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# LEO ORNSTEIN

FUTURIST  
of  
FUTURISTS

Personal suggestions from the composer for the correct rendition of his  
sensationally revolutionary composition

## THE CATHEDRAL

The surprise and absolute consternation which this youngest of Futurist composers has aroused among musicians and critics with his later works has constantly increased since their first appearance. And the publication of many of his works has not simplified matters. The character and nature of his music, his idiom and the unheard-of effects he produces, the entirely novel inventive plan of his harmonic combinations, are astonishing to hear, but when we try to reproduce all this from the written copy, astonishment is transformed to dismay in the futile efforts to disentangle the harmonic mazes, master the technical requirements and interpret the whole with that *meaning*, both in its musical, descriptive and aesthetic sense, which the composer has in mind.

The moon cast its rays upon the cathedral,  
Which stood in its majestic omnipotence, silently  
waiting.  
Sharp, black figures crawled over the walls,  
And long writhing figures, like green snakes,

Tore at the hard, square stones, their white teeth  
bristling.  
Bells sounded, first loud and harsh, then soft and  
mournful.  
The fate of a universe seemed concentrated on  
its peal.

Suddenly all was dark, and a sharp, piercing  
wild shriek, came through the black night.  
Large, great blocks of stone crashed, falling, fall-  
ing into an abyss, into the figures.  
A loud, piercing wail—then all was silence.

### The Cathedral

Leo Ornstein, Op. 37, No. 2



## Descriptive and Suggestive Notes for The Cathedral by the Composer

- The opening measure should be played very fully with the swing of the whole arm through use of third finger in both hands. The sounds of the bells must come as though through a mist, and full of gloom and foreboding.
- As an echo of the first measure, this must be treated in a grave manner, with a muffled bell-like sound.
- The chords should be rendered with a fiery stroke, almost like a sudden flame of light, and then the eighths in the left hand very softly as though knelling.
- The previous chord is held, and gradually diminished into the following measure.
- Execute this with grief.
- The four thirty-seconds should be treated in a hurried and shrieking manner with great pressure, relapsing finally into the quarter chord which should be played with flat fingers. While the chord should produce a hollow effect it should nevertheless be played with a certain amount of tenderness.
- This should be made to sound like an echo of the previous measure. Play the thirty-seconds very slowly with great pathos and melancholy. The left hand playing the eighths in a pitiless, relentless manner.
- Suddenly the tempo is hastened, the bells commence ringing a little more quickly, although in a clumsy and heavy manner. Play the left-hand part with the swing of the full arm, and with a sameness of quality. Do not diminish, but keep right on into the ninth measure. At (a) play fifth finger on F, fourth on G, third G sharp, second A sharp and thumb on A and E.
- Here, not until the last eighth, is there a shadow of a change; but as the three sixteenths are reached, the tempo suddenly becomes very slow, and the right hand plays the three upper notes with great tenderness and expressiveness. A soul in torment.
- Ascending with terrible, deliberate fierceness, this measure should rise up into a wild shriek. For the third chord, the left hand plays above the right.
- Play this very hurriedly with a tremendous clanging sound, almost as though two blocks of steel were clashing into each other.
- The left hand begins the chord very softly and caressingly. A gradual crescendo and a generally hurried movement is worked up into the leading measure. Be sure to play the first two notes in right hand (E-F) with the thumb, as the subsequent climax (13) is dependent upon such a start.
- Here everything becomes confusion, all matter seems to decompose, and nothing but an empty void of atmosphere remains. Right-hand fingering: F with thumb, F sharp with second, G third, G sharp fourth and A, fifth finger. To play this chord, fingers must be held absolutely straight and the arch of the hand very high. Left-hand fingering for first chord: G fifth, A sharp third, B second finger, and D and E thumb. For second chord: D sharp fifth, G sharp fourth, B flat third, C second finger and D and E with the thumb.
- This measure is to be played as a reflection of measure six; do not hurry the thirty-seconds, but make them sound like a dreary wail in the night. Be careful about fingering the chords exactly as marked.
- Gradually all is diminished into a sound of floating bells, through the atmosphere.
- The left hand resumes its insistent foreboding.
- The right hand here wails to the accompaniment of the left, which strikes the chord with fierce abandon.
- Here the impression must be given of huge boulders in friction. Gradually the B flat striking the note of fatality, must be cleared of the pedal, and held as a background for the next measure.
- In the last measure the first two chords come out crystallized and inexorable; the last beat dropping into oblivion and nothingness. Observe unusual fingering for third right-hand chords: G and A with thumb, B second, and E with fourth finger to insure perfect legato.



## HOW MY MUSIC SHOULD BE PLAYED AND SUNG

A Series of Papers Devoted to the Character and Idiom of My Latest Works, Describing Essential Requirements for Their Adequate Understanding and Providing Suggestions for Mastery of Their Technical Difficulties

By LEO ORNSTEIN

### I

The surprise and absolute consternation which this youngest of Futurist composers has aroused with his later works among musicians and critics has constantly increased since their first appearance. And the publication of many of his works has not simplified matters. The character and nature of his music, his idiom and the unheard-of effects he produces, the entirely novel inventive plan of his harmonic combinations, are astonishing to hear, but when we try to reproduce all this from the written copy astonishment is transformed to dismay in the futile efforts to disentangle the harmonic mazes, master the technical requirements and interpret the whole with that meaning, both in its musical, descriptive and æsthetic sense, which the composer has in mind.

The merits of any new movement in art have never been accepted from the very outset. Leo Ornstein's ideas and entire musical conceptions are so radically different from accepted standards, that bitter opposition and criticism must follow.

However, in order to understand works of such novel and original plan, in order to give an estimate of their real worth, in fact to say whether or not we can begin to like such music, we should hear it frequently, and be able to play or sing it.

To assist towards such an end, and to prove that his music can be sung and played just as any other music can, Mr. Ornstein has decided upon writing a series of descriptive papers devoted to a careful analysis of what, in his mind, would be necessary for an adequate understanding of his works and give such instructions as to mastery of his peculiar technical needs and devices as will lead to clear, satisfactory interpretation.

As planned there will be five papers in all, two for the violin and one for his vocal works.

The composition used for this first article has been specially written for the purpose and has never before appeared in print.

Readers desiring further information regarding any of Mr. Ornstein's statements, or who may wish additional suggestions about his work or methods are invited to address the undersigned, who herewith invites open discussion and who will give his personal attention to all such communications.—THE EDITOR.

So much has been said and written in reference to the so-called insurmountable difficulties and impossibilities of my idiom, that I think it high time to offer a few explanatory suggestions and remarks. The misleading idea of invariably associating excessive intricacies and impossibilities with new works has been existent for many years. The difficulties that exist are after all only relative; for instance, one could hardly say that the idiom of Liszt is difficult; it is only a question of the individual work of the composer. "The Liebesträume" is less difficult than the "Wild Hunt," although the idiom remains quite the same. Consequently it all resolves itself into the question of sufficient technical development of the individual performer. There are, of course, a few difficulties in my idiom which require a rather novel position of the hand, but with a little conscientious practice and very careful thought these positions can easily be acquired and overcome as difficulties pure and simple. But after all, the mere technicalities are of comparatively small importance when we consider the difficulty and the tremendous effort it will require to understand these new works, in point of

their esthetic and descriptive content.

The very first step which the composer must be given the privilege of insisting upon is, that his listener should approach his work with no preconceived notions of any kind; they must learn to allow absolute and full freedom to their imagination, as it is only under such circumstances that any new work can be understood and appreciated at first. All preconceived theories must be abolished, and the new work approached through no formulas.

#### Preconceived Notions

Music, one must remember, should primarily be felt and not analyzed. The ultimate end of understanding the essentials of a new work must after all be done through a conscious effort towards realizing musically exactly what the composer means. The performer, just as the listener, will find that he will be obliged to discard the established formula of tonic, sub-dominant, dominant, and return again to tonic. *The student will find it a physical impossibility to apply this preconceived formula to any of my music.*

The basis upon which this music is constructed is very foreign indeed to the established rules of music. The essence of this music is constructed with an endowment of a universal sympathy which exists between one musical sound and another. All musical tones are related to each other just as by an intuitive force we feel that all human beings are related to each other whether the realization is conscious or sub-conscious.

#### Universal Sympathy of Sounds

Why must a composer labor under the handicap of any formula whatever, or any rules, instead of allowing himself all the freedom possible, so as to make his work as spontaneous, as free, and as expressive as he individually is capable of? Of course, some would claim that this would cause musical anarchy, but I wish to state that by becoming thoroughly free from any theories whatever, I do not mean to say that the composer should lose the sense of the material that he is for the moment employing; on the contrary, one of the most vital issues that I would insist on, is that every composer should, and must have, to the highest degree, a feeling for the sense of the

#### Necessity of Absolute Freedom for the Composer



LEO ORNSTEIN



material that he is dealing with, so that, for instance, when composing for the piano he is conscious of all its capabilities as well as its limitations, and just the same in writing for all other instruments.

Unfortunately, we have evolved a scheme which has now become almost a habit of viewing everything through an outward manifestation. Art has become entirely too photographic these days, and unless we can almost geographically trace a composition there is a tendency to condemn it. We have become so accustomed to photographic art that when we hear a piece of Debussy or Ravel, in which sometimes the finest passages have the strength of mountains in them, we will insist on asking where

is the power and strength in this piece, showing immediately that we seek outward signs of strength such as great crashy chords. Is it not possible that a very fine and delicate passage can have the strength of night in it, and the noisy big sounding piece can be pompous, sentimental and weak, even if the noise is tremendous. May not a flower have the strength of a tree? . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

In this first paper I shall endeavor to give a practical illustration of how to perform one of my compositions, "The Cathedral," printed on this and the following page. After composing it and playing it over a few times the following rhapsody suggested itself to me: (See page 715.)

## The Cathedral

Leo Ornstein, Op. 37, No. 2

The musical score for "The Cathedral" is presented in nine numbered measures. Measure 1 is marked "Lento sostenuto" and begins with a *ff* chord. Measure 2 is an echo of the first measure, marked *pp*. Measure 3 features a *ff* chord with the instruction "molto espressivo". Measure 4 shows a *p* chord with a long note. Measure 5 is marked *pp*. Measure 6 is marked *ff* and includes the instruction "sfz molto dim.". Measure 7 is marked "Molto meno mosso" and includes "vibrato" and "rit.". Measure 8 is marked "Molto agitato" and features a *ff* chord with a triplet. Measure 9 is marked "Molto meno mosso" and includes "molto espressivo" and "rit.". The score includes various dynamics and performance instructions throughout.

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### Descriptive and Suggestive Notes for The Cathedral by the Composer

1. The opening measure should be played very fully with the swing of the whole arm through use of third finger in both hands. The sounds of the bells must come as though through a mist, and full of gloom and foreboding.
2. As an echo of the first measure, this must be treated in a grave manner, with a muffled bell-like sound.
3. The chords should be rendered with a fiery stroke, almost like a sudden flame of light, and then the eighths in the left hand very softly as though knelling.
4. The previous chord is held, and gradually diminished into the following measure.
5. Execute this with grief.
6. The four thirty-seconds should be treated in a hurried and shrieking manner with great pressure, relapsing finally into the quarter chord which should be played with flat fingers. While the chord should produce a hollow effect it should nevertheless be played with a certain amount of tenderness.
7. This should be made to sound like an echo of the previous measure. Play the thirty-seconds very slowly with great pathos and melancholy. The left hand playing the eighths in a pitiless, relentless manner.
8. Suddenly the tempo is hastened, the bells commence ringing a little more quickly, although in a clumsy and heavy manner. Play the left-hand part with the swing of the full arm, and with a sameness of quality. Do not diminish, but keep right on into the ninth measure. At (a) play fifth finger on F, fourth on G, third G sharp, second A sharp and thumb on A and E.
9. Here, not until the last eighth, is there a shadow of a change; but as the three sixteenths are reached, the tempo suddenly becomes very slow, and the right hand plays the three upper notes with great tenderness and expressiveness. A soul in torment.



THE MOON CAST ITS RAYS UPON THE CATHEDRAL,  
WHICH STOOD IN ITS MAJESTIC OMNIPOTENCE, SI-  
LENTLY WAITING.

SHARP, BLACK FIGURES CRAWLED OVER THE WALLS,  
AND LONG WRITHING FIGURES, LIKE GREEN SNAKES,  
TORE AT THE HARD, SQUARE STONES, THEIR WHITE  
TEETH BRISTLING

BELLS SOUNDED, FIRST LOUD AND HARSH, THEN SOFT  
AND MOURNFUL

THE FATE OF A UNIVERSE SEEMED CONCENTRATED  
ON ITS PEAL.

SUDDENLY ALL WAS DARK, AND A SHARP, PIERCING,  
WILD SHRIEK CAME THROUGH THE BLACK NIGHT.  
LARGE, GREAT BLOCKS OF STONE CRASHED, FALLING,  
FALLING INTO AN ABYSS, INTO FIGURES.  
A LOUD, PIERCING WAIL—THEN ALL WAS SILENCE.

\* \* \* \* \*

I would advise this to be used as a help towards entering into the whole mood of the piece, but I would say that it should not be followed word for word to the music; that would leave no room for each individual performer to exercise his own imagination, and to put his own creative efforts into it.

- 10. Ascending with terrible, deliberate fierceness, this measure should rise up into a wild shriek. For the third chord, the left hand plays above the right.
- 11. Play this very hurriedly with a tremendous clanging sound, almost as though two blocks of steel were clashing into each other.
- 12. The left hand begins the chord very softly and caressingly. A gradual crescendo and a generally hurried movement is worked up into the leading measure. Be sure to play the first two notes in right hand (E-F) with the thumb, as the subsequent climax (13) is dependent upon such a start.
- 13. Here everything becomes confusion, all matter seems to decompose, and nothing but an empty void of atmosphere remains. Right-hand fingering: F with thumb, F sharp with second, G third, G sharp fourth and A, fifth finger. To play this chord, fingers must be held absolutely straight and the arch of the hand very high. Left-hand fingering for first chord: G fifth, A sharp third, B second finger, and D and E thumb. For second chord: D sharp fifth, G sharp fourth, B flat third, C second finger and D and E with the thumb.

- 14. This measure is to be played as a reflection of measure six; do not hurry the thirty-seconds, but make them sound like a dreary wail in the night. Be careful about fingering the chords exactly as marked.
- 15. Gradually all is diminished into a sound of floating bells, through the atmosphere.
- 16. The left hand resumes its insistent foreboding.
- 17. The right hand here wails to the accompaniment of the left, which strikes the chord with fierce abandon.
- 18. Here the impression must be given of huge boulders in friction. Gradually the B flat striking the note of fatality, must be cleared of the pedal, and held as a background for the next measure.
- 19. In the last measure the first two chords come out crystallized and inexorable; the last beat dropping into oblivion and nothingness. Observe unusual fingering for third right-hand chords: G and A with thumb, B second, and E with fourth finger to insure perfect legato.

