APPENDIX

LECTURE-RECITAL SCRIPT

Slide 1 (title of the lecture-recital and portrait of Ottorino Respighi)

Good afternoon. Welcome and thank you for coming to this lecture-recital, titled “Stylistic Interpretation and Performance Issues in Ottorino Respighi’s Violin Sonata in B Minor.” Today I will discuss one of Respighi’s most famous violin works, focusing on stylistic aspects of its performance. First, I will talk about the background of this piece.

Slide 2 (Respighi’s Compositional Legacy)

Ottorino Respighi’s compositional legacy is remembered today mainly through his numerous orchestral works, including the tone poems known as the “Roman Trilogy:” *The Fountains of Rome, The Pines of Rome,* and *Roman Festivals.* His output in other genres, however, is often overlooked. *(Slide 3)* As a composer of chamber music, Respighi wrote many works for strings, woodwinds, and piano. While these works were admired during the composer’s life, they did not preserve their popularity after his death. Thorough studies of the stylistic influences in Respighi’s chamber music did not begin to appear until almost thirty years after the composer’s death in 1936. Prior to this research, studies about performance practice of such works do not exist. The temporary lack of interest in Respighi’s chamber pieces can be attributed to the international success of his orchestral works and to the heavy scholarly focus on the influences of the Second Viennese School and Stravinsky during the first half of the twentieth century.

Slide 4 (Sonata for Violin and Piano in B Minor: Current Research)
The Violin Sonata in B-Minor, composed in 1917, is one of Respighi’s most performed and recorded chamber pieces. It has grown steadily in popularity since Jascha Heifetz produced one of the most famous recordings of the piece in 1950. The work has not only been played and recorded more often in recent years, but also praised in several reviews and scholarly writings about Respighi’s music. It has thus gradually entered the standard violin repertoire as a great example of twentieth-century violin sonatas.

Several analyses of Respighi’s chamber works by musicologists such as Alberto Cantù and Christoph Flamm, discuss the B-Minor Sonata with emphasis on general compositional procedures and formal structure. Although these authors mention important stylistic characteristics of the sonata, none have taken steps to explain this piece so as to help performers interpret it in a way that reflects their observations. My research offers advice on making stylistically appropriate decisions and conquering technical and ensemble issues in the sonata. I will now provide a brief historical background on the composer and the piece in order to provide a basis for my stylistic observations and suggestions. After that, I will discuss the most salient characteristics of the sonata’s compositional style and structure, followed by selected performance suggestions. Finally, I will finish with a performance of the entire work.

Slide 5 (Biography: bullet points; Respighi’s portraits)

Ottorino Respighi is celebrated today as a composer of symphonic works and as a transcriber of numerous Italian compositions from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At a time when musical culture in Italy was largely influenced by nineteenth-century Italian opera, Respighi became one of the main figures to revive national instrumental music and to achieve international recognition for these works.
Respighi was born in Bologna, where he began his piano studies with his father at an early age. As a child, he also took violin lessons before becoming a student at the Liceo Musicale in 1891. There he studied violin and viola with Federico Sarti and composition with Luigi Torchi and Giuseppe Martucci. Torchi, a renowned musicologist specializing in early music, was the first to inspire Respighi’s life-long interest in Italian music of previous centuries. Martucci, on the other hand, influenced the Romantic style of his early compositions.

Between 1901 and 1903, Respighi visited Russia, where he was employed for several months as a violist while studying composition with Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. In 1913 Respighi was appointed professor of composition at the Academy of St. Cecilia in Rome, where he kept this position for over a decade. During his tenure at St. Cecilia, Respighi’s reputation as a composer grew exponentially due to the international success of his orchestral works.

After 1926, Respighi traveled extensively through Europe, the United States, and South America premiering his compositions as a conductor, piano soloist, and accompanist. Having been diagnosed with a heart disease in 1931, Respighi’s health deteriorated during the last five years of his life. He wrote no new original compositions after 1933, and his last work, the opera Lucrezia, had to be completed after his death in 1936 by his wife Elsa and his student, Ennio Porrino.

Respighi composed chamber music throughout his entire career. However, most of his chamber works were produced between his formative years and his first mature...
period of composition, namely between 1895 and 1910. As a result, a large number of these pieces were student compositions and some of them still remain unpublished.

In this period, Respighi shows preference for small ensembles, particularly for the violin and piano. The Violin Sonata in D Minor from 1897 was his first chamber composition. He also wrote other works for violin and piano, including eight Baroque transcriptions, as you can see on this slide. Adding the B-Minor Sonata, these works comprise Respighi’s entire repertoire for violin and piano. (**Slide 10**) Other important chamber works written before 1910 include six string quartets, a woodwind quintet, a double string quartet, and a piano quintet.

**Slide 11 (Works Written Between 1910 and 1920)**

After 1910, Respighi’s works start incorporating elements of French music, particularly that of César Franck and Claude Debussy, as well as the influences of Richard Strauss and exoticism. Each of his pieces shows a different amalgamation of styles. The Violin Sonata in B Minor incorporates elements of impressionism and the Baroque period within a late Romantic style.

**Slide 12 (Violin Sonata in B Minor; History)**

Let us now turn to the history of the Sonata in B Minor. The work was finished in 1917 and dedicated to a violinist and Respighi’s longtime friend, Arrigo Serato. The other dedicatee of the sonata, Ernesto Consolo, was a pianist who had accompanied Serato and the composer earlier that year on a concert tour. Respighi was very pleased with the work both during the compositional process and after its premiere, which took place in 1918 with the composer himself on the piano and the violinist Federico Sarti, who was Respighi’s former teacher.
Respighi’s reasons for writing a work for violin and piano are more unclear. It is likely that the writing of the sonata was partially motivated by a renewed contact with his friend Serato. However, there is a more personal reason for Respighi’s choice of the two instruments of his childhood and for the dramatic and gloomy character of the sonata. In 1916, his mother died and, with her, the last connection to his home, Bologna. Considering the lighter tone of the other works that followed this tragic period, the B-Minor Sonata is the only piece that seems to be a reflection of Respighi’s extreme emotional crisis.

**Slide 13 (Style and Structure)**

Respighi’s assimilation of compositional influences throughout his life did not produce a single distinctive style common to all of his works. Instead, each piece has a unique formula in which one style can be perceived as dominant while the others play a background role and can only be detected under closer examination. The complex individuality of each work therefore requires thorough considerations of stylistic influences in order to make appropriate performance decisions.

The variety of influences that can be found in the B-Minor Sonata range from the gestures and forms of the Baroque and Classical periods to the chromaticism of Wagner and Strauss, the impressionistic textures and harmonies of Debussy, and the textures of his orchestral works.

**Slide 14 (Example 1. First Movement: Primary Theme, mm. 1 - 17)**

Although the predominant style of the B-Minor Sonata can be described as Romantic, it is well differentiated from that of his earlier chamber works. Its highly chromatic quality, more advanced than in his previous chamber works, can be heard from
the onset of the primary theme, with a rather early half-step modulation down to B-flat Minor and a melody full of chromatic tones and dissonant intervals.

(Slide 15) Another characteristic that sets the sonata apart from earlier chamber works is its thematic connection between movements. The motivic cells that comprise the primary theme of the first movement reappear fragmented in climactic moments of the second movement and again in the third movement’s passacaglia theme. Respighi uses the melodic and rhythmic profile of short motives from the primary theme to create entire passages and themes in all three movements, thus unifying the thematic content of the whole sonata.

Slide 16 (Influences of Orchestral Writing)

The B-Minor Sonata’s link to Respighi’s orchestral writing comes mainly from the sonority of the work itself, achieved through thick multilayered textures in the piano as well as extreme registers and gestures evocative of orchestral music. One example is the persistent use of tremolos in the low register of the piano. (Slide 17) In the closing theme of the first movement, the listener could imagine orchestrating this passage with its trills or tremolos for the low strings and the melodic material for the woodwinds and upper strings. (play closing theme)

Slide 18 (Impressionistic Influences, Example 3. Second Movement: mm. 1-8)

The subtle impressionistic influences in the B-Minor Sonata are most evident in the second movement. The arpeggiated material introduced by the piano creates a rocking motion, resembling a berceuse. However, the constant syncopations at the beginning and middle of the bar cause an ambiguous sense of beat placement. This effect is enhanced by conflicting subdivisions of the beat between accompaniment and melody. Different
authors have related the character of this opening to Debussy’s music due to elements of harmony and voice leading. For example, the parallel fifths in measure six recall the technique of planing, or parallel voice leading, often used by Debussy. However, the second movement is not strictly an impressionistic work. The lyricism and tragic character of the middle section still make strong references to the Romantic style.

**Slide 19 (Baroque Influences; Examples 5 and 6)**

The last movement, in contrast, has stronger ties to the Baroque period. The choice of a passacaglia as a finale was directly influenced by Respighi’s own transcriptions of Baroque works. Given his ample knowledge of Baroque music, Respighi could have chosen a form traditionally associated with grief to express his emotions over the tragic loss of his mother. However, the Baroque elements in this movement go beyond the choice of form and the serious tone of the passacaglia. The dotted rhythms in the bass theme recall the solemn quality of a French overture. Meanwhile, the style of a chaconne, specifically the one featured in Bach’s Partita for Solo Violin in D Minor, is strongly suggested because of the use of triple meter, the characteristic rhythm, and the emphasis on the second beat. This can be heard from the third measure of the bass theme as well as in the countermelody of the right hand of the piano in Variation I.

**Slide 20 (Form of the Violin Sonata in B Minor; bullet points)**

The forms of the movements can be easily identified as sonata, large ternary, and passacaglia. At first, Respighi’s treatment of form seems traditional. However, Christoph Flamm’s extensive analysis of the work proves that Respighi’s creativity lies in the motivic connection between themes and movements, the seamless transitions between sections, and the grouping of variations in the passacaglia. It is important to note that
Respighi’s frequent changes of tempo, a unique feature of this work, are used structurally
to mark the beginning of new themes or sections in all three movements.

**Slide 21 (Passacaglia; themes A and B)**

The passacaglia is perhaps the most original of the three movements in its
treatment of form. The ten-bar theme A is followed by a secondary theme B. However,
this secondary theme is not just a variation of the theme in the bass. Instead, theme B is
of equal importance, sometimes being combined with theme A and other times standing
alone without it.

**Slide 22 (Grouping of Variations in the Passacaglia)**

Flamm talks about allusions to both sonata form and to the four-movement
structure of a sonata or symphonic work through the grouping of variations. In his
analysis, the themes and variations I through IV correspond to the first key area of a
sonata-form exposition. The next block, V through VII, corresponds to the second key
area and development because of their shift to the major mode and modulation process.
After that, the implied sonata-form structure is interrupted by variations VIII to X, which
resemble a second movement scherzo. Variation XI represents a thematic recapitulation
of the first movement by having the themes return in their original form. This placement
of the recapitulation is rather unusual since it happens after the implied second
movement. Variation XII serves as a transition to variations XIII to XV, which group
together as a slow third movement. Finally, variations XVI to the end represent a fourth
movement finale with a slow introduction, fast section, and coda. Flamm’s analysis is the
only one to suggest any sort of organization between the variations. This interpretation
can help performers emphasize the structure of the movement by choosing clearly defined characters and phrasing goals for each block of variations.

**Slide 23 (Performance Considerations)**

Respighi believed in the interpretation of the performer as a necessary part of the musical creation. (Slide 24) As stated in his own words, “there can be various different performances of the same work but they all combine to form the ideal image of the composer’s intention, an image which he could only fix imperfectly and express partially.” The freedom of a performer then lies in the ability to highlight different aspects of a piece by making informed decisions based on a previous study of the composer, the work, and all aspects of its compositional background.

Based on the stylistic and formal discussions provided so far, I will now offer performance suggestions for the B-Minor Sonata.

**Slide 25 (First Movement: Stylistic Considerations)**

The overall approach to sound production in the first movement, and in the whole sonata, should be that of a late Romantic work. The long lyrical lines require continuous intensity in the sound, which can be achieved by planned and controlled bow distribution, smooth bow connections and string crossings, and connected vibrato. Phrases with soft dynamics, however, should be considered on a case-by-case basis. For example, the beginning of themes P1 and S1 in the exposition start soft and dolce. Therefore, I recommend using a smooth attack and small amounts of vibrato for the beginning of these phrases.
The use of rubato is encouraged, especially to achieve smooth transitions between the frequent tempo changes. Within long phrases such as the main theme P1, rubato can also be used to emphasize the various small-scale dynamic changes on the score.

**Slide 26 (First Movement, mm. 17-27)**

The frequent changes of tempo in the first movement pose a performance challenge for the ensemble. Less explicit tempo indications, such as the ten-measure *Movendo* of theme P2, can be interpreted with liberty. The *Movendo* should be played either gradually throughout the section or as a rubato in which the tempo is pushed and pulled with the overall goal of moving forward.

**Slide 27 (First Movement: Measures 138-146)**

In regard to multiple subdivisions of the beat, like in measures 140 to 145, the septuplets can be played with some freedom as long as the two instruments line up on each downbeat. However, at the *allargando* of measures 144 and 145, the two parts should be stretched evenly and avoid lining up until the downbeat of measure 146.

*(play example)*

*(Slide 28)* The previously discussed passage is technically challenging in the violin part in terms of fingerings and string crossings. In the preparation of this passage, the violinist should aim for clarity, evenness, smooth string crossings, and continuous sound intensity towards the lower register. These four bars can be practiced at a slow tempo, in double stops wherever possible, and at a faster tempo with different rhythmic patterns.

**Slide 29 (Second Movement)**
In regard to the second movement’s allusion to impressionism, the sound of the arpeggiated quintuplets should be thin and soft on both instruments. The two performers should strive for smooth legato lines and, when the quintuplet motive is on the violin part, it should be played with a minimal amount of vibrato.

The melody in 4/4 should have a stronger sound and be always in the foreground. Nonetheless, the entrance of the violin at measure 13 should not be aggressive in spite of being marked forte. I suggest matching the volume of the piano and also its quality by playing the decrescendo rather quickly and emphasizing the note with bow speed more than with vibrato. After that, vibrato can be added gradually, thus creating a smooth transition between the timbre of the piano and the violin.

(Slide 30) In this movement, metronome markings are more problematic than in the first. The indication of 72 for the dotted quarter note creates confusion since none of the parts are written in compound meter. It is likely that the dotted quarter note is an editorial misprint, considering that, at the return of Tempo I, Respighi uses the quarter note as the beat value. In any case, the performer must decide between a tempo of 72 for the quarter note of the 4/4 or of the 10/8. The latter results in a slower tempo between 57 and 58 for the quarter note of the 4/4. While I prefer the faster tempo, both of them are stylistically appropriate and allow for different liberties in the use of rubato.

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Slide 32 (Third Movement, mm. 1-10)

The robust and serious character of the passacaglia calls for a deep and powerful sound in most of its variations. For this reason, the more lyrical variations in the major mode as well as the playful scherzo variations should use a contrasting and much lighter sound. In addition, dynamics should be treated freely within the context of forte. Since
Respighi’s dynamics range between mezzo forte and fortissimo all the way to the end of Variation VII, performers can use more contrast to achieve better balance, phrasing, and differentiation between variations. A suggestion regarding rhythm in this movement is to exaggerate the dotted rhythms of the theme slightly. This avoids having triplets and dotted rhythms sound alike and, at the same time, it evokes common Baroque performance practice.

**Slide 33 (Variation XVII and Più presto)**

Tempo markings are inconsistent in some of the variations and almost too fast to play in others. The Più presto in measure 191 is one of the most problematic tempo markings in the last movement. Since the metronome indication for the previous section is 100 for the dotted half note, this Più presto would be impossible to play faster or even at the same speed. However, if the whole note is instead perceived as the beat in Variation XVII, the tempo of the beat could be perceived as increasing from 50 to around 70 in the Più presto, creating the feeling of a faster tempo. *(Slide 34)* This interpretation is based on the fact that the melody of the violin in Variation XVII is an augmentation of the previous variation. Since the quarter note in Variation XVI becomes the whole note in the new variation, the listener can perceive the whole note as being the new beat, an effect supported by the dynamics in the piano. I will now play the first four bars of Variation XVI and then the first eight bars of Variation XVII. *(play examples)*

**Slide 35 (Variation XI)**

Variation XI features the most technical challenges of the violin part. In order to improve the string crossings in this variation, the above passage can be practiced in double stops at a slow speed. When practicing slow and up to speed, it is important to
stay somewhere between the middle and upper part of the bow and to not use large amounts of bow. Additionally, the whole variation can be performed at a slower tempo and at a dynamic of mezzo forte without compromising its character. If the tempo is slowed down, the relationship between this tempo and the tempo of the beginning should still be close.

**Slide 36 (Conclusion, portrait of Ottorino Respighi, quote)**

Respighi’s Violin Sonata in B Minor is a unique example in the composer’s oeuvre and in the violin repertoire. Aside from being one of the last Romantic violin sonatas, the work showcases a wide array of stylistic influences not commonly found in most late Romantic sonatas. Unlike Respighi’s early chamber works, the B-Minor Sonata is the first example in the genre to convey the style of his symphonic compositions and the only one to achieve such extreme contrasts of mood.

As stated previously, the performance preparation of Respighi’s works requires a full consideration of his compositional influences. The eclectic style of the composer must then be analyzed carefully in every work to be performed. (Slide 37) In Respighi’s own words, “the performer is in a way the composer’s collaborator as well as a reproducer.” This study of the B-Minor Sonata has shown ways in which Respighi’s music can be materialized in a performance with accuracy and through the use of informed performance decisions. The goal of this research is to inspire future similar approaches to performance studies of the composer’s works and, in particular, of his often overlooked violin and chamber music repertoires.

Thank you for your attention, and now please enjoy our performance of Respighi’s Violin Sonata in B Minor.