

ภาษาดนตรีและการตีความบทเพลงเปียโนคอนแชร์โต
ในกุญแจเสียงดีไมเนอร์สำหรับเปียโนสองหลังและวงออร์เคสตรา ของปูแลง

The Musical Language and Interpretation of
Poulenc's Concerto in D Minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra

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Abstract

The main objective of this research is to explore features of the musical language within the conventional idiom of F. Poulenc's *Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra*. The interpretational approach and analysis overview of the *Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra* by Poulenc refers to an approach of providing piano students and pianists' insight into the specific technical and musical challenges and to include a stylistically and musically satisfying performance. This research also includes a historical overview of the selected piano concerto and a biographical background of the composer. This research should shade a light to enhance competence in the interpretational musical objectives of students and pianists' performance by adding a new dimension and an improvement to contribute a work of stylistic, historic, and musical significance.

Keywords: Musical Language / Piano Concerto / Pianistic Interpretation

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาลักษณะเฉพาะทางดนตรีที่พบใน *เปียโนคอนแชร์โต ในกุญแจเสียงดีไมเนอร์สำหรับเปียโนสองหลังและวงออร์เคสตรา* ของปูแลง การตีความและการวิเคราะห์ผลงานชิ้นนี้มุ่งหวังให้ผู้เรียนเปียโนและนักเปียโนทั่วไปเกิดความเข้าใจในเทคนิคการบรรเลงพิเศษ รวมทั้งความท้าทายทางดนตรีซึ่งประกอบด้วยลีลาการบรรเลงและสุนทรียะด้านดนตรีเพื่อการบรรเลงที่สมบูรณ์ งานวิจัยนี้ยังศึกษาภูมิหลังของเปียโนคอนแชร์โตและชีวประวัติของนักประพันธ์เพลงชิ้นดังกล่าว อันจะช่วยให้เกิดความกระจ่างในการตีความทางดนตรีสำหรับผู้เรียนเปียโนและนักเปียโน โดยเพิ่มมุมมองใหม่และการพัฒนาแนวทางอันนำไปสู่รูปแบบเฉพาะตัวและการพัฒนาเกี่ยวกับบทเพลงในด้านลีลา ประวัติศาสตร์ และความสำคัญด้านดนตรี

คำสำคัญ: ภาษาดนตรี / เปียโนคอนแชร์โต / การตีความของนักเปียโน

I. Introduction

The interpretational approach of the *Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra* by F. Poulenc is created to help young students and performers, teachers, and composers to have a better grasp and understanding of the selected piano concerto. The pianistic and interpretational challenges include performance techniques to meet these demands and present various possibilities for interpretation of the concerto for two soloists.

The notes on the approach to the musical interpretation of the selected measures in piano practice of the selected piano concerto will offer many benefits effectively for support and improve a pianistic performance. This concept may encourage hyper improvement experiences for students and pianists. Furthermore, to achieve an interpretational approach to stylistic expressiveness in performance.

The statement of the problem

Piano practicing and pianistic interpretation involve a complex technical factors interacting at different levels and engage relevant musical knowledge, within the musical analysis. In this sense, the development of musical values requires interaction between affective and cognitive domains, the development of a sense of aesthetics. Effective narrations in pianistic interpretation cannot be accomplished without mastery aspects (the expression of inner balance, musical language), supremacy and control over techniques (fingering, articulation, pedal, tone quality like color and character), posture, and expressing thoughts, ideas, and feelings of composers and performers. This article follows systematic approach toward progress that leads to the higher levels of piano performance.

Research objective

This research aims to develop, explore, and implement in depth levels of knowledge of stylistic and pianistic interpretation of the selected piano concerto and to present the approach to the musical interpretation of the selected measures of the *Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra*.

II. Literature Review

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963): Biographical Overview

Francis Poulenc was born in Paris on January 7, 1899 and died on January 30, 1963. Poulenc was a French composer and pianist; member of a famous group known as “*Le Six*”. Upon the group’s formation, its members stood in staunch revolt against César Franck’s explicit Romanticism and Claude Debussy’s Impressionism. He was one of the most important French composers in the twentieth century. In 1916 Poulenc became a pupil of the pianist Ricardo Vines². Vines had a great influence on Poulenc

² Francis Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself* (London: Dobson Books Ltd, 1978), 63.

in the development of his technique for the piano and for the stylistic development of Poulenc's compositions³.

Poulenc's repertoire is comprised of diverse genres such as ballets, operas, sacred music, chamber music, piano pieces, and choral works. Poulenc most famously displayed his musical process through his concerto which he transformed, expanded, and diversified. Indeed, his concertos, which included the *Concert champêtre for harpsichord and Orchestra*; *Aubade*, a choreographic concerto for piano and eighteen instruments; *Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra* and *Concerto in G for Organ, Strings, and Timpani* were among the most prolific pieces in his repertoire. Each of them differed from each other in their purpose, spirit, and orchestral arrangement.

Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra

The *Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra* was arranged at the request of Princess Edmond de Polignac, an American patroness of the arts and a friend of both Poulenc and his childhood friend pianist, Jacques Février. She asked for a piece that the two French musicians could play together; and after two and a half months in 1932, Poulenc produced the *Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra* which was described as a lively piece that was awash with fresh, unique, and well-organized ideas.

Poulenc undertook an evolutionary step as a composer with the *Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra*. Like *champêtre*, which has hallmarks of the Baroque era, the *Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra* reverts back in time, specifically to the Classical era. However, while he utilized the *Double Concertos* of Bach, Mozart, and Mendelssohn as a model, he nonetheless broke free of the Baroque and Classical conventions which the earlier compositional icons were bound to by opting to follow the more liberal spirit of *divertissement*.

³ Carol Kimball, "Poulenc's *Le Travail du Peintre: A Synthesis of the Arts*," *NATS Bulletin* 44, 2 (1987): 8.

The first movement, called *‘Allegro, ma non troppo’* is distinguished by its energetic dynamics and buoyant tempo. Here, the composer facilitates an ingenious dialogue between two soloists. Incorporated into the thematic web are the use of *chansonnettes* as well as well-known Parisian tunes from the café-concert circuit. Of note is the use of coloristic effects in the coda where the composer integrates the gamelan music he had come across during the 1931 Colonial Exposition⁴.

During a time of retroactive tributes, where the likes of Stravinsky harked back to Bach and Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev would create compositions much like a ‘twentieth century’ Haydn, while Poulenc would pay tribute to the likes of Couperin in his *Champêtre Concerto*. It is hardly surprising that the composer would likewise choose to pay homage to his most preferred composer, Mozart.

The outlines featured in *Larghetto* are indeed very classical, particularly as its outer sections bear a striking resemblance to *Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 21 in C Major, KV.467*. However, the more melodramatic middle section possesses significantly more Poulenc’s elements in its unabashed sentimentality⁵.

Poulenc’s melodic and harmonic talent is most visible in the *Allegro molto Finale*. The movement begins by incorporating the style of a toccata as the pianos play a rushing figure, followed by an announcement of the main theme –a music-hall march melody. After a more serene interlude the piece returns to a café-concert mood and ends in an exuberant manner with a *fortissimo* dash of virtuosity.

Accomplishment

Poulenc’s works have evolved from relaxed, lively and entertaining to serious subjects with a certain political and social background. Based on the French folk song

⁴ Mervyn Cooke, “The East in the West: Evocations of the Gamelan in Western Music,” in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 258-280.

⁵ Keith W. Daniel, *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style* (London: UMI Research Press, 1982), 124.

tradition, he developed Debussy's musical rhythm principle and Mussorgsky's vocal recitation method. His tunes are singular and are known as "*François Schubert of France*"⁶.

The work involves various genres of music, including opera (*The Carmelite Sister, The Voice of the Man*), dance drama (*The Doe*), chorus (*Glory of the Glory, The Mass in G minor*), piano music (*Nazi Party*), the orchestral (*Country Concerto, Organ Concerto, The Deer Suite, Piano Concerto in C-sharp Minor, and Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra in D minor*). The style is novel and unique.

Research Methodology

The interpretational approach and analysis overview of the *Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra* has been designed based upon literature review and the researcher's experience. The researcher selected some measures from the 1st movement, 2nd movement, and 3rd movement describing sense of aesthetics and narrations in pianistic interpretation.

III. Researcher's notes on the approach to the musical interpretation of selected measures of the *Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra*

Allegro ma non troppo: 1st movement

Introduction: mm. 1-18, tonal center: B-flat/D

m. 1: begins with chords playing in *fortissimo* – *ff* – emphasizing the chords using a very short pedal on each chord, characterized by two violent colliding chords pointing to D as the tone center. The first chord is a D minor triad; the second chord, also D minor, with the addition of E-flat.

mm. 2-3: Piano: playing in *fortissimo* – *ff* – use pedal on the 1st and 3rd beats, accent on the 4th beat.

⁶ Carold Kimball, 8.

mm. 4-6: Piano I: playing in *fortissimo* - *ff* – with accent on each beat, changing pedal on 1st and 3rd beats.

Piano II: careful to play *forte* – *f* – not *ff* to highlight Piano I

mm. 7-15: Piano I: playing *marcato in fortissimo* - *ff* – on each chord.

Piano II: playing in *fortissimo* - *ff* – the melody line; sometimes a very short pedal is also applicable to create the ‘dry touch’. In measures 7-10 Piano II starts in *fortissimo* while making a *crescendo* culminating on the 3rd beat m.8, and then followed by *decrescendo* to m. 10; mm. 14-15 starts in *mezzo forte* and pursues a *crescendo* until the culminating point in m. 16. The researcher recommends in these measures practice using some rhythmic variants, changing tempo, changing touch to perform with clearness and brilliance as indicated in the score⁷.

m. 16: Piano I/Piano II: *sforzato in fortissimo* emphasis – *sff* – using a very short pedal on each chord.

m. 18: Piano II: *Marcato* playing in *fortissimo* – *ff*; accent on each beat as to support Piano I starting ‘precisely’ in measure 19 – Theme 1a.

Theme 1a/1b: mm. 19-33, tonal center: C-sharp

Theme 1a and 1b highlight the skill of Poulenc’s dialogue between two pianos and the supporting orchestra. A fine balance between LH by Piano II and RH by Piano I is needed. The same Theme and dialogue between Piano I and Piano II appear in measures 38-46.

Theme 2: mm. 47-54 tonal, center: F/D

In Theme 2 starting on mm. 47-50, Piano I and Piano II accompany the Theme by the orchestra. The piano part must be performed in *mezzo forte* - *mf* – dynamics culminating point in *fortissimo* - *ff* – in measure 51.

⁷ Barbara Sicherl Kafol, Olga Denac, Jerneja Žnidaršič, Konstanca Zalar, “Analysis of Music Education Objectives in Learning Domains,” *Procedia -Social and Behavioral Sciences* No.186 (2015): 95-104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.069>.

Theme 3a: mm. 62-63, tonal center: C

Piano I is to be played more gently as in the typical accompaniment, while Piano II plays the theme, concentrating on articulation in *staccato*, *legato*, and accent. This measure is reminiscent of Mozart: it is the blithe composers of the delightful divertimenti and serenades.

m. 92: *Lento subito*

A slower middle section begins in m. 92. In m. 94 both Piano I and Piano II must keep very precise time with each other in order to execute the descending melody line precisely and together. From mm. 92-102, Although it is noted that both pianos are to perform with the same dynamics - *piano* – *p*, Piano I should perform somewhat more gently than the Piano II to emphasize the main melody line played by Piano II.

m. 103: Piano I should stress the main melody, while in m. 104 on the 3rd beat, Piano II starts a *crescendo* and culminates with Piano I in m. 105 in *f*. The same dynamic approach by Piano II reappears in measures 107, 108, and 112. Theme 3a in m. 147, is similar to mm. 62-63, Piano I assumes the melody line while Piano II assumes the accompaniment. In a similar manner, the melody line is emphasized more while the accompaniment line is played more gently.

Coda: mm. 172-199: *Très Calme*

A *Coda* to the first movement is inspired by gamelan, a traditional musical ensemble popular in Java and Bali, dominated by metallophone instruments struck with mallets, which Poulenc encountered at the 1931 *Exposition Coloniale de Paris*. Both pianos take a mysterious approach with a clear touch trying to imitate the effects as close as possible produced by gamelan ensemble. In mm. 76-79, Piano I has the melody line, playing in a delicate manner keeping one pedal throughout the three bars to create a mysterious effect. It is recommended that both pianos keep one sustain pedal in every measure and change on the first beat of each measure. The use of *una corda* pedal is highly recommended for both pianos throughout the *Coda*.

In m. 185, the initial theme of the *Coda* is repeated but with the melody line taken together with a violin. The melody, played by both Piano I and violin, should be played as if imitating a rebab, a bowed instrument from a gamelan ensemble.

***Larghetto*: 2nd movement**

mm. 1-2: Piano I presents Theme I with repeated F's in measure 1 beats 1-3, highlighting each note with a slight *crescendo* with each repetition, ending the first phrase, m. 2 beats 3-4, with a *diminuendo* in the melody from F to D. This main melody line should be performed in *cantabile* style and *legatissimo*. In the same phrase, the LH should be performed smoothly in *portato* articulation, as if imitating the strings *pizzicato*. Throughout mm. 1-8, Piano I performs four musical phrases with the identical musical concept of performance and articulation as the first phrase. Within these four phrases, Poulenc recreates the style of Mozart's *Concerto in D minor KV.466* – Andante.

mm. 21-25: Piano I performs a brief musical phrase consisting of a chromatic scale functioning as a small bridge to deliver Theme I to the subdominant key presented by Piano II in mm. 22-25. Piano II should perform Theme I in a similar manner regarding dynamics and articulation as the previous presentation of Theme I by Piano I.

mm. 34-41: The section consists of four phrases, Piano I takes the main melody line as did Piano II in the previous section, whereas Piano I follows the exact same musical approach as Piano II from the previous section, while Piano II enters at mm. 34-38 with an E-flat natural minor scale performed thirds apart. This scale presented by Piano II should be performed in *legatissimo* with the use of left pedal and the use of right pedal, changed at every quarter note.

mm. 42-50: This section acts as a transition from the Mozartian initial themes to the Camille Saint-Saëns – inspired middle section. Piano II starts this transition with a descending chromatic scale performed in *librament* – a freedom of tempo in *mezzo forte* - *mf* dynamic while accompanied by the orchestra.

mm. 91-103: In this particular section, Piano I acts as the accompaniment to support the main theme in the form of octaves by Piano II. Although it is noted in the score that Piano I performs in *mf*, it is recommended that Piano I keep the dynamic consistently softer than Piano II; hence the accompaniment of Piano I will not cover the melody line presented by Piano II in conjunction with the orchestra.

mm. 137-141: The section consists of four phrases; Piano I takes the main melody line as did Piano II in the previous section. Piano I follows the exact same musical approach as Piano II from the previous section, while Piano II enters with a B-flat natural minor scale performed thirds apart. This scale presented by Piano II should be performed in *legatissimo* with the use of the left pedal and the use of the right pedal, changing every quarter note.

mm. 147-149: This section ends the 2nd movement, performed solely by Piano II. It is recommended that Piano II use the left pedal all the time during this section and perform the note with clarity and also use the right pedal, changing every half note without any *ritardando*. In m. 149, It is recommended that Piano II perform the last notes only with RH.

***Allegro molto:* 3rd movement.**

mm. 1-5: The 3rd movement starts with three measures in unison between pianos and orchestra where both pianos and orchestra perform in *fortissimo - ff* - and end in m. 5 with a strong chord struck in *sff* by Piano II whereas Piano I starts the toccata-like theme in the same measure. Here it is recommended that both pianos strick the chords in a percussive-like manner in order to compliment the orchestra's percussion.

mm. 38: In this particular measure, is a rhythmical challenge for both pianos in that both pianos have to focus on starting and ending the scale together. It is recommended that both pianos focus on the rhythm rather than the precise

measures as this will help both pianos to perform and end this scale precisely together.

mm. 44-63: Character of a March, both pianos should perform in a precise rhythmical approach, consistent tempo, and with *staccato* touch followed by the presentation of the main theme –a music-hall march melody. Here the orchestra simply serves as an accompaniment to Piano I and Piano II.

mm. 91-113: A more serene interlude, the piece returns to a café-concert mood. The melody presented by Piano I in the top note should be performed in a delicate manner.

mm. 155-180: Incorporated into the thematic web is the use of *chansonnettes* as well as well-known Parisian tunes from the café-concert circuit. In mm. 155-162, Piano II takes the main melody whilst Piano I assumes the accompaniment. In mm. 163-177, Piano II changes the melody style into a toccata-like melody while still accompanied by Piano I. Both pianos should perform in an improvisational manner. This Finale should be performed in the characteristic of flirting with one of the deliberately vulgar themes close to the composer's heart.

mm. 271-291: This *Coda* is noteworthy and is pure bliss starting with brilliant percussive-like chords played by both pianos before Piano I and Piano II introduce once again the conflicting melody between both soloists. In m. 284 continues incorporating the gamelan style melody which the composer first heard during the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris. Both pianos perform in *fortissimo* - **ff** - imitating the metallophone instruments from a gamelan ensemble while accenting the first note of each measure. The notes are using coloristic effects in the *Coda* where the composer integrates the pentatonic of gamelan music. In m. 290, both pianos should perform the chords precisely without any *rallentando* in **ff**, accentuating each note before both pianos and orchestra end the *Coda* with a unison D minor chord. The 3rd movement reflects a duel between the two pianos as the orchestra acts as an

accompaniment; and ends with a D minor chord, leaving a feeling of incompleteness which reflects as if there is no winner between the two conflicting pianos.

Fingering recommendation of selected bars of the *Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra*

The researcher selected a few measures specifically chosen for a practical and effective fingering on the 1st and 2nd movements. Following is the instructions:

Allegro ma non troppo: 1st movement

The numbers indicated below represents the fingering set used for the passage in thirds in m. 14 with each set progresses linearly according to the notes on the score. I. e. 1/3 means that the finger 1 and 3 are to be used simultaneously on the aforementioned thirds notes.

Piano II

m. 14: RH: 1/3, 2/4, 1/3, 1/5, 2/3, 1/5, 2/4, 1/3, 2/4, 1/3, 1/5, 2/4, 1/3, 2/4, 1/3, 2/4

LH: 4/2, 3/1, 4/2, 3/1, 2/1, 4/2, 3/1, 4/2, 3/1, 2/1, 4/2, 3/1, 4/2, 3/1, 4/2, 3/1

Figure 1: Introduction, mm. 13-14



m. 117, 3rd beat: begins by LH: 4-3-2-1 following by RH: 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, (4)

Figure 2: mm. 115-117



Larghetto: 2nd movement

Piano II

mm. 34-35: RH: A-flat by LH, 2, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4 (ascending scale)

LH: 5/3 (together), 4, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 1, 4, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 1, 3 (ascending scale)

mm. 36-37: RH: 1, 4, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, (4)

LH: 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 4, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, (1)

Figure 3: mm. 34-35



Figure 4: mm. 36-38



Analysis Overview

1. The movements of the Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra

The first movement is not written in sonata form, as might be expected of a neo-classical style in the first movement of a concerto. In reality, the first movement described the form as ternary, formed exclusively on tempo changes within the movement, fast-slow-fast. Reveals that the most prominent tonal areas are not the traditional such as the tonic (i), the mediant (III), and the dominant (V). The tonal areas of the first movement emphasized are the submediant (b VI), the subtonic (b VII), and the neapolitan (b II).

The second movement, *Larghetto* in B-Flat major, in this gently stimulating, consciously naïve *Larghetto*, Poulenc recreates the famous Mozart's *Concerto in D minor KV.466 – Andante*. The sonorous middle section echoes the soul of Saint-Saëns, a Frenchman who in his serious moments could be among the most Mozartian of 19th century composers. The *larghetto* pays homage to Mozart throughout; at one point the first piano leads in effect a musette, as if on a toy piano. The middle sections follow a more impassioned mood, leading to a sonorous climax before returning to a calm state.

Poulenc's Finale is a rondo that evokes the sass of a Parisian music hall and, again, the eastern sonorities of the gamelan orchestra. Rapid chatter and sparkling repeated notes lend it an effervescent quality. The composer's melodic gift is almost profligate, with a new theme around every corner.

Poulenc's melodic and harmonic talent are most visible in the *Allegro molto Finale*. The movement begins by incorporating the style of a toccata as the pianos play a rushing figure, followed by an announcement of the main theme - a music-hall march melody. After a more serene interlude, the piece returns to a café-concert mood and ends in an exuberant manner with a fortissimo dash of virtuosity.

The Coda is noteworthy, having incorporated the gamelan which the composer first heard during the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris.

Conclusion

The objective of the current research was to develop, explore, and implement in depth levels of knowledge of stylistic and pianistic interpretation within the musical analysis of Poulenc's *Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra*. The supplementary approach to the musical Interpretation of the selected measures for the development of piano technique are also to reinforce skills or address possible weaknesses within the performer's psychomotor domain and also addresses a tremendous contribution and provides assistance to music students and pianists results an unconditional powerful pianistic performance.

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