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A study of the Four Roman sketches of Charles T. Griffes

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A STUDY OF THE FOUR ROMAN SKETCHES
OF CHARLES T. GRIFFES

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Conservatory of Music
College of the Pacific

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Music

by
John Louis Hoberg
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INTRODUCTION

Charles Tomlinson Griffes becomes a remarkable figure in American music when one considers the musical influences which surrounded him. The first of these influences, and the one of longest tenure, was that of his piano teacher, a Miss Mary Selena Broughton. An eccentric woman and, considering the times, an extremely unorthodox teacher, she instructed Griffes in piano for twelve years. In addition to giving him thorough technical training and sound musicianship, she allowed his imagination free rein. This freedom of expression was to be the biggest factor in the next and last phase of his musical training—the four years of study in Germany.

In the last decade or two of the 19th Century and on into the first two of the 20th, Germany held the position as the foremost center for music education. That Griffes should choose to study there was only natural; that he should be able to throw off the powerful influences of Wagner and Strauss was, however, remarkable. For most of the pilgrims to Germany the effect was disastrous, as they were never able to free themselves from the German influences. Griffes was one of the fortunate few who, having been exposed to a rigorous and disciplined training in the groundwork of music, had the resilience to outgrow it. During his stay in Germany, under the tutelage of such an eminent man as Humperdinck (one of Griffes' several teachers), he wrote music which was typically aca-
demic but which showed the progress of his craftsmanship. It seems almost as if he were biding his time until he could get back to America and away from the German influence, but appreciating all the while the excellent instruction that he was receiving. All his compositions were derivative in this period. He even used foreign language texts for his songs. Some of the German songs are worth some attention as they have been looked upon as being as good as those of "the masters of song", Brahms and Strauss. Griffes assimilated their technique to a remarkable degree. One of the last of this German group, "Auf geheimem Waldespfade", shows a definite trend toward Impressionism, which was then at its zenith. Strangely enough, Griffes' work in the Impressionistic medium was a fairly independent parallel to that of Debussy and Ravel and the others in France, as he had had no instruction in it, nor had he heard much of it in Germany. His study and use of Oriental scales and melodies contributed to the similarity which his music had with that of the Impressionists.

One is almost compelled to think of Griffes as one who seemed to know what ultimate musical style and idiom he would finally reach. His eclecticism seemed deliberate—he chose to study and work only in those musical schemes which advanced him toward his goal.

* * *

The **FOUR ROMAN SKETCHES** were inspired in part by poems
of William Sharp ("Fiona McLeod"). Each of the sketches is prefaced by excerpts from Sharp's work. (The White Peacock, however, was originally inspired by Griffes' seeing such a bird in a Berlin zoo shortly after his arrival in Germany.) They were composed sometime during the years 1912 and 1916.

The style of the pieces is Impressionistic; however, the romanticism of Wagner and Strauss is sometimes evident. Whole-tone scales, diatonic chords with added tones, short, episodic themes, and bi-tonality are the composer's tools. The extreme chromaticism is achieved not only by the intervals used but also by the use of techniques peculiar only to the piano; e.g., by holding the sustaining pedal down for two bars in Clouds (bars 37 and 38), all the tones of the chromatic scale are heard together (the effect here is polytonal rather than atonal, however, because of the frequent recurrence of certain tones). The bi-tonality used is sometimes extremely dissonant because the two tonalities are only a semi-tone apart. Major and minor 9th, 11th, and 13th chords are very frequently used; also, the use of the augmented 4th (tri-tone) is a favorite device. Griffes' great interest in Oriental music provides the basis for the exotic scales and tone clusters which are used.

These pieces are the direct antecedent of the later Piano Sonata (composed during 1917-1918) in which Griffes gave up conventional tonality and in which the Impressionistic style was nowhere evident. They were the first evidence of
the true Griffes style and of his great originality.
FORM

A  B  C
(a b)

B'  A'  C'  A''  B''  A'''
(Dev)  (Dev b)  (Dev)  b'  a'

NUMBER OF MEASURES
7 10 9 8 7 4 3 10 6 1/2

**Languidamente e molto rubato.** 3/2. The first part of theme A begins immediately, without introduction. It is a very short theme, based on a whole-tone scale A#(Bb), C, Cx (D½), E, F#, and an added G which resolves to the F# in a quasi-appoggiatura effect:

It is repeated and is then followed by the second half (b) of theme A which consists of a descending chromatic scale over a D# 7th chord in various positions, down an octave. The end of the theme is heard over 9th chord harmonies. In bars 5, 6, and 7, there is an extension of the theme which finally ends on a chord derived from another whole-tone scale (A, B, C#, D#, and F [E#]).

In bar 8, theme B begins with an ascending run (really made of a broken chord: B7 followed by D#7) leading to the actual first note of theme B:
This is repeated exactly (it is only the beginning fragment of B) and then occurs the full statement of theme B, beginning in measure 12 and ending in measure 16. Bar 17 consists of a series of 9th chords descending and coming to rest (I) on a B7 chord. An interesting appoggiatura occurs here: the right hand chord is D#7 sounding simultaneously with Bb7 in the left hand; the Bb7 resolves to a B7 which, with the sustained D#7 chord in the right hand, forms B9 harmony.

![Musical notation for D#7 and Bb7 chords]

Theme C, beginning in bar 19, is marked, "Con languore", and is in the alternate meters of 5/4 and 3/2. It is of comparatively simple structure and harmony and is derivative, in its line, of both A and B themes, but its character is distinctive enough to justify its being a new subject. It is 3 bars in length and is accompanied by simple arpeggios:

![Musical notation for Theme C]

This is repeated a major 3rd lower and with a few minor alterations and then proceeds to a climax in bar 24, on a Db major cadence. The cadence is extended for another bar, in an agitated feeling, and climaxes again on the first beat of bar.
26, after which there is a diminuendo to bar 28 where a development of theme B begins. The rhythm, together with the thematic alliance with B, forms the basis for this section. It begins tranquilly but gradually builds up to a climax in measure 33. A diminuendo follows and in bar 36 theme A(b) returns. It is heard a diminished fifth higher than when originally stated. This time the accompanying 7th chords are broken up into arpeggios in groups of seven 16th notes in a harp-like effect. In bar 38 theme A is repeated, this time a major 7th interval below the original statement. In its first measure it is again accompanied by arpeggios; in the second, however, stretto is used (its ending measure is heard simultaneously with the beginning one). This is repeated in bar 40 an augmented 4th higher, and again in bar 41 a diminished fifth higher. All this finally gives way to an ascending chromatic scale in octaves. A crescendo leads to the climax of the piece (in measures 44 and 45), which uses a fragment of theme C. These climactic bars are repeated three times, each time starting a semitone lower and also gradually diminishing dynamically. This passage ends with a quiet ascending arpeggio reminiscent of that used to introduce theme B at its first statement; now, however, the arpeggio leads to a restatement of theme A(b) an octave higher than its original position and accompanied by the arpeggio figure used in measures 36 and 38. This restatement arrives at the same cadence which was used originally.
measure 51 a restatement of theme B begins; it is an exact repetition except for the last two beats of its 6th bar which are lowered a semitone, and the whole 7th bar which is a diminished 4th interval below the original. This seventh bar is extended by means of repetition (a perfect fifth higher) in measures 59 and 60 and ends on a D# minor 7th chord over an octave B in the bass. In measures 61, 62, and 63, the first part (a) of theme A is restated twice in its original form. In bar 64 it is again repeated, now in augmentation and extended by one note. The piece ends very quietly (ppp) with the dying away of the tones of this last statement of theme A(a).
NIGHTFALL

FORM

A

(a b c)

B

(d e d)

A

(b' a)

Codetta

NUMBER OF MEASURES

48  35  17  9

Lento misterioso. 4/4. The first section is introduced by a syncopated rhythm on an octave D# over a G# minor triad: 4/4 \( \frac{4}{4} \) \( \frac{4}{4} \) \( \frac{4}{4} \) \( \frac{4}{4} \) \( \frac{4}{4} \) \( \frac{4}{4} \) , etc. In the second measure a chord composed of two tones, D# and E, doubled at the octave, establishes the new tonality of D major simultaneously with the one in G# minor. The third bar sets forth theme a in D major beginning with a repeat of the D# E octave in the previous measure:

(As will be seen, the D# octave with the G# minor triad is used as organ-point for themes a and b.) The G# minor figure is heard alone again and is followed by a repetition of theme a, this time with the addition of two notes extending it at the end. This is followed by two measures of the accompanying figure which lead directly to theme b, four bars in length:
This theme is in the same key, G# minor, as the accompanying figure. It is repeated almost exactly and is then followed by a codetta, the first four measures of which are derived from the second half of theme \( \text{b} \) (a variant of the melodic inversion is used):

\[
\text{(16)} \\
\text{(22)}
\]

Measures 26 through 29 of the codetta are based on the accompanying organ-point figure. Measure 30 is the beginning of a five bar episode which prepares for, and introduces, the accompanying figure for theme \( \text{c} \). It is a dissolution of the preceding four measures and has its basis in the chromatic progression of measure 26:

\[
\text{From} \\
\text{(26)}
\]

This downward progression continues in bar 30 and dissolves into the fundamental harmonic pattern for the accompaniment to theme \( \text{c} \). The basic figure accompanying \( \text{c} \) is again an octave (G#) but contains, alternately, the interval of the 5th and 4th:

\[
\]

Theme \( \text{c} \) actually is not a new idea; its basis in theme \( \text{a} \) is unmistakable. It contains much of the same rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic material used in theme \( \text{a} \); by changing the accompanying figure rhythmically and by slightly altering
it melodically, it is different enough to be treated as a new theme. (This composition achieves an almost cyclic unity; each section contains derivative material from a previous section in a disguised form so that it appears entirely different.) Theme 9 is in two sections, the first four bars long (repeated) and the second five bars:

A crescendo begins in bar 46 and in bar 47 there is a long glissando beginning on contra-D#, and ascending up the black keys of the keyboard. It ends with a chord trill which leads into a cadenza-like passage (based on the accompanying figure for the second half of theme 9). This diminishes as it goes down the keyboard and finally becomes a low, undulating accompanying figure for theme 4 of section B. The tonality for this theme is Ab major. (The whole composition is based generally in the two tonalities of G# minor and Ab major.)

Again a triplet figure is the accompaniment as in theme 9 of section A (which is derived from the 6/8 meter of theme b).
On the last beat of measure 49 the theme begins; again the mood is slow—\textit{Tranquillo}:

\begin{music}
\begin{musicnotes}
\begin{musicmeasure}
\begin{musicclef}Cclef\end{musicclef}
\begin{musicstaff}
\begin{musicbar}
\begin{musicnote}s\end{musicnote}3\end{musicbar}
\end{musicstaff}
\end{musicmeasure}
\begin{musicmeasure}
\begin{musicclef}Fclef\end{musicclef}
\begin{musicstaff}
\begin{musicbar}
\begin{musicnote}s\end{musicnote}3\end{musicbar}
\end{musicstaff}
\end{musicmeasure}
\end{musicnotes}
\end{music}

(The similarity to a Wagnerian or Straussian theme is remarkable.) Traces of themes a and b can be found in it, particularly in its rhythmic feeling. The second half is harmonized by alternate major and minor 9th chords. In measure 61 the accompanying figure dissolves into another running figure still in triple rhythm but in 16th notes rather than 8ths. This accompanies a very short episodic theme (derived from b) two measures in length. It is repeated once and extended for three measures; the extension is really a dissolution which prepares for the restatement of theme d. Theme d reappears, this time in a more elaborate setting. It also has a rest- less feeling now because of rhythmic and harmonic changes: the triplet figure becomes two similar figures in different rhythms—in the bass are groups of five and sometimes six 16th notes against groups of seven 16ths in the treble (the theme is in the middle voice); also, the harmonic foundation is the tonic 6/4 chord of Db major, so that there is no
feeling of cadence. Only the first half of the theme is used.

There has been a steady crescendo which reaches the climax, fortissimo, in measure 74. The melody then dissolves into the opening two notes of theme a, which began the piece; it is transposed down a semitone, however. This motif is repeated twice, each time getting more quiet until it dissolves into a repeat of the five-bar episode which introduced theme a (enharmonically changed now to fit the Ab signature). The first two bars of theme b are brought back in the original key of G# minor, and over the original organ-point. Bars 86 to 88 are variations of the two previous bars. In measure 91 a skeleton dominant 7th chord is sustained over the whole measure. The chord consists of an octave D# with a single C#.

The final section begins with an exact repetition of the first five bars of the piece. Measure 96 (or the last bar of theme a) is repeated with some chromatic alterations over the next three bars. In measure 101, over a sustained D# octave, the first two bars of theme b are heard in augmentation. This ends on a G# major 6/4 chord which is sustained for two measures. An A minor chord follows (four beats), then a B major 6/4 chord (two beats), and finally a cadence to G# major is sustained over four bars to the end.
III

THE FOUNTAIN OF THE ACQUA PAOLA

FORM A B C D C E A Codetta
(a b) (a) (C)

NUMBER OF MEASURES 12 8 8 13 2 9 12 6

Allegro moderato. 4/4. Without introduction this sketch begins, in the tonality of $D^b$ major, with a simple and somewhat conventional theme (it stays almost entirely within the $D^b$ major tonality) in the middle register of the keyboard. It is accompanied by a rapid ostinato figure an octave higher. The theme, A, is in two sections; the first part is followed immediately by the second:

\[ \begin{align*}
&\text{\begin{music}
&\scriptsize\text{D}^b, 4/4.\quad \text{Allegro moderato.} \\
&\text{\footnotesize}\begin{array}{c}
&\text{A} \quad \text{B} \quad \text{C} \quad \text{D} \\
&\text{E} \quad \text{A} \quad \text{Codetta}
\end{array}
\end{music}}
\]

In the ninth bar it ends on the tonic $6/4$ harmony. Measures 10, 11, and 12 are concerned with dissolving the accompaniment figure and also modulating to the key of $B^b$ minor. In bar 13 the accompaniment to theme B begins, pianissimo. Again it is a 16th-note figure; however, the section is marked, Meno mosso, rubato. This theme is short and is transitional in
character. The theme is only $3\frac{1}{2}$ beats in length:

It is repeated five times, each time starting a half step higher. In bar 17 it dissolves into a rapid passage which continues the upward chromatic rise with arpeggiated minor 6th intervals and then a descending triplet figure in minor 3rds. The accompaniment to this is a series of arpeggiated major 9th chords. These chords follow the right hand figure in their rise and fall. This is repeated a whole step lower in bar 18. In bar 19 the descending triplet continues until, in measure 21, on a low Bb octave in the bass, theme C begins. It is somewhat reminiscent of A but is distinctly different:

It is accompanied by arpeggio figures following in outline the Bb minor tonic chord.

Measures 27 and 28 are transitional (derived from measures 10, 11, and 12); they lead to a new section which begins in bar 29. This section is one of great rhythmic complexity; there are three different rhythmic patterns occurring simultaneously:
The theme is 3 measures long and occurs in the triplet quarter-note rhythm (described above); it is in the tonality of D♭ major:

![Musical notation]

The last note forms an elision with the first note of the repeat of the theme (a 4th higher). All other voices move up correspondingly. (This is a remarkably colorful section; it is color in pastel shades. Marked, pianissimo, and highly chromatic, it has a feeling of mist, shimmering and evanescent.) Again the theme is repeated, slightly altered melodically and starting higher yet (a minor 6th higher than its original presentation). A crescendo begins in bar 35 and continues until it reaches a climax in bar 38 where the theme broadens and begins to descend and diminish at the same time. The rhythm becomes less complex; the triplet quarter-note changes to duple rhythm, and the triplet 8th-note figure is eliminated entirely. After a ritard in bar 41 the first part of theme C returns, slightly altered and set a minor 3rd higher than originally. This leads directly to a new theme, E, marked, Agitato, in bar 44. The theme is eight measures in length and is heard over several key changes A7, A7 with diminished 5th, a minor 11th chord on
B, Eb major, a minor 11th chord on D, and finally a climax (fortissimo) in the original Db major tonality.

In measure 52 an ascending arpeggio (an Ab major triad followed by Eb major) leads into the accompanying figure for the return of theme A which is restated exactly in its original form. Again the episode of dissolution follows, leading to a Codetta based on the first bar of theme C. A ritard with diminuendo begins in measure 68 and the work ends in measure 70 on a slowly arpeggiated Db major tonic chord with an added 6th.
**IV**

**CLOUDS**

**FORM**

\[(\text{a a' b b'}) \quad (\text{a Dev a}) \quad (\text{a b'' b'''}) \quad (\text{b})\]

**NUMBER OF MEASURES**

\[14 \quad 16 \quad 11 \quad 3\]

**Tranquillo. 7/4.** The work begins with the accompanying figure, in Db major, for theme a. This accompaniment consists of seven chords within the Db tonality, repeated in ostinato along with theme a. The theme is three bars long:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccccccc}
\text{\ldots} & \text{\ldots} & \text{\ldots} & \text{\ldots} & \text{\ldots} & \text{\ldots} & \text{\ldots} & \text{\ldots} & \text{\ldots} & \text{\ldots} & \text{\ldots} & \text{\ldots} & \text{\ldots} \\end{array}
\]

As is apparent, this basically simple theme depends on the harmonization for its interest.

In measure 5 alternate major 9th chords, triads, and 7th chords form a coloristic or atmospheric interlude before the repetition of theme a beginning in measure 6. The last half of this repeat is transposed a major 3rd higher and is extended in bars 8 and 9. (The rhythmic figure used in a, \[\text{j j j j j j j j j} \], is used also for theme c, thereby unifying the two themes.) In measure 10 an undulating triplet pattern
against one of duple rhythm prepares for theme \( b \). This section, theme \( b \), is one of the most interesting of Griffes' writings. The theme itself almost encompasses the complete twelve-tone scale (\( A^\flat \) and C are omitted). It is two bars in length and is set against a bi-tonal harmonic background: D minor and \( A^\flat \) major in the first measure and D minor and \( D^\flat \) major in the second. Each measure has the sustaining pedal held throughout.

In measures 13 and 14 theme \( b \) is repeated with some slight harmonic differences (a semitone difference in several instances). Theme \( a \), marked, piu mosso, follows this repetition of \( b \). It is very similar to a development section based on theme \( a \). (This section begins with the rhythmic pattern, previously mentioned, from theme \( a \); it is followed by the rhythm pattern used in the first part of theme \( a \); in other words, the rhythmic pattern is reversed but the melodic line remains very similar to theme \( a \):
It is a somewhat rhapsodic treatment of theme a, accompanied by a chromatic running figure in 16th notes.

After a small crescendo, measures 21 to 23 are suddenly pianissimo. They are an interlude which has no particular relationship to any previous material except possibly to the single bar interlude of measure 5 which separates theme a and its repetition. It is a succession of chromatically descending alternate major and diminished 7th chords.

Again a variant of theme a begins in measure 24, marked *piu tranquillo, espressivo*; parts of the original are deleted and some of the remaining are stated in augmentation. This section, after a crescendo and accelerando, reaches a climax in measure 30 where the accompanying figure which began the piece makes its return; this prepares for the return of theme a in measures 31 to 33. Measure 34 is a repetition of 33, this time transposed down a minor 3rd interval. In measure 35, over a pianissimo Db major chord in the bass, theme b returns, transposed up a 4th interval; it is stated this time against the bi-tonal background of G minor and Db major in the first bar and G minor and Gb major in the second bar. The two measures are repeated exactly except for slight harmonic changes in the second bar (measure 38). This return of b is made even more harmonically complex (in the sound of it) than in its original
statement. When first presented, the sustaining pedal was changed, or can be changed, for each measure of the theme; this return (marked quasi lontano), however, has an open Db chord which is to be sustained throughout both bars; consequently, the two measures must be played over only one pedal. Every tone of the twelve-tone scale is heard simultaneously because of the pedal being held throughout. These tones are tied over into the first beat of measure 39. The remainder of measure 39 consists of an arpeggiated bi-tonal chord on the second beat, repeated twice on the third and fourth beats. The chord itself is of interest; it is a minor 7th chord on Gb combined with a minor 9th chord on G (the Gb chord is over the 9th chord):

A codetta based on theme b closes the work. It begins exactly as did the second statement of b but dissolves, in measure 42, into the closing chord—a minor 7th chord on Db with the added color of a single Db over an open Db chord in two octaves in the bass.
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