-century avant-garde, and a reintegretion of the ideals of the pre-modern era. The result is an eclectic style that reintroduces conventional architectural elements, thereby enlarging the repertoire of styles available to designers.

10 Even as early as 1967, Leonard Meyer, in Music, the Arts, and Ideas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 143) predicted that the search for new and radically experimental techniques would exhaust itself, and composers would begin to use methods that would "involve the combination, mixture, and modification" of compositional techniques already in existence.

H. Wiley Hitchcock has suggested an analogy between post-modern architecture and certain recent musical works. In both music and buildings, he says, post-modernism builds on the tension between historical references and modernist practice. This tension is clearly reflected in the eclectic composer's mix of old and new style elements. Because these techniques have yet to be, nor are they likely to be, integrated into a single twentieth-century style, contemporary music has moved in many different directions, resulting in "...a dizzying diversion of ways and means," according to Hitchcock. Above all, he says, post-modernism "is willing to let the future take care of itself; ... and a great deal of it shares one characteristic: accessibility."¹²

This accessibility is a distinguishing feature of Corigliano's music. Many performers, critics, and audiences applaud the variety, dramatic effects and vivid scoring in his works. Corigliano attributes the resultant appeal to the influence of contemporary film music, suggesting that its eclectic qualities have stimulated public interest in twentieth-century musical idioms.

Corigliano’s major contribution to the film score genre is *Altered States*, which received an Academy Award nomination in 1981. The score is a vivid mixture of compositional styles and techniques, graphically described in the following review by Paul Snook:

... reflecting the current swing to an unselfconscious and omnivorous eclecticism, *Altered States* skillfully employs a gamut of modes, from electronically amplified sounds, to distorted quotations, a la Ives ... to a serenely Brahmsian passage for piano trio. In its flamboyant mix of nightmarish dissonance, ominous low rumblings, neoprimitive sacre-like ostinatos, and a gently diatonic love theme, the score provides a graphic counterpart to Ken Russell's phantasmagoric fusion of neuropsychopathic horror film, anthropological sci-fi, and humanistic uplift.13

In 1981 Corigliano arranged excerpts from *Altered States* into a fifteen-minute orchestral work, *Three Hallucinations*. One critic, while acknowledging the work's "dizzying eclecticism," also emphasizes its skillful workmanship and formal logic:

Its impact is so immediate that it would be easy to underestimate the score as a glossy crowd-pleaser. Yet beneath the surface is a notable formal integrity. I am not referring so much to its motivic unity, striking as it is, but rather to the finesse with which Corigliano juggles competing elements. The music is consequently less a succession of discrete effects than a coherent process through which moods are created, distorted, and refined. . . .14

This formal logic, combined with "dizzying eclecticism," pervades Corigliano's entire compositional output. Through the intelligent combination of these elements, Corigliano continues to produce accessible works in a variety of genres.

CHAPTER III

ETUDE FANTASY

Corigliano composed the Etude Fantasy for the Bicentennial Piano Series of the Washington, D. C. Performing Arts Society. Published in 1976, the work was premiered by James Tocco at the Kennedy Center on October 9 of that year. With its imaginative use of piano sonority, virtuosity, and wide spectrum of moods, the work was an instant success.

The chief features of the eighteenth century fantasia are preserved in Corigliano's Etude Fantasy. Its sectionial design, rhapsodic passagework, and striking contrasts in tempo, dynamics, and mood, are qualities reminiscent of fantasias by C. P. E. Bach and Mozart, two great masters of the genre. Furthermore, Corigliano's work exhibits an underlying structural cohesiveness and formal planning which are particularly impressive when realized in the context of a work that often sounds improvised.

Structural Design

The large-scale design of the Etude Fantasy is comparable to that associated with nineteenth-century composers, such as Schubert and Schumann, who used the fantasy as a vehicle for the expansion of form, both
thematically and emotionally. Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasie* (1823) is, for example, a large, cyclic work consisting of four interrelated movements. Similarly, Corigliano's *Etude Fantasy*, a set of five connected etudes, is unified through the same type of thematic transformation associated with Schubert's fantasy, and later with many of the works of Franz Liszt. Corigliano's work also possesses structural similarities to Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes* (1834-37), a series of etudes with variations in which thematic links unify many of the individual pieces.

Corigliano organizes the *Etude Fantasy* through an elaborate and imaginative use of thematic transformation. The five etudes share motives, introduced early in the work, which in turn have close thematic ties with one another. Despite this intricate and quasi-serial motivic unity, the *Etude Fantasy* retains a free, spontaneous character with the aid of a large, freely-sectional design. Variety in texture, keyboard style, and tempo between sections creates the overall effect of formal freedom and flexibility. The largest etudes of the set are nos. 1 and 4, which are multi-sectional and rhapsodic in style. These longer, virtuoso etudes are balanced by the slow, hypnotic second and fifth etudes.

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etudes, which provide lyrical contrast. The third etude, a scherzo, can be viewed as the midpoint of the work. The formal design of the *Etude Fantasy* is shown in Illustration 1.

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<td>D melody</td>
<td>Scherzo</td>
<td>A,B,C,F</td>
<td>D melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tempo:</td>
<td>Large, sectional</td>
<td>B accomp</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>E, B accomp</td>
<td>slow</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Legato</td>
<td>Fifths to Thirds</td>
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Illustration 1. Formal Diagram of John Corigliano's *Etude Fantasy*.

The *Etude Fantasy* opens with motive A (shown in Example 1) stated in the manner of a tone row. This motive features the intervals of the major seventh, minor sixth, and perfect fifth which are prominent throughout the work.

This declamatory beginning possesses striking similarities to the opening statement of Aaron Copland's *Piano Fantasy* (1955-57), which is also based upon a row-like motive. Example 2 shows this motive.


In Corigliano's *Etude Fantasy*, Motive B is characterized by a repeated pitch (E-flat, in this case) that serves as a tonal axis around which major sevenths above and below revolve. Motive C is composed of the same interval set type (01347) as motive B, the intervals of the major seventh and minor third being prominent. Here the sevenths are characterized by a stepwise descent and a rhythm. Example 3 shows the opening statements of motives A, B, and C. A fragment of motive A is also stated vertically and in diminution.

After motives A, B, and C have been combined in several ways, motive D is introduced. As indicated in Example 4, it is closely related to both motive B and motive C. From motive B, it takes the use of a tonal axis (now the pitch A-flat) around which the major sevenths, sometimes notated as grace notes, revolve. In addition, the descending minor second interval of motive C is rhythmically elongated and used as a melodic focal point.

![Motive D](image)

Motive E, (shown in Example 5) is introduced as an ostinato figure in the bass. This motive is formed from the minor third interval which is also prominent in motives C and D.


![Motive E](image)

Motive F, which is not introduced until Etude no. 3, has a subtle relationship to the preceding motives. Whereas all previous motives feature the major seventh and minor third as important intervals, motive F features harmonic fifths and thirds in alternation with one another. Examination of motive F, however, reveals a melodic relationship to the
stepwise fragment of motive D. This fragment, shown in
Example 6, is inverted and stated in a dotted rhythm whose
origins may also be found in motive D.


The entire Etude Fantasy is constructed of various
transformations of motives A, B, C, D, E, and F, both
individually and in combination with one another. The degree
and pervasiveness of this unity approaches serial
organization: Virtually every pitch in the work can be
traced to one of the original motives. Furthermore, all the
original motives are in fact generated from the opening 'tone
row' (motive A) which contains the recurring structural
intervals of the major seventh, minor second, minor third,
and perfect fifth.
Corigliano's skill in keyboard writing is particularly impressive in this etude, which is for the left hand alone. Technical problems include contrapuntal playing, large distances, sensitive tonal control for voicing, and the need for power in the often-neglected left hand. Such challenges are also typically present in other important left hand works by Scriabin, Prokofiev, Bartok, and Ravel.2

The sectional design of this etude, an alternation of unmeasured, rhapsodic material with rhythmically strict two-voice counterpoint, links it with the keyboard fantasias of C. P. E. Bach and Mozart. Motives A, B, and C are introduced in the opening declamatory section; Motives D and E make their initial appearances in the contrapuntal section which follows. The remainder of the etude consists of inventive dialogue among all five motives. Free alternation of material creates the flexible formal design similarly associated with the eighteenth-century keyboard fantasia.

Throughout Etude no. 1, the five motives are clearly distinguishable from one another, even when transformed. Motive A, for example, always occurs in the bass as a widely-spaced, resonant melodic line in long note values. Often its

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2Scriabin: Nocturne, op. 9, no. 2; Prelude, op. 9, no. 1. Bartok: Etude for the Left Hand (1903). Prokofiev: Piano Concerto no. 4, op. 53. Ravel: Piano Concerto for the Left Hand.
pitches are doubled in octaves to create even more resonance. Transformations of motive A most often occur in the form of pitch permutations or rhythmic diminishions, as shown in Examples 7, 8, and 9.

Example 7. Corigliano, Etude Fantasy, Etude no. 1, page 2, third score.


Because of its repeated note figure (see Example 3), motive B is easily recognizable. In addition, it serves as the basis for many of the rhapsodic flourishes in the composition. Corigliano uses the interval set type (013467) of the original motive B to generate flourishes like the ones in Examples 10 and 11.

Transformations of motive C in Etude no. 1 most often involve fragmentation, sequence, and rhythmic alteration. Initially heard only in the upper range of the keyboard, motive C eventually migrates to the lowest register, where it is fragmented and used in sequence, as shown in Example 12.
Statements of motive D in this etude generally occur as small fragments which Corigliano combines with each other in two-voice counterpoint. In Example 13, the descending minor second interval (A-flat to G) of motive D occurs in the upper voice, while the lower voice consists of the ascending stepwise fragment of the same motive. The combination of these two different fragments of the same motive creates a dialogue.
Fragments of motive D also interact with motive E. In Example 14, the minor second fragment of motive D, transposed to E-flat, is combined with the staccato minor thirds of motive E.

The texture of Etude no. 1 is predominantly linear, the two-voice counterpoint alternating with freer, single-line material. However, through expert scoring and liberal use of the damper pedal, Corigliano produces an extremely resonant sound. Although there are rarely more than three pitches played at one time, the range and voicings of the vertical sonorities create a texture that sounds a great deal fuller. This efficiency in scoring is not unlike that used by Aaron Copland in his Piano Fantasy and Piano Variations, works which create masses of sound with a minimum of means.

**Etude no. 2 "Legato"**

In contrast to the bravura and percussiveness of Etude no. 1, Etude no. 2 is subdued and lyrically expressive. It retains the contrapuntal elements of the first etude, but with the texture expanded to three voices, blended together and veiled with pedal. Motive B functions as an ostinato accompaniment throughout. This accompaniment, begun in the left hand at the end of the Etude no. 1, provides a transition to the second etude, and creates a serene and hypnotic atmosphere akin to certain works of the French Impressionists. The descending minor second idea of motive D
is the source of the melodic material. Example 15 shows the opening of Etude no. 2.
Because of irregular groupings of repeated notes and rests, and the use of syncopation and other subtle rhythmic inflections, the rhythm of this etude is prose-like and unmeasured. Combined with the stepwise melody and ostinato accompaniment, this fluid non-metrical pulse is reminiscent of certain works of Debussy, among them the Prelude, "Footsteps in the Snow," shown in Example 16.

Etude no. 3, "Fifths to Thirds," occupies the center position of the set, and is quite different in texture and style from the etudes surrounding it. Whereas Etudes 1, 2, 4, and 5 contain rhapsodic, improvisatory elements, Etude no. 3 is, for the most part, rhythmically strict. Furthermore, the texture is dry and percussive, as opposed to the resonant, thickly-pedalled textures of the other etudes. In this respect its sound is more eighteenth-century, while that of the other etudes could be considered Impressionist-influenced.

The keyboard writing of Etude no. 3 requires a great deal of light and intricate finger technique, as opposed to the predominantly large-gestured playing associated with the other etudes in the set. Here, the demand is for speed, alertness, and agility. Legato double notes, rapid hand crossings, and absolute precision in articulation are required. Such acrobatics bring to mind the keyboard sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti.

The mood of this etude is jovial, good-natured, and very much in the manner of a scherzo. Continual meter changes, unexpected accents, and sudden dynamic changes, combined with the perpetual motion of cleanly articulated passagework, create tremendous rhythmic vitality. Example 17 is an excerpt from the opening of Etude no. 3.

Etude N°3: Fifths to Thirds

Allegro Scherzando $d=100$

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Etude no. 3 is also the only etude of the set which exhibits a clear reference to traditional tonal/modal harmony. Lydian and mixolydian modes are frequently implied, often with the addition of chromatic surprises. Fragments of the whole tone scale are heard occasionally. The result is a witty and slightly bizarre mixture of modes which further contributes to the humorous mood.
In one section of this etude (shown in Example 18), the lydian, mixolydian, and whole tone scales are implied in a double-note passage for both hands. The alternation between 4/4, 7/8, and 3/8 adds an asymmetrical element to what could have been a very square phrase structure. Corigliano's performance instruction, "slithery," and sudden dynamic changes contribute to the implied humor.

The keyboard writing in this passage is curiously similar to that of Zez Confry, the ragtime pianist, whose style frequently features the same dizzying double-note playing using alternating fifths and thirds. Confrey’s *Kitten on the Keys* (Example 19) is one example of the many pieces in which the composer used this keyboard texture. Whether Corigliano intended a reference to Confrey’s ragtime style, the humor is nevertheless present.


Even clearer technical and stylistic similarities exist between this etude and Aaron Copland’s *scherzo humoristique*, "The Cat and the Mouse" (1920), shown as Example 20. Scampering double notes, rapid hand crossings and alternations, and jovial declamation are elements shared by
Given Corigliano’s admiration for Copland’s music, the similarity is not surprising.


![Example 20. Copland, The Cat and the Mouse, measures 14-17.](image)

Structurally, Etude no. 3 is the only one of the set which does not make direct reference to more than one motive. All material is derived from motive F, which is first introduced in this etude. The only interruption in the otherwise perpetual spinning out of this motive occurs two-thirds of the way into the etude, at the Andante section (shown in Example 21). Here the tempo slows considerably, and motive F becomes, in the composer's words, "dreamlike." Clouded with pedal and freed from its strict rhythmic
setting, motive F now creates a moment of musical repose before returning to the opening material of the etude. Corigliano uses accelerando to create a smooth transition back to Tempo I.
Etude no. 4  "Ornaments"

With Etude no. 4, the serious mood that characterizes the etudes prior to Etude no. 3 returns. Large-scale and highly sectional, Etude no. 4 is similar to Etude no. 1 in its imaginative combination and transformation of motives. The piece opens with a restatement of motive A in its original, declamatory whole note rhythm. The mood, however, is somber rather than percussive. A combination of unmeasured trills and flourishes (Example 22), based on motives A, B, and E, follows.
Following this eerie, cadenza-like passage, the tempo increases and bar lines are added. Motive C appears, surrounded by more trills and flourishes (shown in Example 23). These are followed by a chain of rumbling tremolos and trills announcing motive A.
The sonority in this passage is massive, creating cluster effects often associated with Henry Cowell's piano music. Trills become tremolos, and the distance between the hands increases until the extremes of the keyboard are reached. The final tremolos are written as clusters executed
"with the heels of the hands," according to Corigliano's instructions.

The Allegro section which follows (shown in Example 24) contains the most dramatic motivic transformations of the entire work. The ideas presented here appear at first to be new material, but are actually related to motives F and C. Broken octaves surround a transposed augmentation of motive F with octave displacements.


Later in the same section, both motives C and F are imbedded in the dense texture. Accompanied by clusters in a ferocious ostinato, the passage begins with a sixteenth-note permutation of motive F. The order of pitches, and the rhythm of the original motive have been altered; however, the interval content (minor second, major second, and minor
third) is identical, as is the emphasis on four-note groupings. Motive C, more clearly recognizable, interrupts periodically, but is now transferred from its original bass register to the upper region of the keyboard. Example 25 shows the transformations of motives C and F.


Another important example of motivic transformation in this etude involves motive B. In Example 26, the tonal axis is B-flat, and the characteristic repeated pitch is stated in quarter notes rather than eighths. Later, the same passage is transposed to E-flat.
As with Etude no. 1, the technical demands are substantial: double note trills, tremolos at the extremes of the instrument, percussive clusters and octaves, and leaps covering large distances on the keyboard. Furthermore, these techniques must be performed at high speed and with great physical power. Corigliano's expert keyboard writing fits the hands well, however, and the difficult passagework yields an orchestral-like variety of colors that make this etude an effective virtuoso piece.
In a review of the premiere of Corigliano's Etude Fantasy, critic Paul Hume described the final etude as "a closing page of desolate beauty not unlike the end of the 'Winterreise' of Schubert, or the second Chopin Ballade." Following the fury of the preceding etude, the gentle, rocking ostinato and prose rhythms of Etude no. 5 create the atmosphere of a postlude.

Musically, this etude resembles the serenity of Etude no. 2, but with a more complex contrapuntal texture and use of thematic transformation. The melody is generated from motive D, and its accompanying ostinato has its origins in motive E and motive B. The opening of the etude is shown in Example 27.

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Later in the etude, the ostinato figure which began as motive E is temporarily altered. In Example 28, this ostinato is now generated from the repeated notes of motive B.
Immediately preceding the closing measures of the etude, motive A makes a final appearance, transformed as an inverted permutation (shown in Example 29). Two different fragments of motive D, one in triplets and the other featuring the descending half-step interval, follow.
John Corigliano's *Etude Fantasy* is a virtuoso work which presents significant technical and musical challenges to the performer. Furthermore, the carefully planned motivic organization reveals a compositional logic that is impressively skilful and clear. Corigliano has achieved a balance between intellectual and musical elements in this work, as the composer suggests in the following anecdote:
A few months ago after the premiere of my new Etude Fantasy for Piano at the Kennedy Center, a woman came up to me and said, 'I hope you won't be insulted when I tell you something about your music.' So I steeled myself and I said, 'okay what?' She said, 'I understood it.' I said, 'huh?' 'Well,' she explained, 'I hear so many contemporary pieces that I don't understand, but I could follow yours. I hope it's not wrong of me to say that.' You see, that woman assumed that contemporary composers don't want to be understood. And she's right in some cases. It's the fashion. But fashions change. People are getting bored with being mystified, and some critics recognize that it's time to return to the skills that were once the composer's stock and trade."4

CHAPTER IV

FANTASIA ON AN OSTINATO

Fantasia on an Ostinato was commissioned for the 1985 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. Traditionally, the commissioned work for this prestigious competition has been the product of an eminent American composer, and is a required work for all contestants who reach the semifinal phase of the competition. With this commission, Corigliano joined the list of distinguished composers previously commissioned for the Van Cliburn competition: Lee Hoiby, Willard Straight, Norman Dello Joio, Aaron Copland, Samuel Barber, and Leonard Bernstein.

Certainly the intended performers of this work--some forty young virtuoso pianists from around the world--exerted a significant influence on the finished product. Rather than writing a virtuoso display piece, however, Corigliano chose to compose a work requiring sensitive tonal control, nuance, and other musical subtleties. The Fantasia on an Ostinato is a display of the pianist's imaginative powers, rather than technical brilliance. Other commissioned works for the Van Cliburn have had similar musical aims, notably Leonard Bernstein's Touches and Aaron Copland's Night Thoughts.
Corigliano's Fantasia on an Ostinato is, like the Etude Fantasy, immanently pianistic, although of a different sort of pianism; and, like the Etude Fantasy, it is an accessible mixture of twentieth-century devices and traditional elements. However, the organizational methods and musical styles are quite different from one another.

There are two twentieth-century techniques present in the Fantasia on an Ostinato that are immediately apparent: 1) the use of borrowed material and quotation, and 2) the use of minimalist techniques. The pervasiveness of these two elements in Corigliano's work indicates the composer's interest in experimenting with a variety of twentieth-century idioms. In addition, both techniques are presented in an accessible and appealing manner. Because of the importance of these devices in this work, they will be discussed individually in this chapter.

**Quotation in Fantasia on an Ostinato**

Fantasia on an Ostinato is based on the theme from the second movement of Beethoven's Symphony no. 7, a three-phrase idea that permeates the entire structure of Corigliano's work. Example 30 shows Beethoven's theme.
Example 30. Beethoven, Symphony no. 7, second movement theme.

The repeated figure serves as a unifying ostinato that is nearly always present in one hand or the other. Fragments of Beethoven's theme are quoted and transformed throughout the work, culminating in a full quotation at the end of the composition. In addition, Corigliano takes advantage of the repetitious nature of the original theme, expanding it into a minimalist-influenced work, complete with repetitive patterns and rhythmic phasing.
The formal design of the *Fantasia on an Ostinato* is rounded binary. The opening section contains material borrowed from the first phrase of Beethoven's theme, along with an ostinato in eighth notes. The end of this section coincides with a chorale-like setting of the second phrase of the theme. The harmonic progression of this phrase in turn serves as the basis for the unmeasured broken chord section which follows. This central section provides contrast to the opening section in tempo, texture, and color, and contains the climax of the composition. It is also clearly minimalist-influenced. The return of the A section is signified by the opening ostinato figure and a complete statement of all three phrases of Beethoven's theme. The formal structure of the work is diagrammed in Illustration 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>(A)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ostinato</td>
<td>chorale</td>
<td>Ostinato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phrase 1</td>
<td>phrase 2</td>
<td>based on chorale harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fragments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Illustration 2. Formal Diagram of Corigliano's *Fantasia on an Ostinato*.

Corigliano's work opens with a series of repeated eighth notes (shown in Example 31) which are borrowed from the
characteristic \( \text{\footnotesize \\Riemann integrals} \) rhythm of Beethoven's theme. By applying tenuto stresses to certain notes, the rhythmic outline of this theme is retained in the right hand ostinato. Several bars later, the left hand enters with this motive in augmentation.

**Fantasia on an Ostinato**

for Solo Piano

John Corigliano (1985)

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*1. Accidents are continued as long as the note repeats. n = niente (nothing)*

*2. Repeat note in same rhythm. Vary the number of repetitions so as not to be predictable.*

*3. The second G sharp is not to be read, but played much softer than the first.*


*4. Repeat the note for the duration of the instrumental last.*
The repeated eighth-note figure of the opening is present throughout the work, serving as a mesmerizing pulse against which other material, also derived from the Beethoven theme, is set. The pitch content of the ostinato may change; however, its rhythmic structure is always retained. In Examples 32, 33, 34, and 35, this idea is present in one or more parts at all times.
Example 32. Corigliano, *Fantasia on an Ostinato*, page 3, third score.

Example 33. Corigliano, *Fantasia on an Ostinato*, page 4, second score.
Example 34. Corigliano, *Fantasia on an Ostinato*, page 4, fourth score.

Example 35. Corigliano, *Fantasia on an Ostinato*, page 5, first score.
For further unification, Corigliano retains the original harmony and phrase structure of Beethoven's theme. There is one full quotation of this theme, occurring in the final section of the *Fantasia on an Ostinato*. In this section (shown as Example 36), Corigliano uses Beethoven's original harmony in the left hand, renotating the theme as to yield the impression of duple meter within the 6/8 time of the accompanying ostinato.
Example 36. Corigliano, Fantasia on an Ostinato, page 9, first and second scores.
This haunting passage is the most complete statement of the original theme in Corigliano's work. The dissonant ostinato on E-flat, set against the warmth of the bass register chords, and combined with the haze of the damper pedal, creates a veiled, ethereal quality.

Another quotation in this work, though not exact, shows clear derivation from the Beethoven model. This passage resembles a chorale setting, and features the second phrase of Beethoven's theme. It retains the outlines of Beethoven's rhythm, phrase structure and harmonic progression, but transforms them through modulation and alterations in meter. Like Beethoven's second phrase (Example 30, phrase 2), this passage begins in C major, moves towards E minor in the second bar, and ultimately returns to A minor. Whereas Beethoven then continues to phrase three (in A minor), Corigliano repeats the first portion of the second phrase (bars 6 through 8). This phrase leads to a German augmented-sixth chord in bar 9, which resolves, eighteenth-century-style, to the dominant in A minor. The phrase is then extended by yet another repetition of the second phrase idea, in G major and C major. Example 37 shows this chorale setting.

- Tempo: poco rall.

- Key signatures: C major, A major, C major, E minor, A minor

- Symbols:
  - *1* The entire unmeasured section that follows until the 4-4+ is to be played with mounting intensity and excitement. The tempo should gradually accelerate from q.s. = c.76 to q.s. = c.122 to 1.38.
  - *2* The pattern under the repeat sign continues playing for the duration of the horizontal line following it. The number of repetitions is left to the imagination and sense of proportion of the performer; the repetitions should constantly vary so that the entrance of new patterns should not become predictable. Nothing should last too long.
  - *3* Start all new figures on the lower note of the accompanying figure unless otherwise indicated. The eighth of the right hand equals the eighth of left hand.
  - *4* Unless indicated, both hands should play at the same volume. All notes should sound equally so that the two patterns merge into a single new pattern. The pianist must listen and constantly adjust the weight of his attacks to achieve this.

- Hold pedal throughout until ♩.
The subsequent section of *Fantasia on an Ostinato* consists of broken chord figures in both hands, outlining the harmonies of the chorale. There are three statements of this progression, the second of which resembles a portion of the A major section of Beethoven's symphony, which features an enharmonic modulation using a German augmented sixth chord. Example 38 shows Beethoven's use of this chord.


Corigliano's version of this passage (shown as Example 39) features the augmented sixth sonority as a focal point. The F major-minor seventh chord functions enharmonically as a German augmented-sixth chord in A major, and resolves to the dominant of that key.
In using another piece of music as inspiration for Fantasia on an Ostinato, Corigliano follows an old and well-established tradition of musical quoting and borrowing.\footnote{Medieval and Renaissance masses and motets often used borrowed cantus firmi from plainchant and secular song as the basis for new compositions. J.S. Bach was a great borrower, as were many of his contemporaries; and both Busoni and Liszt borrowed from Bach. Franz Liszt's opera paraphrases, some of which he labeled "fantasias", were freely sectional works based on important themes from operas by other composers. Liszt's use of the term "fantasia" implies a seemingly-improvised style in which the musical essence of the opera is captured. These connotations might also be applied to Corigliano's Fantasia on an Ostinato.} Although this tradition was strongest in medieval, renaissance, and Baroque music, it has been revived in the twentieth century, particularly by post-modern composers interested in reclaiming past musical traditions.

One of most influential of these composers is George Rochberg. Rochberg has been a great defender of the musical past, both in his compositions and in his writings about music. Although his early works were serial, his style changed radically after the death of his son in 1964. The works which followed, such as the String Quartet no. 3 (1972-3) and the Violin Concerto (1975), were based largely on quotation, and were the result of the composer's realization "that the music of the 'old masters' was a living presence,
that its spiritual values had not been displaced or destroyed by the new."

In his collection of essays, *The Aesthetics of Survival*, Rochberg discusses the pervasive influence of the past and its symbiotic relationship to the present:

All acts of renewal through uses of the past renew both that past drawn upon and that present in which the act occurs. Far from being acts of weakness or signs of depletion of creative energy, they reveal a profound wisdom about the paradox of time, which does not consume itself and its products as if it were fire, but gathers up into itself everything which has occurred in it, preserving everything as the individual mind preserves its individual memories.

Rochberg shares this philosophy with other post-modern composers, including Corigliano. In the following paragraph, Corigliano expresses his admiration for Rochberg's fearless use of musical quotation:

(Rochberg's) Third String Quartet is the most revolutionary contemporary work I've heard. In it is twenty minute set of variations that could have been written by Beethoven. What courage to have abandoned the nineteenth century goal of originality, for the more important goal of excellency.

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In the Fantasia on an Ostinato, Corigliano's treatment of borrowed material closely resembles that used by George Rochberg in his piano fantasy, Nach Bach (1966), one of the latter's most important solo piano works. Given Corigliano's acknowledged admiration for the works of Rochberg, a comparison of these two works seems appropriate.

The inspiration for Nach Bach is J.S. Bach's Partita in E minor, from which Rochberg borrows extensively. These borrowings take the form of literal quotations, as well as what Rochberg terms "transformed quotes," passages that are inspired by the Bach model, but are altered via twentieth-century techniques. The form of Nach Bach is sectional, consisting of free, improvisatory sections alternating with more rhythmically strict ones. Rochberg describes this organization as "akin, in spirit at least, to the old 'fantasia' idea of Bach and Mozart."

Full quotations from the Bach model occur throughout Nach Bach, most of them phrases from the Toccata and Fugue, the Sarabande, and the Air. These quotations are frequently surrounded by or combined with atonal passages that bear some resemblance to the eighteenth-century fantasia, particularly

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6Ibid.
in texture and idiomatic keyboard writing. Arpeggiated chords, virtuoso flourishes, sudden dynamic and tempo changes are reminiscent of the Bach's fantasias. In the following passage (Example 40) from *Nach Bach*, a motive from the Bach Sarabande is quoted literally. Preceding and following this quotation are atonal flourishes that resemble the texture and improvisatory style of Baroque keyboard writing.
Later, entire phrases from Bach's Partita are quoted in rapid succession; and at the end of the work, quotations from the opening Toccata are interspersed with atonal recitative and statements from the Sarabande (shown as Example 41).


Similar techniques are used by Corigliano in his Fantasia on an Ostinato: full quotation (Example 36), transformed quotation (such as Example 37), and original material that is inspired by Beethoven's theme (such as Example 38). Like Rochberg, Corigliano also uses a single work of another composer as inspiration for a new
composition. In this respect both Nach Bach and Fantasia on an Ostinato differ from the collage works of Charles Ives, Luciano Berio, and Maurice Kagel.

**Minimalism in Fantasia on an Ostinato**

The central section of Fantasia on an Ostinato presents an interesting example of minimalist technique. Here, Corigliano has borrowed a twentieth-century musical practice normally associated with a specific group of composers (notably Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass), and incorporated it into a work that also borrows from Beethoven.

Minimalism originated in the mid-1960's as a reaction against the complexities of the avant-garde. This reaction led to a conscious reduction of musical materials in order to create simple, accessible forms. Along with this, there was a marked return to tonal idioms, diatonic harmony, and a clear rhythmic pulse frequently propelled by simple ostinato figures. The resulting style was extremely simple, conservative, and highly patterned.

Fantasia on an Ostinato exhibits many of the typical features of minimal music. The persistent ostinato figure and slow tempo of the outer sections create a hypnotic effect. More overtly minimal, however, is the central section of the work, which is based on the harmonic progression from the second phrase of Beethoven's theme. By
using broken triads and seventh chords in a tonal setting, Corigliano preserves portions of the original harmony. As shown in Example 42, each chordal pattern is repeated an unspecified number of times by the performer. Rhythmic phasing results as the two hands move gradually from pattern to pattern and the relationships between the parts change. Despite the constant eighth-note pulse, meter changes (6/8, 5/8, 3/8, 2/8, and 4/8) are implied throughout the section, as one or the other hand performs patterns involving various combinations of eighths, quarters and dotted-quarters. These patterns are simple, and are altered very gradually, usually changing only one or two notes at a time.
Example 42. Corigliano, *Fantasia on an Ostinato*, page 6, first and second scores.

*1. Converse pedal throughout: blueing is intended.*

*2. Note different volume of left hand, also insist (stress) over the A flat. Please observe duration (v.g., dotted qrs.) accurately in terms of accompanying rhythms.*
The rhythmic phasing, repetitiveness, and gradual harmonic changes in the preceding passage are commonly associated with minimal music. Steve Reich, one of the foremost representatives of minimal style, uses these techniques in his compositions. Typically, his works concentrate on a simple ostinato rhythm which is subjected to cyclic variation, a type of phasing in which the voices play at first in unison and then change their relationships by small forward shifts in one part only.\(^7\) Reich's \textit{Piano Phase} (1967) for two pianos or marimbas presents an excellent example of this technique. In his directions for performance Reich explains:

The first performer starts at bar one and, after about four to eight repeats, the second gradually fades in, in unison at bar two. After about twelve to eighteen repeats, getting into a comfortable and stable unison, the second performer gradually increases his or her tempo very slightly and begins to move very slowly ahead of the first until, after about four to sixteen repeats, he or she is one sixteenth note ahead, as shown at bar three. This relationship is then held steadily for about sixteen to twenty-four repeats as outlined above. The dotted lines indicate this gradual movement of the second performer and the consequent shift of phase relation between both performers. This process of gradual phase shifting is continued with the second pianist becoming an eighth (bar four), a dotted eighth (bar 5), a quarter (bar 6) etc. ahead of the first.

performer until he or she passes through all twelve relationships and returns to unison at bar fourteen.®

The first page of Reich's Piano Phase is shown in Example 43. The keyboard writing, characterized by alternation between the hands, is similar to that used by Corigliano in his Fantasia on an Ostinato.

Example 43. Steve Reich, Piano Phase, page 2.

In minimal works such as Reich's Piano Phase, the musical process is extremely slow, and the listener's attention is drawn to the smallest details of change as they occur. This results in a heightened awareness of the musical process itself, something which is possible only because this process is so gradual.

Similar stasis characterizes the central section of Corigliano's Fantasia on an Ostinato. In Example 44, the harmonic succession is achieved by changing only one or two pitches between each chord, and only after many repetitions of each sonority. Since one hand remains constant while the other changes, a dimension of continuity and seamlessness is created.
Example 44. Corigliano, *Fantasia on an Ostinato*, page 7, first and second scores.
Also typically minimalist is the emphasis on color and texture as the most interesting and varied musical elements. Corigliano instructs the performer to change the damper pedal only occasionally, thereby creating an intentionally blurred texture. Furthermore, the two hands play in the same register of the instrument and at similar dynamic levels most of the time, creating a wash of color. Fragments of melody appear occasionally, through precise changes in rhythmic accent, dynamics, and articulation. With the addition of alternating sixteenth notes between the hands, the texture develops a shimmer that is enhanced by the combination of staccato touch with the damper pedal. The grace note figures in the indeterminate passage which follows (shown in Example 45) create the effect of fireworks randomly exploding over the sixteenth-note ostinato.
Example 45. Corigliano, Fantasia on an Ostinato, page 7, third and fourth scores.

*1. Vary order of figures in box. They are forte and fast (grace notes). Vary presence (g.) between bursts. Sometimes combining groups of figures. Avoid exact repetition and pattern forming.
Throughout this section, the dynamic level and tempo are gradually increased in preparation for the climax which occurs at the end of the B section. The climax (shown as Example 46) is achieved not only through instructions to "play with mounting intensity and excitement," but also by substituting sixteenth notes as the predominant note value. The range between the hands is also expanded, the left hand moving to the lowest register of the instrument as the climax is reached.
Example 46. Corigliano, *Fantasia on an Ostinato*, page 8, second and third scores.

*1. From here in 4/4, e.g., quarter-note to the and need not align with it. Keep the rhythm exact at up to c. 122-128.

\( \frac{4}{4} \)
Emphasis on sound effects such as these is an important feature of most minimal music. Stripped of the complex formal devices, variety, and dramatic connotations of goal-oriented music, minimalist works are noteworthy chiefly for the sensual appeal of sonority itself. Philip Glass views this phenomenon as desirable, explaining that "in process music, structure is secondary to sound," and that such music must be heard as "a pure sound event, an act without any dramatic structure." 9

The central section of Fantasia on an Ostinato contains hints of this aesthetic. The simple, perpetual motion rhythm and gradually changing patterns draw the listener's attention towards sound itself. However, despite this obvious connection to minimalist style, Corigliano's work possesses a degree of purposefulness and variety not present in conventional minimalist works. In his Program Note to the score of Fantasia on an Ostinato, Corigliano explains his use of minimalism. This explanation reveals not only the composer's attitude toward minimal technique, but also his determination to modify it in order to achieve his musical aims:

I approached this task with mixed feelings about the contemporary phenomenon known as minimalism, for while I admire its occasional ability to achieve a hypnotic quality (not unlike some late Beethoven), I do not care for its excessive repetition, its lack of architecture, and its overall emotional sterility.

In Fantasia on an Ostinato I attempted to combine the attractive aspects of minimalism with convincing structure and emotional expression.

Variety is achieved through limiting the use of minimal technique to the middle section of the work, with contrasting material on either side. Furthermore, within this section, the use of accelerando and crescendo creates a forward propulsion that is often lacking in more strictly minimalist works. The result is a unique combination of the colorful sonorities and statis of minimal technique, with the dynamic variety and forward momentum associated with dialectic music. By establishing well-defined limits in his use of minimal technique, Corigliano has achieved a balance of elements that is both unique and musically convincing. The composer sets similar limits in his use of musical quotation: Rather than creating a collage of several works, he borrows from only one composition, combining direct quotes with his own transformations of the original material. In this way, Corigliano succeeds in expertly integrating borrowed material so that the effect is not merely quotation, but "complete recapture."  

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CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

John Corigliano's *Etude Fantasy* and *Fantasia on an Ostinato* share important features associated with the keyboard fantasy of the eighteenth century. Both are sectional works featuring expert keyboard writing, imaginative motivic development, and colorful sonorities; and both possess the musical freedom and dramatic atmosphere of an improvisation. Yet, while these two works belong to the same genre, they are remarkably different from one another in style, formal design, and pianism. Corigliano's choice of the fantasia as the vehicle for expression is appropriate because it allows the vast array of compositional possibilities that characterize these works.

The *Etude Fantasy* is a large work modeled after the nineteenth-century piano fantasia. Contrasts in tempo, texture, dynamics, and keyboard writing are exaggerated. Free recitative is juxtaposed with counterpoint and percussive clusters. Slow, hypnotic sections contrast with virtuoso ones. The texture changes continually: alternately Impressionist, neoclassical, or percussive. These contrasts occur within a flexible formal design that is painstakingly organized through thematic transformation.
The Fantasia on an Ostinato, by comparison, is conceived not as a large virtuoso work, but as a short, atmospheric tone poem that transforms and comments on a familiar nineteenth-century theme. Careful motivic organization is present, but on a smaller and less complicated scale than in the Etude Fantasy. Through the influence of minimalist technique, Corigliano's methods of organization are drastically simplified. The intricate thematic transformation of the Etude Fantasy is replaced by a more straightforward compositional approach involving repetitive pulse, consistently homophonic texture, and simple formal design.

Dynamics, texture, and tempo remain nearly at one level throughout this work. In keeping with minimalist style, contrasts occur gradually rather than abruptly. Furthermore, the harmonic language has been simplified. Whereas the Etude Fantasy contains sections that are atonal or based largely on seconds and sevenths, the Fantasia on an Ostinato is tertian-based. The harmonic language is that of expanded tonality, with polytonality as an important device. Some functional chord progressions are also used.

The keyboard writing in Fantasia on an Ostinato is largely non-virtuosic. Conceived as a sound piece in which subtle nuances are projected, the composition makes little demand for pianistic brilliance and power. The Etude
Fantasy, however, contains substantial amounts of virtuoso writing.

In Fantasia on an Ostinato, Corigliano has used two recent trends in American music: minimalism and quotation. Corigliano experiments with these trends by combining them and using aspects of each as compositional tools. Similarly, the Etude Fantasy borrows from other compositional trends, among them the nineteenth-century keyboard fantasy and twentieth-century serial technique.

This reliance upon established compositional practices, apparent in both the Etude Fantasy and Fantasia on an Ostinato, is consistent with Corigliano's self-acknowledged eclecticism. The mixture of compositional styles and techniques permit a constantly expanding musical tradition in which excellence is achieved by enlarging upon the musical language that is already in place, rather than rejecting all that is past.\(^1\) The result, according to Corigliano, is music that is contemporary, logical, and accessible:

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There is just no reason why a composer shouldn't be able to reach large audiences in a worthwhile way, even if he uses advanced techniques. Beethoven and Wagner, among others, managed to do it. If a piece is put together with attention to the overall shape, and if the composer takes note that most listeners will not hear his technical procedures, but will be able to follow that shape, then there is a good chance the music will communicate.²

Corigliano's interest in direct communication with the audience has shaped his musical aesthetic. Along with many of his post-modern contemporaries, he regards the composer's primary compositional goal as the ability to maintain personal standards of excellence, while at the same time providing works that will communicate effectively to listeners.

In the Etude Fantasy and Fantasia on an Ostinato, Corigliano has achieved this goal by allowing himself to borrow freely from many musical traditions. Honest in his indebtedness to the past, he mixes the best of traditional and avant-garde techniques to produce these expertly-crafted concert works. The proven versatility of Corigliano's style in these and other works has become the composer's trademark, and has earned him an important place in contemporary American music:

Corigliano's bold yet accessible music cuts across many levels of listener taste and perception, effectively dissolving distinction between what is serious and what is popular, abstract and theatrical. He embodies the healthy spirit of eclecticism that has helped free serious American composition from the shackles of gray, academic serialism.³

This 'healthy eclecticism,' accounts for the differences in style and compositional approach between the *Etude Fantasy* and *Fantasia on an Ostinato*. It also explains much of the immediate appeal of both works. By intelligently and imaginatively combining a variety of idioms, Corigliano has constructed two highly contrasting keyboard works that are both musically and intellectually satisfying.

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