

Nikolai Kapustin's Solo Piano Works 2007-2013:
A Recording and Performance Guide

by

Qingqing Ye

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Walter Cosand, Chair
Robert Hamilton
Rodney Rogers

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ABSTRACT

Born in 1937, the Ukrainian-Russian composer Nikolai Kapustin has gradually gained recognition among Western music scholars and pianists by blending American jazz idioms into classical forms, such as concertos, sonatas, and preludes; recently he has become a very prominent composer. As one of the most prolific composers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, he has composed over 160 works to date. Most of them are piano solo works. The uniqueness of his compositional philosophy is that he consistently treats the music language of jazz as a core element in all his output, while others might only use jazz idioms experimentally in their works.

Being an excellent pianist himself, Kapustin has recorded many of his own works, giving a firsthand reference for interpreting his piano music. Some of his most famous works, including the *Variations*, Op. 41, the *Eight Concert Etudes*, Op. 40, and the *24 Preludes in Jazz Style*, Op. 53 have been recorded by other prominent artists, such as Steven Osborne and Marc-Andre Hamelin.

Scholarly research on Kapustin's piano works remains limited. Most of it is found in journal articles and dissertations. Unfortunately, all of them are focused on his early popular works. His more recent works from 2007-2013: the *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, *Dialogue*, Op. 148, *Etude Courte mais Transcendante pour piano*, Op. 149, *Nobody Is Perfect*, Op. 151, *A Pianist In Jeopardy*, Op. 152, and *Wandering*, Op. 153, have not yet been discussed in any scholarly writing.

In brief, the purpose of this study is to present a first recording of these six major solo works, and to examine them in a research paper. The paper discusses Kapustin's consistent use of jazz elements in his recent works, addresses musical and technical

concerns in their performance practice, and facilitates more extended study of these valuable but yet to be recorded works.

The paper consists of eight parts. The first part covers brief background information on the composer, as well as reviewing important jazz features, in order to more effectively analyze his stylistic language in the six compositions which are explored in the subsequent chapters including a conclusion.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background Information on Nikolai Kapustin

Nikolai Kapustin was born in Gorlovka, Ukraine, in 1937. He is one of two children in his family. Neither of his parents had any musical background, but they wished both of their children to become musically educated.¹ His older sister Fira Kapustin learned violin. Kapustin started to play piano at the age of seven, but not with a teacher until three years later with L. Frantsuzova, who was a student of Russian composer and professor Samuel Maykapar (1867–1938) at the St. Petersburg Conservatory.²

Surprisingly, Kapustin did not receive formal training in composition in his early years. Although he composed his first piano sonata at 13, he comments that it was not a serious work and not related to jazz.³ At 14, Kapustin moved to Moscow to attend the preparatory school affiliated with the renowned Moscow conservatory, under the guidance of Avrelian Rubakh, whom Kapustin considered his first serious piano teacher. “Rubakh taught everything, including technique...he attached great importance to sound quality.”⁴

¹ Jonathan Eugene Roberts, “Classical Jazz: The Life and Musical Innovations of Nikolai Kapustin.” Order No. 3596242, The University of Alabama, 2013. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 24.

² Ruby Wang, “Fusion of Classical Virtuosity and Jazz Techniques in the Etudes of Nikolai Kapustin: ‘Eight Concert Etudes,’ Op. 40, and ‘Five Etudes in Different Intervals,’ Op. 68.” Order No. 3621017, University of South Carolina, 2014. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 6.

³ Wang, “Fusion of Classical,” 7.

⁴ Roberts, “Classical Jazz,” 17.

Four years later, Rubakh introduced Kapustin to the legendary piano pedagogue Alexander Goldenweiser, who had been classmates with Sergei Rachmaninoff and Alexander Scriabin. According to Kapustin, Goldenweiser was very impressed by this young talent. “It was he [Rubakh] who took me to Goldenweiser. I played him the Liszt *Don Giovanni* Fantasy; he liked how I played and asked Rubakh, ‘Where did you find such a pianist?’”⁵

Interestingly, Kapustin recalled that Goldenweiser did not help him very much as a teacher but told him many fascinating stories about famous Russian composers:

He [Goldenweiser] was a very interesting person--he remembered Rachmaninov and Medtner, so it was very interesting to speak with him. But as a teacher he gave nothing, because he was very old...he had known virtually every Russian composer of any stature for decades. He told me...things you will never read in books about these composers. That was the main interest.⁶

While studying in the conservatory as a young man who once dreamed of becoming a classical virtuoso pianist, he discovered that he was captivated by jazz and felt more comfortable with composing rather than public performances.⁷ In fact, when Kapustin heard jazz for the first time, and as soon as he started to play it, he determined that it might be a good idea to blend classical structures and jazz idioms together. He

⁵ Martin Anderson, “Nikolai Kapustin, Russian Composer of Classical Jazz.” *Fanfare - the Magazine for Serious Record Collectors*, 09, 2000. 94.

⁶ Anderson, “Nikolai Kapustin,” 94.

⁷ Susannah Steele, “Nikolai Kapustin’s “Ten Bagatelles”, Op. 59.” Order No. 3568920, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2013. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 8.

shared this thought with his friends, and the positive feedback from them convinced him that he was on the right track.⁸

It was not surprising that Kapustin had such enthusiasm for jazz. Author S. Frederick Starr states in his book, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1980*:

Jazz, with its emphasis on individuality and personal expression, became the *lingua franca* of dissident Soviet youth... a harmonic vocabulary expanded by the introduction of diminished sevenths, flatted fifths, and frequent chord substitutions opened new vistas of mood and coloration.⁹

However, as many can imagine, the political environment was not friendly for any activities associated with jazz under the regime of Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union. No serious composers or players dared to touch jazz works for public purposes. It was forbidden even to use the word “jazz” in print as it was considered by the authorities as Western bourgeois propaganda.¹⁰

The turning point came in the 1950s, thanks to Khrushchev’s so-called liberal period. Musicians and artists were given more freedom for their artistic expression. More jazz ensembles were formed and played jazz music in public.¹¹ It gave Kapustin an opportunity to form a quintet while he was still studying in the conservatory. His group

⁸ Anderson, “Nikolai Kapustin,” 94.

⁹ S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). 242.

¹⁰ Leo Feigin, *Russian Jazz: New Identity* (New York: Quartet Books Limited, 1985). 12.

¹¹ Wendell Logan, *The Development of Jazz in the Former Soviet Union: An Interview with Victor Lebedev*. (Black Music Research Journal 12, no. 2, 1992). 227-32.

played in restaurants for wealthy foreign visitors. It was once recorded by these listeners and broadcast by the Voice of America on the radio.¹²

1957 was a significant year for him as a composer. For the first time, his composition, *Concertino for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 1*, was performed in public at the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students with the composer as soloist.¹³ Moreover, this event was one of the first government-supported jazz events in several decades. It was a positive signal for all jazz-lovers in the Soviet Union.

After graduating in 1961, Kapustin spent the next ten years serving as a pianist and arranger for Oleg Lundstrem's Symphony Orchestra of Light Music, toured with this orchestra's "big band" jazz orchestra throughout the Soviet Union, and mainly composed for the ensemble and big band.¹⁴ From 1972-1977, Kapustin worked for the orchestra "Goludboi Ekran" as a pianist and composer. Then, in 1977-1984, he composed for the National Cinema Symphony before completely withdrawing from public performing and fully devoting himself to composing since then.¹⁵

Kapustin once commented on this work for the orchestra that it was mainly for a stable income rather than a fruitful opportunity as a composer.¹⁶ Kapustin was quite

¹² Akane Megumi Okamoto, *Nicholai Kapustin's Eight Concert Etudes, Op. 40: Reflections on Analysis, Practice, and Performance*. (Order No. 3666110, University of Toronto (Canada), 2013). 8.

¹³ Wang, "Fusion of Classical," 11.

¹⁴ Tatiana Abramova, "The Synthesis of Jazz and Classical Styles in Three Piano Works of Nikolai Kapustin." Order No. 3637360, Temple University, 2014. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 2.

¹⁵ Okamoto, "Nicholai Kapustin's," 19.

¹⁶ Roberts, "Classical Jazz," 22.

happy with his life as a pure composer. “It was a more productive period in my life after I stopped playing with orchestra in 1984 and became completely free as a composer.”¹⁷

There is no surprise that Kapustin’s fame as a non-mainstream composer in the USSR never flourished under the harsh political climate of the 60s and 70s. Fortunately, he had never been troubled by the authorities. Quoting from his own words, “I was entirely free; no problems. My music wasn’t avant-garde.”¹⁸

Kapustin is currently living in Moscow with his wife Alla. Even in his early 80s, he is still composing. There were over 160 opus numbers under his name by 2018.

Overview of Kapustin’s Style and Output

Kapustin uses various classical forms that had been masterfully used by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, and many others. The content of these forms was completely rejuvenated by the American jazz idioms. Somehow, it worked, and it worked surprisingly well. Listeners felt it was refreshing and fascinating to hear something more ear-pleasing than most other contemporary music. Performers likewise felt it was cool to play a sonata or suite with elements of jazz.

Naturally, a musician receiving so much attention is the topic of a great deal of discussion. How should musicians define such a unique composer among his contemporaries? Is he a classical composer, or more of a jazz musician?

¹⁷ Abramova, “The Synthesis,” 3.

¹⁸ Anderson, “Nikolai Kapustin,” 96.

The composer has clarified this issue in his interview with Martin Anderson. “I’m not interested in improvisation...and what is a jazz musician without improvisation?”¹⁹ He did not consider himself as a jazz musician, but a “normal” composer like many others who were also classically trained. In his mind, there is a clear boundary between jazz and classical works. No doubt jazz musicians have more freedom. The same work could sound greatly different depending on the performers’ skill level, mood, or audience. Jazz players are expected to be creative outside of the score. Needless to say, they sometimes only have the lead sheet in front of them.

On the other hand, all the classical works are carefully notated. Performers are expected to faithfully replicate all the musical intentions from the composer. Kapustin put rigorous thought into his writing, as stated:

My improvisation is written, of course, and they became much better; it improved them...My school is the Russian school, but my compositions were taken from American culture. So you can take anything, but you take it into your own tradition.²⁰

Kapustin is proud of coming from the “Russian school,” which has a profound classical tradition and equipped him with all the necessary knowledge for becoming a composer who is capable of writing many genres. Eventually, the fusion of classical forms and jazz idioms was his choice. He has consistently applied this philosophy throughout his entire compositional career. This truly made him stand out among others.

As one of the most prolific composers of his generation, Kapustin’s output has covered almost every classical genre including 20 piano sonatas, six piano concertos,

¹⁹ Anderson, “Nikolai Kapustin,” 96.

²⁰ Ibid.

three works for piano four hands, three works for two pianos, a violin concerto, and two cello concertos. The chamber music includes four piano trios with various instruments, two piano quartets, two string quartets, and a handful of others. There are over 20 works for the big band and/or orchestra. Most of them were composed during the period when the composer was working for the different orchestras before 1984.

After 1984, piano became Kapustin's main focus. His solo piano works generally feature complex rhythm and challenging improvisatory-like jazz passages. They demand pianists who should have extensive pianistic technique and experience with jazz style.

The piano sonata seems to be his favorite genre. The 20 sonatas vary from a single movement to four movements. All of them were composed and published after 1984. Despite the use of jazz idioms, the writing and sound of his sonatas can be associated with such composers as Chopin and Liszt in their extensive use of long melodic passages. The rhythmic excitement and percussive sound achieved by sophisticated use of syncopations, accents, and various articulations, also suggest the style of Prokofiev.²¹

Furthermore, some of Kapustin's output also reflects homage to many influential classical composers' signature works. His *Suite in the Old Style*, Op. 28, contains seven movements, and followed the same sequence of the dance movements as Bach did for his famous suites and partitas. His *Twenty-Four Preludes for Piano*, Op. 53, is a tribute to Chopin's well-known *Twenty-Four Preludes*, Op. 28.

General Jazz Features

²¹ Abramova, "The Synthesis," 4.

To better explain the works which will be discussed in the following chapters, it is necessary to understand some of the most commonly used features of jazz that give Kapustin’s music its unique sound.

I. The ii-V-I Progression

This is the fundamental harmonic progression in jazz. Adapted from classical music, it has a strong tonal emphasis, establishes the key center, and can serve as a tool for modulation. This progression can lead to a circle-of-fifths motion around a key center.²²

The musical score shows a sequence of chords in C major. The first system (measures 9-12) includes C major, G7b9, G9, C7b9, Fmaj9, F6, Bm11, E13, Bb13b5, A13, and A7alt. The second system (measures 13-16) includes D9, D9, Dm7, G7, and C major. The F6, Bm11, E13, A13, and A7alt chords are circled in the original image.

Example 1.1: Gene Rizzo, *Best of Jazz Piano*, “There Is No Greater Love,” music by Isham Jones, arranged by Ahmad Jamal, mm. 9-16.

The circled chords in Example 1.1, F-B-E-A-D(ii)-G(V)-C(I) is a typical chord movement based on the circle of fifths in the key of C major.

²² Randall J. Creighton, “A Man of Two Worlds: Classical and Jazz Influences in Nikolai Kapustin's Twenty-Four Preludes, Op. 53.” ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2009. Web. 37.

II. Syncopation

Syncopation is one of the most distinct rhythmic features in jazz. The misalignment between downbeat and the accent creates an impressive rhythmic intensity, and it often appears in the melody.



The image shows a musical score for the first two measures of "Take the 'A' Train". The music is in 4/4 time and features a syncopated melody in the right hand. The first measure is marked with a "1" and a "Cmaj7" chord. The second measure is marked with an "Am7" chord. The melody in the right hand starts on the downbeat with a quarter note, followed by an eighth note on the second beat, a quarter note on the third beat, and an eighth note on the fourth beat. The bass line in the left hand consists of quarter notes on the downbeat and eighth notes on the second and fourth beats, creating a syncopated accompaniment. The dynamic marking "mf" is present in the first measure.

Example 1.2: Gene Rizzo, *Best of Jazz Piano*, "Take the 'A' Train," music by Billy Strayhorn, arranged by Jimmy Rowles, mm. 1-2.

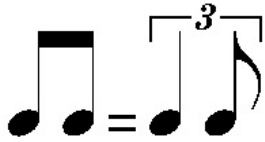
As shown above, the eighth-note /quarter-note /eighth-note pattern can often be heard in African music and has become the most important pattern of syncopations found in jazz.²³

III. Swing Eighths

Beside the syncopation, "swing eighths" is another commonly used rhythmic device in jazz. "[It]...is the subdivision of the beat into thirds...usually thought to be a specific contribution of the Afro-American innovators of early Jazz."²⁴

²³ Henry Martin, *Enjoying Jazz* (New York: Schirmer Books, A Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1986), 30.

²⁴ Martin, *Enjoying Jazz*, 32.

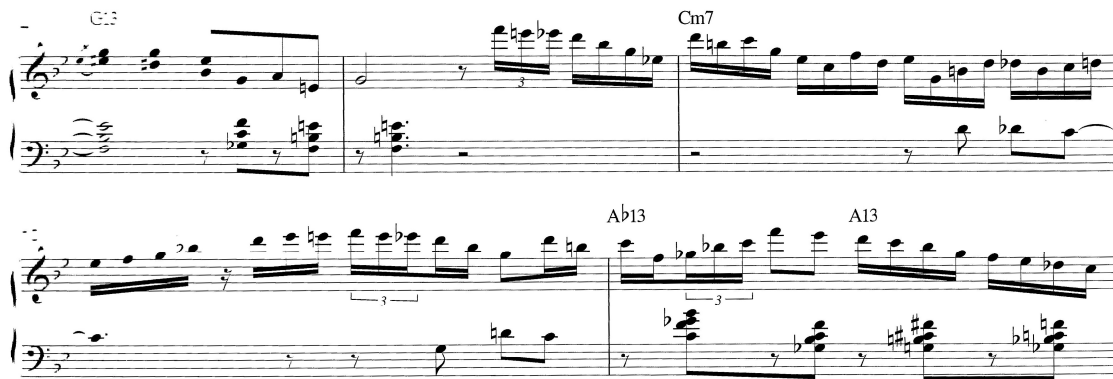


Example 1.3: Standard swing eighths.

The notation for the swing eighths can be written out as shown above or it could be indicated at the beginning of the work that all the duple eighth notes should be interpreted as “swing.”

IV. Triplet with Straight Eighths or Sixteenths

Also appearing mostly in the melody, the pattern of triplets with other straight notes that are rhythmically notated is another important device used extensively in jazz. This creates a momentum.



Example 1.4: Gene Rizzo, *Best of Jazz Piano*, “On A Clear Day,” music by Burton Lane, arranged by Oscar Peterson, mm. 44-48.

V. The Stride

Another typical feature of jazz is “Stride.” It is an accompaniment pattern played by the left hand. A similar device had been commonly used in classic ragtime, but the chords and harmonic progressions were more complex, richer, and fuller than those from classic ragtime.²⁵

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Shoo Fly Shout" by John Valerio, spanning measures 21 to 32. The score is written for piano and is divided into three systems. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major). The first system (measures 21-24) features a bridge section marked with a 'B' in a box. The second system (measures 25-28) and the third system (measures 29-32) contain the main body of the piece. The left hand (bass clef) is characterized by a 'stride' pattern, which is highlighted by ovals in several instances. This pattern typically consists of a single bass note followed by a chord in a mid-range register. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melody with various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Chord symbols such as F, C7, and Ab°7 are placed above the treble staff to indicate the harmonic structure.

Example 1.5: John Valerio, *Stride & Swing*, “Shoo Fly Shout,” mm. 21-32.

The example above shows a typical stride technique where the bass note of the stride is a single note followed by a chord in a mid-range register on the keyboard. In addition, the bass note of the stride can be two notes, octaves, or even tenths as well.

VI. Walking Bass

²⁵ John Valerio, *Stride & Swing Piano* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corp., 2003), 35.

As circled in Example 1.5, the left hand features a walking bass figure. It sounds more distinctive in a jazz ensemble where it is played by a double bass player. When incorporated into the piano, it can be doubled in octaves and other intervals as well. The notes usually move stepwise with a constant rhythm and help contribute pulse, harmony, and counter melody simultaneously.²⁶

VII. Boogie-woogie

Beside the walking bass line, another popular accompaniment figure is known as Boogie-woogie. According to the *Oxford Companion to Music*, boogie-woogie is “characterized by forceful, repeated bass figuration, almost always using the 12-bar format of the blues... it remains an enduring accompaniment style in blues, rock and roll, and rhythm and blues.”²⁷

Example 1.6: John Valerio, *Stride & Swing*, “Boogie Man’s Blues,” mm. 25-32.

²⁶ Gunther Schuller, “Walking bass (jazz).” *Grove Music Online*. 9 Feb. 2018. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-2000470600>.

²⁷ Peter Gammond, “boogie-woogie.” In *The Oxford Companion to Music*. : Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780199579037.001.0001/acref-9780199579037-e-888>.

Example 1.6 shows a classic boogie-woogie style in the left hand based on the standard blues progression. The example below shows how Kapustin adapted this style in his own compositions.



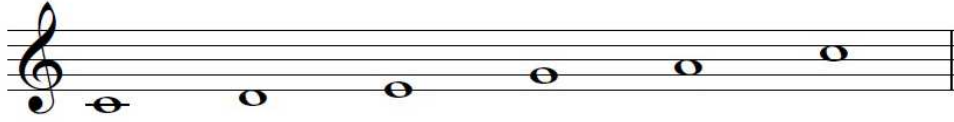
Example 1.7: Nikolai Kapustin, *Etude "Raillery"*, Op. 40, No. 5, mm. 5-9.

In this excerpt, the left hand preserves the steady and repetitive feature of boogie-woogie, but Kapustin has been more aggressive by using larger intervals, such as the tritone and augmented 5th, to make it sound more intense and virtuosic.

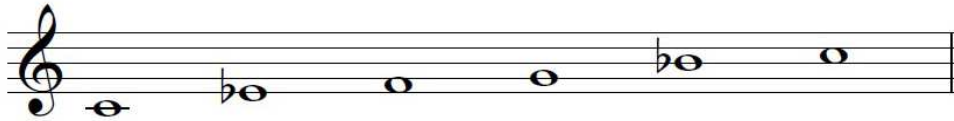
VIII. Pentatonic and Blues Scales

Among all the scales used in jazz (including diatonic major, minor, modes, and chromatic scales), pentatonic and blues scales are the easiest to be recognized. The major pentatonic scale contains five notes based on the scales degrees of 1-2-3-5-6, and the minor one is 1-3b-4-5-7b.

C major pentatonic scale



C minor pentatonic scale



Example 1.8: Major and minor pentatonic scales on C.

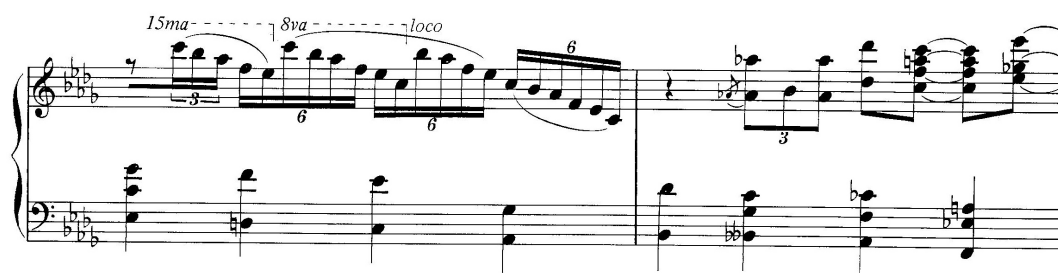
In fact, the blues scale is based on the minor pentatonic scale where it adds 4#/5b to the scale as shown below.

C blues scale



Example 1.9: Blues scale.

For many jazz artists, the blues scale also provides very important improvising material. Art Tatum is the one who has been especially in favor of using the pentatonic scale for his flashy passages.



Example 1.10: Fats Waller, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, Arranged by Art Tatum, mm. 42-43.

The example shows a clear Ab pentatonic scale and is used as a show-off device that rapidly flashes down from the highest C to the middle with a stretched walking bass.

IX. Quartal and Quintal Harmony

Simply stated, quartal and quintal harmony is a harmonic device constructed by the interval of a 4th or 5th in any form. They more frequently appear as block chords. Traditionally, it is considered as unorthodox to use these kinds of chords due to the nature of their non-functional dissonance and difficulty in achieving a smooth resolution. However, the interesting harmonic color and sonority they can provide have drawn the attention of jazz musicians. In the 1960s, jazz pianists, such as McCoy Tyner, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, and many others, included these chords more often in their works.²⁸ The excerpt below is a perfect example to illustrate how Art Tatum uses quartal and quintal chords in his piano arrangements. The harmonies in virtually every measure are constructed of perfect 4ths, perfect 5ths, and tritones.

²⁸ Creighton, "A Man," 64.

Example 1.11: Will Hudson, *Moonglow*, Arranged by Art Tatum, mm. 135-140.

Summary

The elements above are certainly not a full list that comprehensively depicts the essence of jazz style. However, they are among the most popular jazz devices that have been repeatedly observed in Kapustin's earlier works. This gives an expectation for everyone to imagine if Kapustin would continue to utilize his established compositional language or seek a new direction. Therefore, the next chapters are going to find the answer by taking a close look at his latest solo piano works.

CHAPTER TWO

SIX LITTLE PIECES, OP. 133

This set was composed in 2007. In comparison to Kapustin's piano output before, this is the first time he uses such a small scale and this kind of title for his piano solo works. Sonatas, preludes, and etudes are among the most common categories in his previous works. He had composed 20 piano sonatas already in addition to some of his most famous pieces such as *Variations*, Op. 41 (1984), *Twenty-Four Preludes*, Op. 53 (1988), *Ten Bagatelles*, Op. 59 (1991). These titles not only exposed Kapustin's musical ambition, that of composing large-scale works to be compared to famous music from earlier composers, but also his intention to blend his own unique compositional language into these classical forms.

Needless to say, his virtuosic piano writing can be found in the majority of this output. However, for the *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, Kapustin did something different: Presumably, they are not too technically challenging and can be played by someone with small hands, perhaps even a child (the intervals in both hands do not exceed an octave).²⁹

This chapter will give some brief analysis of each little piece. More importantly, a practical performance guide will be provided to help more efficiently learn this set.

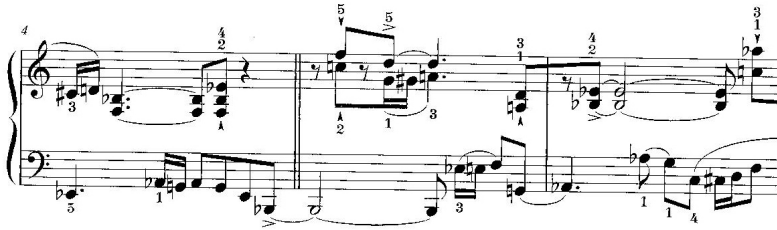
No. 1 Allegro Moderato

Structure

All the preludes show a very clear structure scheme. Kapustin intentionally wrote a double bar between the sections. This helps performers quickly locate the sections and

²⁹ Nikolai Kapustin, "Six Little Pieces, Op. 133." edited by Nikolai Kapustin. Tokyo: Yamaha Music Media Corp., Pg. 2, 2012.

makes it easier to determine his musical intention in each section. Kapustin has been consistently using similar notation for all his piano works. (Example 2.1.1)



Example 2.1.1: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No.1, mm. 4-6.

Obviously, Kapustin did not divide the sections based on the length of the section.

The tonal center and material devices seem to be the main concerns here.

Section	Measures	Comments
A	1-4 mm. 4 Bars	Introduce the main motive, set the key center
A ₁	5-8 mm. 4 bars	Variation of Section A, identical bass progression
B	9-24 mm. 16 bars	The main section with developed materials
C	25-40 mm. 16 bars	Many improvisational passages
B ₁	41-61 mm. 21 bars	Extended section based on B section, recalls the rhythmic pattern from A

Table 2.1.1: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 1 form.

Compositional characteristics

Laying out the sections clearly shows Kapustin has a clear idea of what the structure should be for this piece. Although Kapustin did not provide a key signature for

any of these six little pieces, each piece is certainly built around a tonal center. For each section in the first piece, it always starts with a tonal center of Bb.

The first four bars introduce the main motive and essential rhythmic pattern for this piece.



Example 2.1.2: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No.1, mm. 1-2.

The motive Bb-F-C-Bb in the opening bar is the main material that the composer uses to develop this piece. This four-note motive features an anacrusis of three short notes plus a long note on the heavy beat. Kapustin either alters the direction of the motive or changes the intervals of the notes in other sections. He does not change the rhythmic setting of the motive, achieving a consistency of the mood and characteristics of the piece.

The opening bar also immediately brings out a jazzy flavor by the highly syncopated pattern on the right hand. As matter of fact, Kapustin keeps this pattern in the right hand mostly throughout the piece. The left hand deals more with the main motive and with its variants.

At the section B, Kapustin clearly constructs the theme materials in the right hand by using quartal chords. It is a common device found in jazz compositions. The melodic material in the right hand in m. 13 is a sequence of parallel fourths, which is usually

forbidden in classical music but commonly used in contemporary works.

A musical score for piano, measures 11-13. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The music features a complex texture with many triplets and slurs. The right hand has a melodic line with triplets and slurs, while the left hand has a more rhythmic accompaniment with triplets and slurs. Fingering numbers (1-5) are indicated throughout.

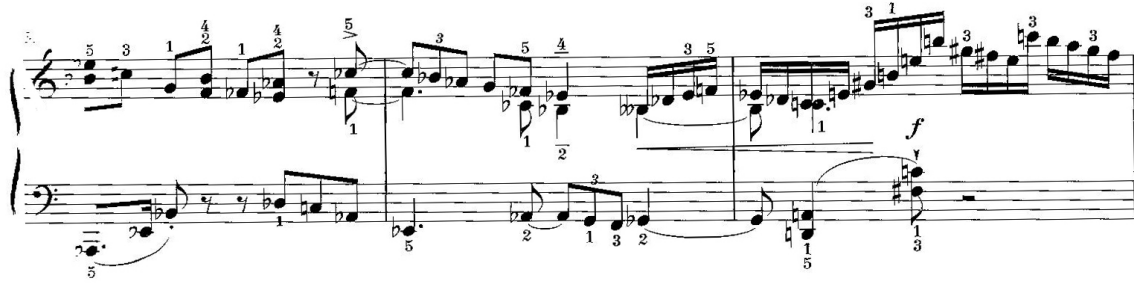
Example 2.1.3: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No.1, mm. 11-13.

Seen in the example 2.1.4, the triplets are frequently used to create a triple vs. duple rhythmic tension. Furthermore, the constant absence of the middle note of the triplets obviously brings out a flavor of the jazz swing feel.

A musical score for piano, measures 21-23. The key signature has two flats. The music is characterized by a high density of triplets and slurs, creating a complex texture. The right hand has a melodic line with many triplets and slurs, while the left hand has a more rhythmic accompaniment with triplets and slurs. Fingering numbers (1-5) are indicated throughout.

Example 2.1.4: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No.1, mm. 21-23.

In section C, the textures of materials become thicker and more complex. One noticeable feature is more use of sixteenth notes that often results in an improvisatory-like flourish.



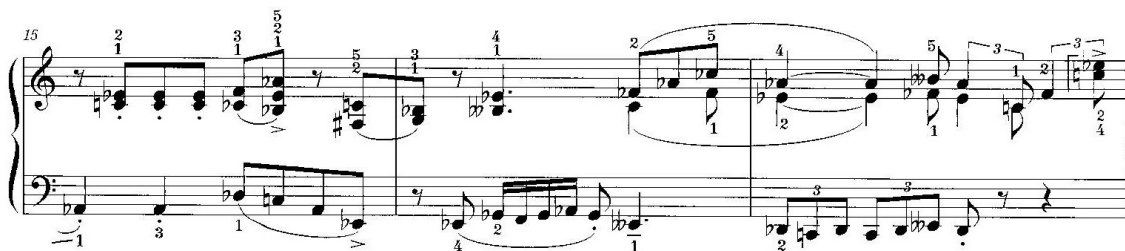
Example 2.1.5: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No.1, mm. 30-32.

Interpretation

From the opening bar, this immediately gives the performer and listeners an easy-going and lazy feeling, because of the simplicity of the texture and lighthearted syncopated effects on the right hand. Thus, the tempo should not be too fast. Following the composer's tempo suggestion is always a good idea.

Metronome use is highly recommended during practice. The B section, in particular measures 21-22 (Example 2.1.4), is where the real challenge is. The quarter-note triplets in the right hand are difficult to line up with the eight-note triplets on the left hand.

Moreover, the performer also needs to pay attention to slur and phrase markings on the score. Not only do they indicate the musical direction, they also imply the different articulations for performers to execute.



Example 2.1.6: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No.1, mm. 15-17.

In m. 17, the triplet has no phrase marking, which suggests that the performer should play them in a non-legato fashion. In opposition to this the right hand has a clear phrase between mm. 16 and 17, which suggests to play legato.

To successfully perform this piece, the performer also needs to carefully study Kapustin's notation of accent. It is a key element to create the rhythmic tension, dynamic colors, and musical flavors.

In general, a performer needs to differentiate four different articulations which indicate different length of the notes and the dynamic of the notes.

The most common one is the standard accent mark ">". Kapustin had habitually used it on the off-beat or the last note of the measure. It is his important tool to raise the rhythmic intensity of the syncopation.



Example 2.1.7: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No.1, mm. 52-54.

Also found in the same example above, the first note has a *staccatissimo* “v” mark which indicates that the note should be played shorter and softer than the next note with “>”.

In mm. 21-22, shown in Example 2.1.4, all four articulation markings have been presented in these two measures. Besides *staccatissimo* and *accent, tenuto* “-” and *staccato* “·” can be found in m. 19. To implement all four articulations at the same time is not a simple task. In order to execute them precisely, performers need a fair amount of physical practice to build up a reliable muscle memory and be mentally ready when getting to this section.

For the convenience of students, the table below outlines the general difference the dynamic and length of each marking indicated:

Length: (Longest first)	--	>	·	▼
Volume: (Loudest first)	>	▼	--	·

Table 2.1.2: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No.1 articulation markings.

No. 2 Comodo

Structure

Unlike the first piece, there is no short introductory section to bring in the main motive and thematic materials. The structure is very clear; it is built on three sections in A-B-A song form.

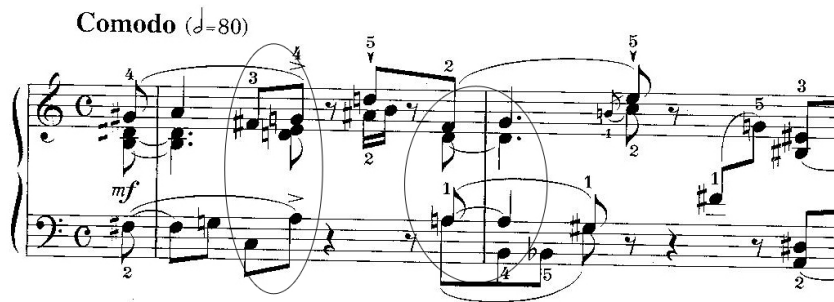
Section	Measures	Comments
A	1-20 mm. 20 Bars	There are two parts. Each part begins with the same motive. Tonal emphasis on G
B	21-44 mm. 24 bars	Highly developed section with more intense rhythmic figures. Starts in C
A	45-56 mm. 12 bars	Starts with the main motive which recalls the A section, finish in C.

Table 2.2.1: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 2 form.

The last part is the shortest section with the identical materials from the A section. However, the length is shortened by not repeating the first part as the A section did.

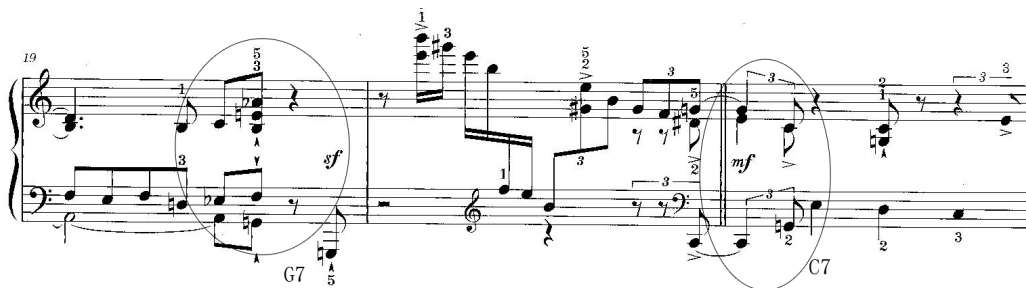
Compositional characteristics

The tonal emphasis is definitely blurred compared to the first piece. The harmonies tend to develop more freely as the melodic materials are running much more chromatically.



Example 2.2.1: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 2, mm. 1-2.

The first two measures exhibit a tonal center of G. The second measure shows a clear D to G progression with the G very pronounced. The end of the A section also shows a very strong tonal implication of G which becomes the dominant of C that Kapustin uses it as the tonal center of the B section.



Example 2.2.2: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 2, mm. 20-21.

The recapitulation shows an uncertainty of a tonal center, but the ending clearly reinforces the importance of C by using a C9 chord to close out the whole piece.

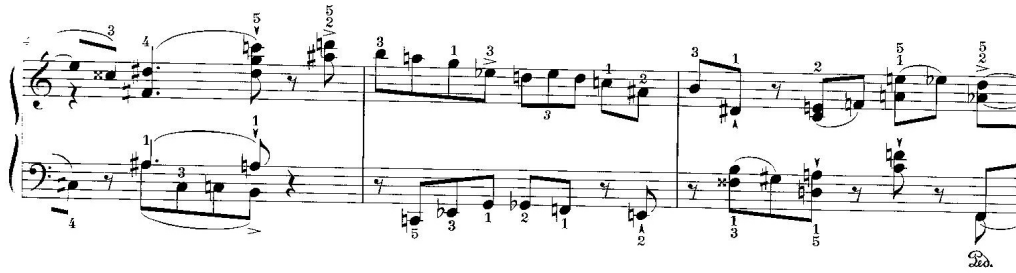
Example 2.2.3: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 2, mm. 55-56.

Generally, the feeling of the piece is much different from the first one. The rhythmic figures and faster tempo display more energy. The cut time ($\text{♩} = 80$) certainly indicates a faster tempo and higher energy level than the first one.

The tempo mark “Comodo” is defined by Grove Music Online as “A word used both as a tempo designation in its own right and as a qualification to other tempo marks... there is nowhere else any apparent suggestion of *comodo* being anything but a fluent and agreeably fast tempo.”³⁰

Another element to make this piece more intense is the constant eighth notes which have fewer rests than the first piece. In addition, as shown in example (Example 2.2.3), Kapustin uses the double-note technique extensively to add more resonance and rhythmic emphasis to the quick running melodic line.

³⁰ David Fallows, “Comodo.” *Grove Music Online*. 8 Feb. 2018. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000006200>.



Example 2.2.4: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 2, mm. 4-6.

Also, the texture of both hands seems evenly matched. The eighth-note passages are the main figure for both hands. The B section is where the materials become flashier with a combination of swift triplets and sixteenth notes.



Example 2.2.5: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 2, mm. 34-38.

Interpretation

The performer needs to always keep in mind that “Comodo” is not “Allegro.” It is very helpful to use the metronome when beginning work on it even in a slow tempo.

Although the tempo marking suggests cut time, it is not a bad idea to subdivide the beat

to keep the beat as precise as possible. The m. 37 (shown in Example 2.2.5) is the most confusing place in terms of counting. After carefully analyzing the rhythmic structure of the measure, performers can read the triplets in the right hand as one extended triplet so that it can line up easily with the left hand.

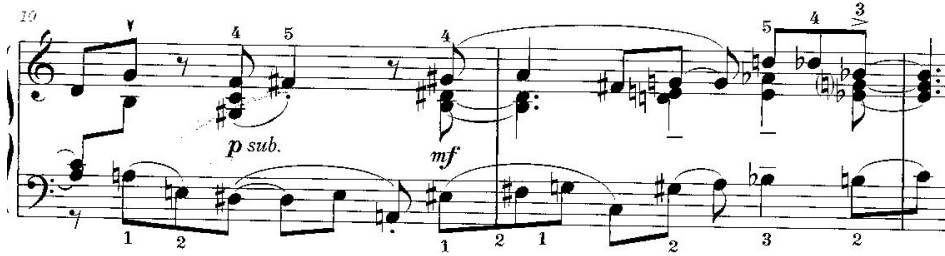
In terms of dynamics, m.16 is the only place marked *f* and there is one *sf* found in m. 19. In other places, *mf* is the most commonly used dynamic marking in this piece. This tells performers that there is not much drama going on in the piece and the dynamic level should be well controlled.

Performers also need to pay attention to the voicing in this piece. As mentioned earlier, Kapustin is very particular about the articulations. The tenuto and accent often appear in the inner voices.

The image shows a musical score for two staves, treble and bass clef, covering measures 26 and 27. Measure 26 begins with a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble staff contains a triplet of eighth notes (F#, G, A) with an accent under the F# and a tenuto under the A. The bass staff contains a triplet of eighth notes (G, F#, E) with a tenuto under the E. Measure 27 continues with similar triplet patterns in both hands. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/8.

Example 2.2.6: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 2, mm. 26-27.

As seen in m. 26, Kapustin puts an accent under F# and D in the right hand so that the performer is required to play them louder than the upper notes. A similar situation also can be found in the example below. The tenuto in m. 11 was placed in the inner voice. It acts as a reminder that the performer needs to keep the inner voices longer than the upper notes.



Example 2.2.7: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 2, mm. 10-11.

No.3 Allegretto

Structure

The three sections are divided very clearly by Kapustin. However, the much shorter length of the C section and the materials presented in this section give the impression that we might better call it a *coda*. The A and B sections share closely related harmonies and textures.

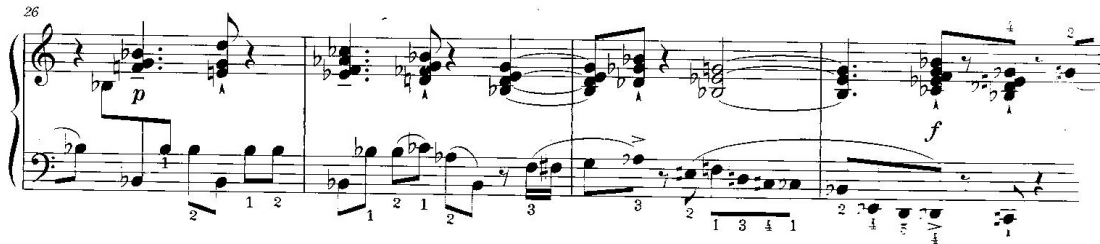
Section	Measures	Comments
A	1-29 mm. 29 bars	The longest section with a relatively stable tonal center in Eb.
B	30-48 mm. 19 bars	Materials are developed from the motive introduced in the A section
C	49-61 mm. 13 bars	Coda like section with a new accompaniment pattern. Key settles in Eb

Table 2.3.1: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 3, form.

Compositional characteristics

The example below shows there is a strong tonal structure from the beginning. This tonal implication creates a very accessible listening atmosphere throughout the piece.

Another notable feature of this piece is the musical patterns are very chromatic. This characteristic not only appears in the single-note melodic passages, but also happens in chord voicing.



Example 2.3.3: *Six Little Pieces No.3*, mm. 26-29.

This example typically shows the single melodic line in the left hand is highly chromatic. At the same time, the voices of the chords in the right hand are also moving chromatically.

Interpretation

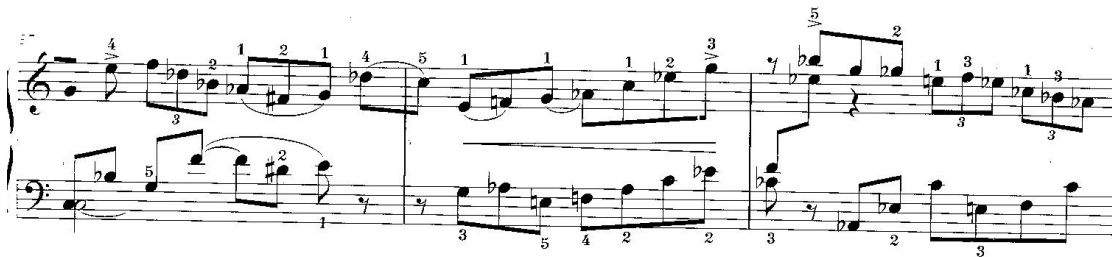
The tempo marking “Allegretto” suggests that performer should keep this piece flowing with a reserved speed. It is technically not as challenging as the previous piece. Since the texture is thinner and there are no showy sixteenth note passages, it is very easy to play it too fast. Performers need to pursue clarity of sound instead of the speed. It is also not a dramatic piece and the dynamic range is mostly under *mf*. Thus, keeping a gentle and lighter touch is highly recommended to preserve the composer’s musical intention.

In fact, the most uncertain interpretation issue for performers is how to articulate for the eighth notes without “slur” on them. According to his interpretation on some of

his earlier pieces, the answer is, yes, the eighth notes need to be all detached but not as short and crisp as *staccato*.



Example 2.3.4: Nikolai Kapustin, *Etude "Raillery,"* Op. 40, No. 5, mm. 9-11.

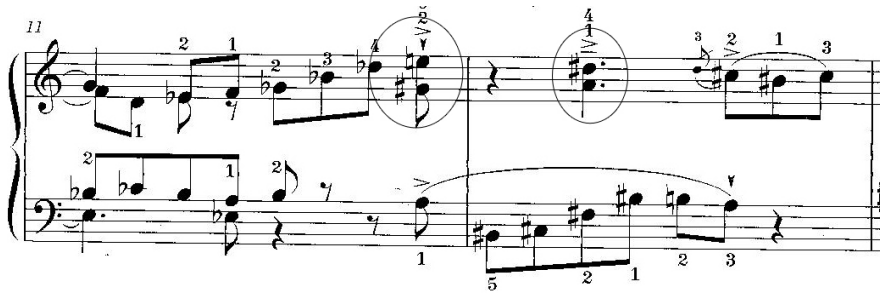


Example 2.3.5: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 3, mm. 37-39.

In his own recording of the *Eight Concert Etudes*, Op. 40, he has clearly demonstrated an authentic execution for the similar texture that is close to *Six Little Pieces No. 3*. All the eighth notes in the left hand (example 2.3.4) are played in a detached way without being overly short³¹. Therefore, this is a great reference for interpreting the similar figures found in the *Six Little Pieces No. 3* (see example 2.3.5).

Furthermore, Kapustin has extended the ways to exercise his uses of articulation signs. In other words, he is very specific about the way the performer should play his music.

³¹ Kapustin, Nicolai. "Eight Concert Etudes, Op 40." Filmed Dec. 2014. YouTube video, 22:26. Posted Dec. 2014. <https://youtu.be/116QHk9jNGI>.



Example 2.3.6: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 3, mm. 11-12.

Seen in the example above, the last chord in m. 11 has both *accent* and *staccatissimo* on it. In the next measure, the first chord has both *accent* and *tenuto* on it. As mentioned earlier in Table 2.1.2, the *staccatissimo* means a much shorter touch than *tenuto*. Interestingly, there is no need to add these markings on these chords because the m.11 chord is an eighth note in comparison to the much longer dotted quarter note chord. But, why does Kapustin implement this? This actually shows Kapustin’s precision of his musical intention. When playing an accent, a common mistake that performers make is playing accented notes too short due to the fast touch for the accent. Kapustin here tries to remind performers that the chords have different lengths although both of them are accented.

No. 4 Larghetto

Structure

Being the only slow piece in this set, the No. 4 Larghetto feels special from beginning to the end. Kapustin divides it into four sections. Each section features different melodic ideas and accompanying figures, but they also have some internal connections such as the tonal implications and similar musical patterns.

Section	Measures	Comments
A	1-10 mm. 10 bars	Ab pedal point throughout the section. Highly chromatic musical figures
B	11-19 mm. 9 bars	Ear pleasing melody, strong tonality in G minor, large use of quartal chords
A ₁	20-27 mm. 8 bars	Shares similar passages from the A section. Pedal point in the left hand.
C	28-42 mm. 15 bars	Recalls the introductory materials from the A section at the end

Table 2.4.1: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 4 form.

Compositional characteristics

The opening of this piece has already featured several elements worth noting. In the first three measures, the left hand has an identical pedal point on Ab. On top of that, there is a repetitive device featuring an F-Fb-Eb descending pattern. The right hand also features a series of repetitive chords Gb-Cb-Db and all these voices move chromatically to G-Bb-D. All three features together ambiguously create a color of Ab minor tonality, but also feel highly unstable.

Example 2.4.1: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 4, mm. 1-3.

Sostenuto e pesante (♩=84)

(col Ess.)

Example 2.4.2: Bela Bartok, *Piano Sonata SZ 80*, 2nd movement mm. 1-5.

As a matter of fact, the atmosphere of the beginning recalls the opening of the second movement of the piano sonata by Bela Bartok. Although the materials of Kapustin's piece are more decorated by the chromatic figures, the fundamental ideas of both pieces are very similar. Both hands feature repetitive patterns to create a gloomy and dark image.

When getting to the B section, the darkness is gone. The uplifting tonal melody on the right hand truly brings a pleasant change to listeners and performers.

Example 2.4.3: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 4, mm. 9-14.

Also seen in this section, the rhythmic pattern of accompaniment on the left hand is consistent. The quartal chords are commonly used in both hands.

The transition to the C section is straightforward. The last chord G-D of the B section recalls the key center of this section. Without any break, the chord directly moves one half-step to Ab-Eb, which echoes the tonality of the A section (see Example 2.4.4).

Example 2.4.4: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 4, mm. 18-26.

In the next section, Kapustin borrows the materials and rhythmic figures from the A section. But the tonality starts to shift around in this section. Also, the time signature begins to change every few measures as seen in the example above. All these details bring out a feeling of uncertainty of this section.

The last section certainly comes back to the main idea of the A section. The atmosphere becomes cloudy again. The patterns of the left hand are identical with the beginning of the piece. The tonality gradually comes back to the original Ab minor, which is reinforced at the end.

Example 2.4.5: Kapustin, *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 4, mm. 37-42.

Interpretation

Grove Music Online defines the tempo mark *Larghetto* as “a rather more lighthearted *largo*.”³² Thus, performers should always keep in mind that *Larghetto* is not simply a tempo mark but also has mood and sentiment involved.

As a slow piece, the texture is thicker and more complex than the others. It is the performer’s burden to discover which voice is the most interesting aspect to bring out. For instance, although the dynamic of the opening is *p*, the bass Ab still needs to be emphasized since it plays an important role as the pedal point to stabilize a tonal center.

³² David Fallows, “Larghetto.” *Grove Music Online*. 8 Feb. 2018.
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000016031>.

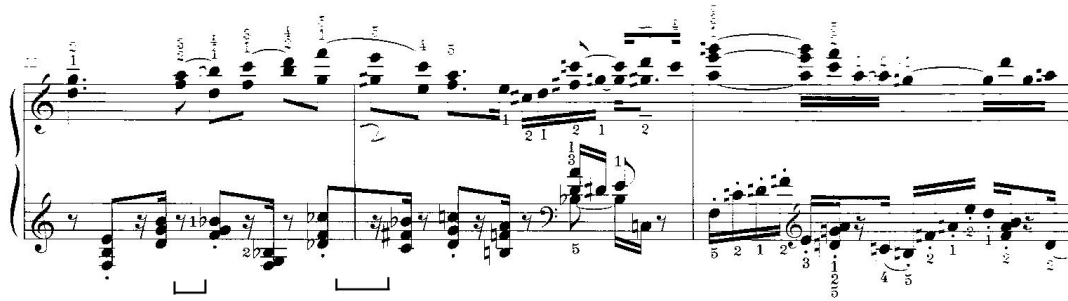
More importantly, keeping the tempo steady is another goal for performers to achieve. Performers need to keep in mind that this is not a romantic piece. Excessive *rubato* will not help bring out the beauty of the phrases and colors of the harmonies, but the precise tempo, perfect execution of dynamics, and faithful touch of different articulations will definitely do so.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with a 4/4 time signature. The music features intricate rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth notes and triplets. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes. The second system continues the piece, showing a change in dynamics to *p* (piano) and further complex rhythmic structures. The notation includes various articulations and dynamic markings throughout.

Example 2.4.6: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 4, mm. 7-11.

Example 2.4.6 is a perfect example to show how Kapustin builds up tension by using different rhythmic patterns. There are many irregular subdivisions on sixteenth notes and triplets as well. Performers need to read the score very carefully to find out where the actual beats are in 4/4.

As mentioned earlier, the B section has a charming tonal melody. The key element to preserve the beauty of this section to perfectly implement all the notations made on the score.



Example 2.4.7: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 4, mm. 12-14.

The measure 12 shown in the example 2.4.7 is probably the most uncomfortable place to work on. The short slur on the right hand always starts on an off-beat. Meanwhile, it is very challenging for the left hand to execute the articulations precisely without the distraction from the right hand. Performers can add a few short pedals to help the shaping of the phrase, but it must be in a very delicate way as shown in the score (Example 2.4.7).

An interesting aspect found in the last section is there are not any dynamic indications. There is one *pp* mark right before the last section as shown below.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piano piece. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system begins at measure 27 and includes a *pp* dynamic marking. The second system starts at measure 31. The third system starts at measure 34. The notation includes various musical symbols such as slurs, ties, and fingering numbers (1-5) above and below notes. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4.

Example 2.4.8: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 4, mm. 27-36.

The example shows that Kapustin wrote three comparable phrases. Without a doubt, there should be some dynamic variety in and between the phrases. Since this movement feels quiet and slow in general, keeping the peak dynamic at *mf* is certainly a safe choice.

The ending comes back to the musical idea of the opening. The world becomes quiet again. (See Example 2.4.5)

No. 5 Allegro Scherzando

Structure

The fifth piece becomes more virtuosic and the length is extended as well. Three sections A-B-A with much more complex details can be easily observed. The last section mainly recapitulates materials from the A section with an epic ending, as quoted from Kapustin’s own words, “the 5th prelude resembles a jazz waltz, but the episode in the middle starts out in 7/8 time, then switches to 6/8, goes back to 7/8, and concludes in 9/8. This episode is followed by a recapitulation, where the quasi-waltz is restored.”³³

Section	Measures	Comments
A	1-25 mm. 25 bars	Tonal center in C. Materials are developed from a two-note motive.
B	26-60 mm. 35 bars	Featuring metric modulations. The time signature includes 7/8, 6/8, 7/8, 9/8, 3/4
A	61-100 mm. 40 bars	A recapitulation with a climax at the ending.

Table 2.5.1: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 5 form.

Compositional characteristics

This jazz waltz starts in 3/4 time. The tempo mark *Allegro scherzando* indicates that it is not a laidback waltz dance but rather intense. The main motive can be found in the first three measures.

³³ Kapustin, “Six Little,” 2.

Allegro scherzando (♩=66)

Example 2.5.1: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 5, mm. 1-12.

Simply enough, the motive has only two notes in an upward setting which has been repeated three times in both hands in the first three measures. Then, the majority of the developed materials afterward have preserved the same upward direction of the motive as seen in Example 2.5.1.

The rhythmic figures in general are more fluent than the previous pieces after the opening. The swift eighth notes and triplets run alternatively in both hands to create a non-stop melodic line.

The opening three measures display a very strong tonal center of C major. However, the harmonies start to shuffle around and feel unsettled. One distinct feature in

the A section is the use of whole tone intervals. They can be found often in the sequence (Example 2.5.2).



Example 2.5.2: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 5, mm. 13-20.

The beginning of the B section shows strong tonal emphasis on Bb. This is by far the most rhythmically complex episode which features “Metric Modulation.” This technique was first introduced by composer Elliott Carter in his *Cello Sonata* (1948). A new tempo is established from development of a cross-rhythm within the old tempo.³⁴

The first part of the B section starts in 7/8. The length of the eighth doesn’t change from the eighth note of $\frac{3}{4}$ in the A section. The left hand features a constant syncopated accompaniment throughout this part. The ragged rhythmic pattern creates a tremendous energy and builds up very enjoyable excitement leading to the next part in 6/8.

³⁴ “Carter, Elliott.” *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. rev. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed October 30, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e1881>.

Example 2.5.3: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 5, mm. 25-32.

In the second part of the B section, the meter is changed from 7/8 to 6/8. It features two phrases with a big ascending and descending line. The mismatch between the right hand triplets and the left hand eighth note creates such strong rhythmic intensity.

In m. 48, the meter comes back to 7/8. The rhythm becomes even more complicated. There are three layers featuring different rhythmic figures.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piano piece. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system shows a treble staff with eighth-note patterns and a bass staff with a similar eighth-note pattern. The second system features more complex rhythmic structures, including syncopated notes and fingerings like '1 5' and '3 2 1 2 1'. The third system continues with intricate rhythmic patterns, including triplets and syncopated rhythms, with fingerings such as '3 1 2 1 2 3' and '2 1 2 3'.

Example 2.5.4: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 5, mm. 45-56.

Seen in the example, the right hand contains two independent lines. One is ongoing eighth notes in the middle layer, and another is irregular syncopation with an extended syncopated note due to the nature of 7/8. The left hand has a swing like pattern which intentionally aims to mismatch the upper layers.

The last part of this section from mm. 55-60 is in 9/8. Basically, it is a fight between the right hand (the eighth triplets), and the left hand (the duple eighth notes.) The sound effect is very rhythmically intriguing but very difficult to play.

This musical score for Example 2.5.5 consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The music features intricate rhythmic patterns with numerous fingerings indicated by numbers 1-5. A fermata is placed over a measure in the upper staff, and a dynamic marking of *mf* is present at the beginning.

Example 2.5.5: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 5, mm. 57-60.

The meter comes back to 3/4 in the recapitulation. Starting from m. 81, Kapustin used double-note trill like figures to enhance the intensity and reach a climactic point for the whole piece. A similar figure can also be found in his early work serving the same purpose. (Example 2.5.7)

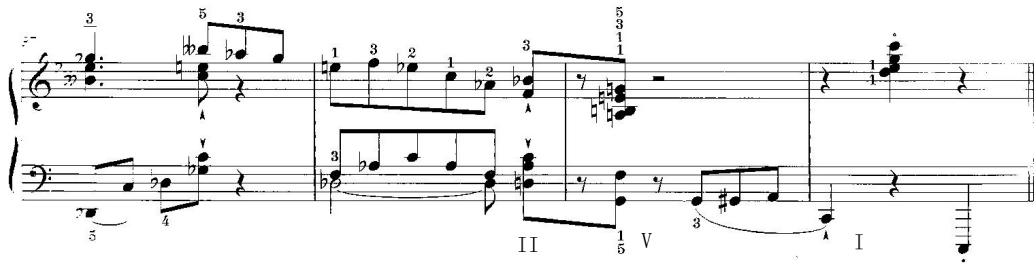
This musical score for Example 2.5.6 shows two staves. The upper staff features a series of double-note trills, with a large oval encompassing a section of these trills. A fermata is placed over the final measure of this section. The lower staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. A dynamic marking of *mf* is visible.

Example 2.5.6: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 5, mm. 81-84.

This musical score for Example 2.5.7 consists of two staves. The upper staff contains a double-note trill figure, with a large oval highlighting a section of it. A fermata is placed over the beginning of this section. The lower staff features a complex rhythmic accompaniment. A dynamic marking of *sfp* is present.

Example 2.5.7: Nikolai Kapustin, *Etude "Pastoral,"* Op. 40, No. 6, mm. 55-56.

The whole piece is concluded in C major. The very playful ending follows a clear II-V-I progression.



Example 2.5.8: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 5, mm. 97-100.

Interpretation

In general, this one is still a lighthearted little piece. The tempo mark *Allegro scherzando* demands a gentle touch and steadiness of the speed throughout. Like the interpretation mentioned in the piece No. 3, all the eighth notes without slurs should be played in a detached fashion.

Kapustin gives only two dynamic indications for the whole piece. They all appear in the first four measures. They act like a reminder for performers that the general dynamic of this piece should be well controlled. On the other hand, it leaves relatively more freedom for performers to express more of their own thoughts about this music.

For the A section, the range of the notes is quite narrow, and there is no big hand stretch. Thus, keeping dynamic up to *mf* is not a bad choice.

In the B section, the situation has totally changed. The syncopated accompanying pattern truly brings in the excitement and rhythmic intensity (Example 2.5.3). This pattern continues until the next time change. Therefore, increasing the dynamic to *f* is necessary.

In mm. 40-47, the time signature is changed to 6/8. However, performers need to avoid counting in six but need to count in two instead. It will make counting the measure 42 so much easier.

The notation and counting become puzzling in mm. 59-60. It will help a lot for reading if performers can analyze and mark where the main beats are. (Example 2.5.5)

Kapustin did not give pedal suggestions in this piece. However, in the last section, there are some places where the pedal is certainly helpful. For instance, mm. 81-84 (Example 2.5.6) are in need of a pedal to keep the dotted half note chord sustained.

The image shows a musical score for Example 2.5.9, consisting of two staves: a treble clef staff (piano) and a bass clef staff (bass). The score is in 6/8 time and spans four measures. The piano part features a melodic line with various fingerings (1-5) and articulation marks. The bass part features a dotted half note chord in the first measure, which is sustained by a pedal mark (a 'y' with a vertical line) that extends through the second and third measures. The bass line continues with eighth notes and rests. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Example 2.5.9: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 5, mm. 85-88.

In the example above, the given pedal is where performers should have the liberty to use the pedals to sustain the bass while the hand is moving distantly.

The whole piece ends dramatically after a gradual building up since m. 81. Therefore, a vigorous dynamic should be implemented at the end.

No. 6 Allegro non troppo

Structure

Finally, as Kapustin has claimed himself, the last is the hardest one in this set in terms of speed, length, voicing of the textures, and articulations.³⁵ Surprisingly, it has been equally divided into two big sections according to Kapustin’s own notation. After a quick analysis, there are two subdivisions that can be found.

Section	Measures	Comments
A	1-37 mm. 37 bars	Three main parts, each part starts with the four-measure main theme. Part 1, mm. 1-8, key center in F; Part 2, mm. 9-24; Db is more pronounced; Part 3, 25-37, highly chromatic patterns.
B	38-80 mm. 43 bars	Materials developed based on the main theme. The rhythmic patterns are identical but highly modified intervals and textures. Closing episode starts in m. 61, a virtuosic ending with a reinforced key of F.

Table 2.6.1: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 6 form.

Compositional characteristics

This piece starts with a four-measure long theme which becomes the main material for developing this piece. It has a feature of dialogue-like quality between both hands. The motive in the right hand is immediately answered by the left hand.

³⁵ Kapustin, “Six Little,” 2.

Allegro non troppo (♩=92)

Example 2.6.1: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 6, mm.1-6.

Also, the “answers” in the left seem much more chromatic than the “questions” in the right hand. The rhythm is highly syncopated. Interestingly, the downbeats of the theme all are rests in the first four measures, and the last eighth note of each measure is accented.

The main theme reappears two times in the A section. The materials in between clearly inherit the rhythmic flavors from the main theme. The motion of these developed materials always follows a pattern of up and down as shown in Example 2.6.2.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system, starting at measure 13, shows a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a rhythmic accompaniment. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5, and articulations like accents and slurs are present. The second system, starting at measure 16, continues the piece with similar notation, including more complex fingering patterns and articulations. The music is in a minor key, as indicated by the key signature.

Example 2.6.2: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 6, mm.13-18.

In the B section, while still preserving the rhythmic characteristic from the main theme, the most appealing element found is that Kapustin, for the first time in this set, employs a style of “stride” accompaniment.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piano piece. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system (measures 54-56) shows a right-hand melody with accents and a left-hand accompaniment. The second system (measures 57-59) features a circled section in the right hand with a 'y' marking above it. The third system (measures 60-63) includes a circled section in the right hand and a 'p' dynamic marking in the left hand.

Example 2.6.3: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 6, mm.54-63.

In m. 62, in addition to the use of stride, the right hand was given the accents on the offbeat to create a rhythmically intense “raggy” feel. Also shown in the example, the quartal voicing is frequently adapted in this section.

To conclude the whole set, a dramatic ending is expected. The buildup begins in m. 74 where the left hand starts to agitate.

Example 2.6.4: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 6, mm.74-81.

Looking at the score above, the left hand features a repetitive pattern of three chromatic notes which shifts up and down in a distance of a fifth to gradually build up the tension. In fact, this setting has some characteristics of a walking bass but is intensified by the chromatic figures, quick shifting between different registers, and fast speed.

Although all the texture seems highly chromatic and blurs the tonality, the last two measures show a clear cadence, in that a C7 chord is resolved to an F chord with two extended notes D and G.

Interpretation

Kapustin has stated that the No. 6 is hardest one in this set.³⁶ Obviously, he plans to maintain a high intensity level by giving a fast cut time with the marking “Allegro non

³⁶ Kapustin, “Six Little,” 2.

troppo.” It is the only piece in the set that begins with a dynamic of *f*. It requires performers to keep the energy level high and stay focused from the very beginning.

Again, Kapustin is very specific on his articulation markings. However, all the pieces in the setting lack further dynamic indication, such as, *crescendo* and *diminuendo*. As mentioned earlier, the motion of the patterns in this piece usually follows a direction of climbing up first and descending right after. Therefore, the changes of dynamic should naturally follow this motion unless otherwise noted.

Another potential issue in terms of interpretation is what to emphasize while the boundary between melody and accompaniment is not clear in this piece.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system, labeled with measure numbers 34, 35, and 36, shows a right-hand staff with a complex melodic line featuring many beamed eighth notes and various fingerings (1-5). The left-hand staff has a more rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes, some of which are circled in red. The second system, labeled with measure numbers 37, 38, 39, and 40, continues the melodic and accompanimental patterns. Again, the left-hand accompaniment features circled chords in red. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and fingerings.

Example 2.6.5: *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133, No. 6, mm.34-40.

Here is shown a typical situation, in that each hand functions differently to serve the musical intention. In mm. 35-36, while the eighth note running passage in the right hand keeps the motion of melodic line flowing, the left hand also offers the rhythmic intensity by the syncopated chords. A similar observation can also be found in mm. 38-39.

Based his own recording of similar passages found in his previous works, he obviously has made these chords standing out regardless of the dynamics of other materials.

Generally, Kapustin has given the pedal indication wherever he feels necessary. Thus, be advised that the use of extra pedal should be very cautious. In m.60 (seen Example 2.6.3), a pedal is added to be able to sustain the half note in the left hand. Other optional pedaling can be necessary in mm. 31, 49, and 68 depending on the hand size of performers.

Summary

All these six miniatures have exhibited Kapustin's compositional philosophy that made him famous for blending jazz and classical style. Since they are all on a small scale, they become wonderful introductory pieces for the performers to get to know Kapustin's musical taste and language.

The structure of all pieces is clear to follow. They are all under two minutes to play. The best part is each one can be performed individually. In addition, all pieces do not require an extensive stretch for the hand. Thus, the pianists with small hands or younger students can handle them comfortably.

In general, there are three very important aspects in terms of interpretation. Firstly, the performers should always keep the steady tempo all the way through. Kapustin did not give any signal to change the tempo during the entire set except the ending of the third piece marked with "poco rallent." (Example 2.3.2) The use of metronome is

inevitable, especially in some tricky parts such as the middle section of No. 5 (Example 2.5.5).

Secondly, pedal use should be very selective. Only a few spots in this set have Kapustin's pedal indication. Performers should be very careful about each additional use of pedals adding to the music. These pedals should not have any or very minimal impact on the articulation of the materials.

Most importantly, performers need to observe and respect the various articulations and accents which Kapustin is the most particular about in this music. Again, the eighth notes running passages should be played in a non-legato fashion unless there are slurs on them.

CHAPTER THREE

DIALOGUE FOR SOLO PIANO, OP. 148

Dialogue for Solo Piano, Op. 148 was composed in 2012. It has become a trend that the majority of his solo piano output, after his *Sonatina, Op. 100*, no longer used a classical title such as prelude, sonata, and impromptu. Instead, most of them were given a concrete title which has no implication of forms and styles but projects more imaginary scenes, moods and emotions. Similarly, these titles could be allusive to the “program music” in the romantic period, in that the instrumental music carries some extra-musical meaning, some “program” of literary idea, scenic description, or personal drama,³⁷ as opposed to “absolute music” which names an ideal of musical purity and that has no external reference.³⁸

Structure

In comparison to the *Six Little Pieces, Op. 133*, *Dialogue* could certainly be regarded as a major piano solo work. Nearly six minutes in playing time, it is far more complicated in terms of structural planning, complexity of harmonies, varieties of moods, and technical demands.

Based on the double bar mark given by Kapustin, the whole piece was divided into seven sections. At first glance, each section seems to have different subjects, tempo,

³⁷ “Program Music.” Britannica Online Academic Edition, 2018, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

³⁸ Roger Scruton, “Absolute music.” *Grove Music Online*. 8 Feb. 2018. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000000069>.

and musical materials. However, after a more thorough analysis, it actually contains the core elements of a sonata form.

The first section from mm. 1-28 can be defined as the first subject group. The first four measures introduce a lyrical first theme with a color of F minor.



Example 3.1: *Dialogue for Solo Piano, Op. 148, mm.1-6.*

The second section goes from m. 29 to m. 46. It features a brighter second theme than the first one. The harmony is unsettled, but an echo of F major can still be heard at the beginning of the second theme. The tempo remains the original.



Example 3.2: *Dialogue for Solo Piano*, Op. 148, mm.27-32.

The mood has dramatically changed in the development. The tempo is much faster and the materials are more agitated. The development covers three sections. The first one goes from m. 47 to m. 66. The tempo mark is changed from *Moderato* to *Piu mosso*.



Example 3.3: *Dialogue for Solo Piano*, Op. 148, mm. 47-51.

The second part of the development, mm. 67-76, keeps the same pace as the previous section, marked as *Tempo precedente*. The next part, mm. 77-92, slows down to *Meno mosso* but speeds up again at m. 86. It plays a role as a transition to the recapitulation with the borrowed materials from the second theme.



Example 3.4: *Dialogue for Solo Piano*, Op. 148, mm.77-82.

The recapitulation brings back the first theme with *Tempo I* at m. 93. A coda section starting at m. 112 gradually builds up the intensity to the end of the piece.



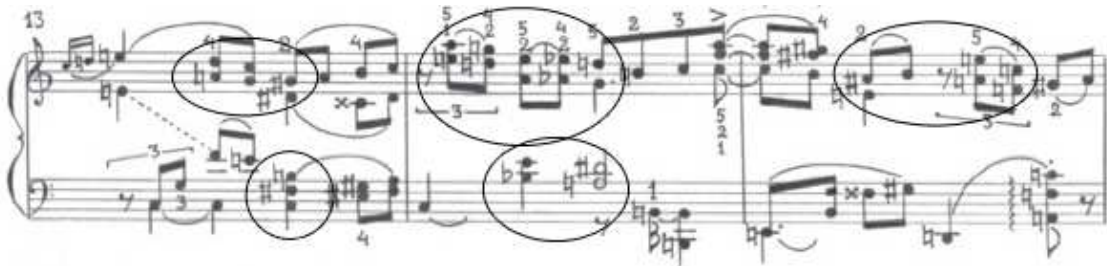
Example 3.5: *Dialogue for Solo Piano*, Op. 148, mm. 93-95.

Compositional characteristics

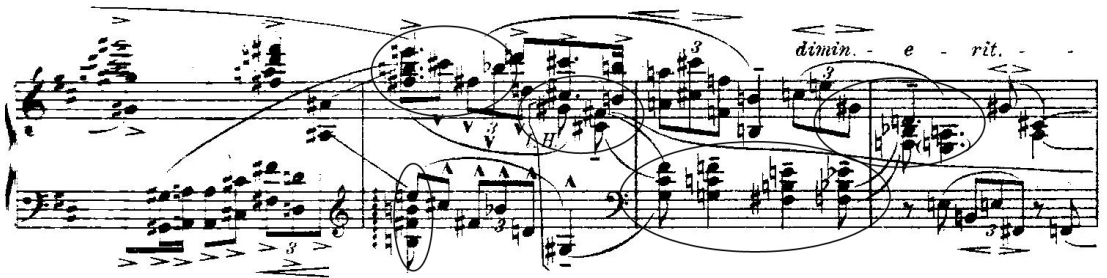
After finishing the recording session of this project, an interesting finding is the abandonment of the key signature for all these pieces in this project. These pieces appear to not be settled in one key and have extensive uses of chromatic modulations and quartal harmonies. However, Kapustin has not abandoned the tonality yet. For instance, the

opening theme of *Dialogue* can still feel the traces of F minor. At the end, it eventually has settled in F as well.

The tone color and atmosphere rendered in the opening theme reminds one of the similar flavors of Alban Berg's Piano Sonata, Op. 1. Both feature a beautiful lyrical thematic idea but also sound contemporary due to the frequent use of chromatic voice leading and quartal intervals.



Example 3.6: *Dialogue for Solo Piano*, Op. 148, mm. 13-15.



Example 3.7: Alban Berg, *Piano Sonata*, Op. 1, mm. 24-27.

The example above shows how commonly the quartal harmony and intervals have been implemented in both composers' work. Moreover, they usually appear in a parallel sequence moving by either whole step or half step.

Interestingly, both pieces also feature a lot of tempo changes. For instance, the development of *Dialogue* (Section 3-5) has changed tempo marking five times, following the order as shown below:



Example 3.8: *Dialogue for Solo Piano*, Op. 148, mm. 47, 64, 66, 77, 86.

In general, the jazz element is not strongly pronounced in this piece. Certainly, the syncopation and chromatic textures are still the main devices found in the music, but the unsettled harmonic movement and dissonance in the texture even give some hints of Debussy or Scriabin.

The whole piece surprisingly ends in an imaginative and quiet setting instead of building up the climax all the way to the end. In fact, the ending truly brings out the jazziest moment of the whole piece.



Example 3.9: *Dialogue for Solo Piano*, Op. 148, mm. 119-123.

As circled in the example, starting with the motive from the main theme, Kapustin masterfully combined three fragments together and made it into a whole F blues scale. It again reminds us of the identity of his compositional language.

Interpretation

Apparently, the exposition including the first two sections of *Dialogue* is full of lyricism and romanticism. Like many typical romantic pieces, a phrase always contains four measures. Performers should always be sensitive about the shapes, patterns, and the textures in these phrases. Thus, it is tedious to interpret this music in a completely straight tempo in the exposition. In addition, like *Six Little Pieces*, Kapustin is still very discreet on marking the dynamics and pedals. Performers might feel lost at first, but on the positive side, it provides more liberty and flexibility for performers to plan the timing, dynamics, and pedaling.

In general, in order to improve the contrast with the development section which features high intensity and energy, it is recommended to render the atmosphere quieter and airy in the exposition.

In terms of pedaling, the example below illustrates some places where some additional pedal might be necessary.

The image displays five excerpts of a piano score for 'Dialogue for Solo Piano, Op. 148'. The excerpts are arranged in two rows. The top row contains measures 7, 14, and 27. The bottom row contains measures 32 and 45. Each excerpt shows both the right and left hands. Measure 7 features a triplet in the right hand and a quarter note in the left. Measure 14 shows a complex rhythmic pattern with slurs and fingerings. Measure 27 is marked 'mf' and features a triplet in the right hand. Measure 32 shows a sixteenth-note passage in the right hand. Measure 45 features a sixteenth-note passage in the right hand and a quarter note in the left. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, fingerings, and dynamics.

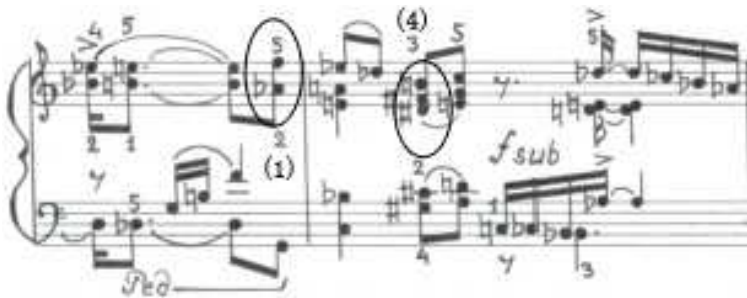
Example 3.10: *Dialogue for Solo Piano*, Op. 148, mm. 7, 14, 27, 32, 45.

The mood and energy in the development has dramatically changed. Unlike the exposition, performers need to keep the tempo steady. The materials become much more rhythmic. The fast and non-stop sixteenth note running passages will not provide much room for performers to breathe.

As mentioned earlier, the tempo marking has changed five times in the development sections. It is always preceded by a *ritardando*. In order to achieve the tempo that Kapustin suggests, checking with the metronome as reference is highly recommended.

The left hand is extremely important in the development. The constant eighth notes become a tool to help the right hand keep the tempo steady. Moreover, it brings out more personality in this section via the challenging jumps and various articulations. Seen in example 3.3, the left hand features *staccato*, *staccatissimo*, and slurs. Performers need to carefully differentiate these articulations. Sophisticated pedaling is also necessary for the slurs on jumps.

The fingering suggested on the score is very helpful in most cases. However, not all of them perfectly fit for all types of hands. Some of the editorial fingerings might be questionable for smaller hands. Performers can always explore options which fit their hands better. For instance, players can certainly do some adjustments at mm. 98-99:



Example 3.11: *Dialogue for Solo Piano*, Op. 148, mm. 98-99.

As circled in the example, using the thumb on A-flat and the 4th finger on B natural would be a better choice for a smaller hand without sacrificing any musical intentions.

Summary

While finishing this recording project, there exist no other professional recordings available anywhere online. As with many other solo pieces that Kapustin has composed, it is a fairly long and tedious process before a performer fully masters the notes and is capable of enjoying the internal beauty of harmonies, rhythm, and melodies. It is certainly a deserving piece that should be introduced to more performers and audiences, and a great contrasting piece when programming another virtuosic piece by Kapustin in a recital.

CHAPTER FOUR

ETUDE COURTE MAIS TRANSCENDANTE, OP. 149

Kapustin finished this etude in 2013 and gave this work a very interesting title. This French title translates as “Short but Supernatural Etude.”³⁹ Perhaps a more graceful translation of this title would be “a short but very difficult study.” It immediately brings to mind Franz Liszt’s milestone work, the Twelve “Transcendental Études” which are well-known for their extreme technical difficulties. Obviously, Kapustin has already shown his ambitions in this title and challenges will be expected.

As a matter of fact, “Etude” is a genre of which Kapustin is very fond. His *Eight Concert Etudes*, Op. 40, has become one of his best known and most performed works.

Structure

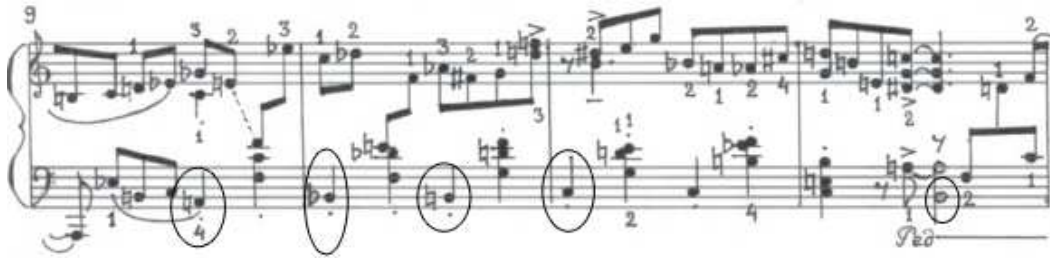
In fact, the structure of this etude is indistinct in comparison to *Dialogue*. It can be roughly divided into eight main sections including a short introduction at the beginning and closing section at the end.



³⁹ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com>, s.v. “Courte mais Transcendante,” accessed December 29, 2017, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/french-english>.

Example 4.1: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 1-8.

Ab is clearly the key center to start this piece. However, it does not last long. When the next section comes, everything starts to shift. The second section is mm. 9-40. As shown in Example 4.2, the bass of the left hand starts to climb up chromatically.



Example 4.2: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 9-12.

The key of Ab does not return by the end of the section. The third section lasts from mm. 41-64.



Example 4.3: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 41-44.

The fourth section, from mm. 65-100, is a beautiful contrasting section featuring a singing melodic line in the right hand. The tempo remains the same but the mood has dramatically changed.

Example 4.4: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 65-72.

According to the double bar indicated by Kapustin, the fifth section is from mm. 101-130. However, at mm. 118-123, Kapustin inserted a thrilling and extremely forceful jazzy passage which apparently recalls the introduction at the beginning. It elicits a feeling that a new section has just started. (See Example 4.6)

Example 4.5: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 101-104.

The image displays a musical score for a piano piece. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system starts at measure 117 and ends at measure 120. The second system starts at measure 121 and ends at measure 124. The score is written for piano and bass. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature is 4/4. The music features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and various articulations such as slurs, accents, and fingerings. Dynamic markings include 'ff' (fortissimo) and 'sf' (sforzando). There are also some performance instructions like '(pizz.)' and '(f)'. The score is numbered 117, 121, and 125 at the beginning of the staves.

Example 4.6: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 117-124.

The two examples above have clearly shown that the materials are very dissimilar. Their tonality is also very distant. The passage shown in Example 4.6 is clearly built on E major. This proves that a clear boundary between the sections is not Kapustin's main concern here while constructing this work.

The next two sections, from mm. 131-152 and mm. 153-168, in fact, would be considered as one section, based on their length and musical function. Both start in a soft dynamic and act as an interlude which leads to a dramatic climax.



Example 4.7: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 129-136.



Example 4.8: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 153-156.

These are rare places that can give the performer a little opportunity to relax before the stormy finale. The closing section starts at m. 169, and the end recalls a strong key center on A-flat which matches the tonality of the opening.



Example 4.9: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 187-190.

Compositional Characteristics

The analysis of the structure of this work reveals the fact that it does not follow any rules of a traditional form. The structure is relatively free in comparison to the very logical framework of *Dialogue*. The materials used in each section do not seem closely related as well. The only place where the audience can sense some cycled materials is at m. 118. (See Example 4.6.) The left hand has exactly duplicated the patterns at the opening and gives a similar jazzy flavor.

Moreover, Kapustin sets the speed in a cut time at 112-120, and there is not any speed change. There is not even a *rit.* at the end of any section. The whole piece definitely carries a strong sense of continuity.

Tonality has not been stable in his recent works including this one. Harmonically, it is unsettled, except the beginning and ending which are clearly built on A-flat major. However, interestingly, the music is not completely moving away from tonality. Whenever the harmonics and textures are progressing to a direction that no one could anticipate, Kapustin will give a strong harmonized passage or melody to freshen the air.

A typical example can be found at m. 65 (see Example 4.4) where a beautiful melodic line in B-flat is brought in after a long sequence of eighth-note runs.

Seen in Example 4.8, mm. 153-156 is another rare place where the right hand features a melodic line harmonized by quartal harmonies.

In general, the main texture in this work is the straight eighths in a restless motion. Even the performer could have a hard time in anticipating where the end of the piece is. The common jazz device of a combination of straight eighths with triplets is absent in this work.

The double-note technique is also extensively used on the running passages to generate more intensity on the important rhythmic gesture. (See Example 4.19.)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system covers measures 21 to 24, and the second system covers measures 25 to 28. The notation is dense, featuring eighth-note runs in both hands. The right hand often plays double-note chords, while the left hand provides a steady accompaniment. Numerous fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-5. The piece concludes with a 'sub p' (subito piano) marking in the final measure.

Example 4.10: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 21-28.

The excerpt above also shows another typical feature of this work, that the pattern of the accompaniment in the left hand is often in contrary motion with the right hand.

The stride technique has been widely blended into this work as seen in the example below. The bass of the stride piano section is moving up chromatically.



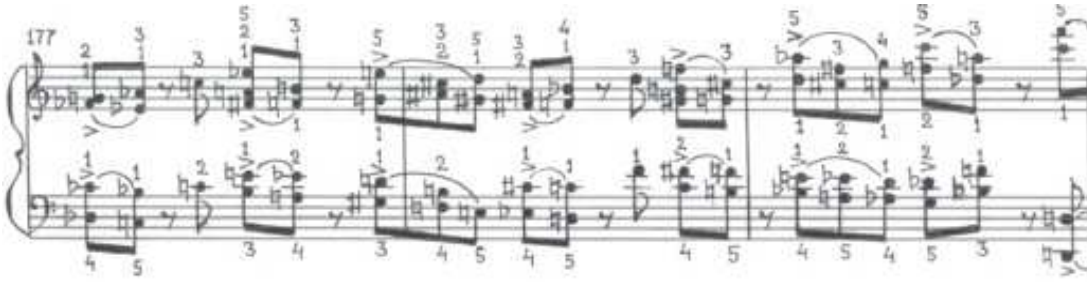
Example 4.11: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 17-20.

The texture of this etude is also very thick considering its fast tempo. And the texture is even thickened while the work is progressing.



Example 4.12: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 109-116.

As seen in this very visually intense section, the texture on both hands is not only doubled, but even tripled. A more extreme example can be found at m. 177 near the climax. Both hands have doubled or tripled eighth notes on almost every single note.



Example 4.13: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 177-179.

Interpretation

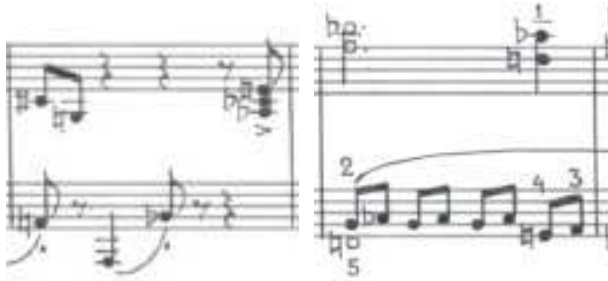
Without a doubt, performers will be well challenged in this work. Only the truly accomplished pianists with a large amount of effort can possibly satisfy the technical demands of this piece and Kapustin's musical ambition.

The fast tempo might not be a problem for many pianists, but the larger challenge is how performers can survive a constant motion for nearly two hundred measures. Therefore, stamina is essential for this work. Performers should find any possible places where the hands can have a little time to relax and recharge.

The first break comes at mm. 40-41 where performers have only one beat of rest and three quarter notes to relax. The passage from mm. 65-80 is the only section in which the right hand presents a relatively lyrical theme instead of constant eighths. The eighths are actually taken over by the left hand at this point.

The next tiny break happens at m. 117 (see Example 4.6). The right hand has one beat of rest right before the powerful jazzy interlude.

The m. 127 and m. 155 are the only other places in which the right hand could have a pause over one beat before the end.



Example 4.14: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, m. 127 and m. 155.

Furthermore, it is necessary to have the metronome on during the practice session to help avoid unconscious tempo shifting. In such places like mm. 65-80 where the right hand shifts the materials from intense straight eighths to the lyrical melody, the performer might slow down the tempo unconsciously. A similar place can be found at m. 183 where the coda starts, the music feels agitated, and the performer could easily take off for a dramatic finish. However, this is no indication for tempo change and the performer has to generate the grand ending without rushing the tempo.

Another major challenge for learning this work is there is a huge amount of accidentals for performers to read. The performers need to spend a lot of time and patience to accurately read all accidentals.



Example 4.15: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 83-86.

In the example above, almost every note has an accidental. Performers need to constantly check the score to see if there is anything that was misread and always be ready to fix errors. The next example also shows another notable challenge in this work, that the left hand has fast and wide jumps.



Example 4.16: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 105-108.

As seen in the example, the big jumps appear in the left hand usually in doubled notes or chords. The speed of jumps is fast as well. This scenario happens throughout the whole work. It is a real challenge for the left hand in terms of accuracy, stamina, strength, and speed.

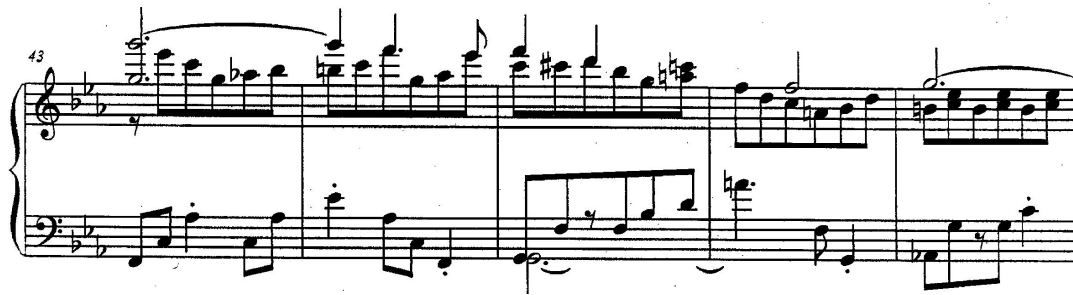
Another intriguing aspect found in this work is that Kapustin has put plenty of thought into creating musical colors in this work, not only through the textures and harmonies, but also through the various dynamic contrasts. Kapustin has planned many immediate dynamic changes. These special moments are something that performers need to project well to the listeners.



Example 4.17: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 37-40.

The example shows a typical way that Kapustin exercises his dynamics in this work. The similar places can be found at m. 28, m. 65, m.118, m. 138, and m. 166.

Like *Dialogue*, there is no other studio recording available prior to this recording project. However, all the performers who are interested in studying this demanding work can still find inspiration from Kapustin's own recording of his *Eight Concert Etudes*, Op. 40.



Example 4.18: Nikolai Kapustin, *Etude, "Reverie,"* Op. 40, No. 2, mm. 43-47.



Example 4.19: *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, Op. 149, mm. 53-56.

The two examples listed above are very comparable in terms of texture, hand positioning, tempo, and accompaniment. In his own recording for this set of etudes, he

has astonishingly demonstrated his capabilities of interpreting his own works in terms of dynamic control, balance, and clarity.

Summary

There is no doubt that the title of this etude is truthful regarding the difficulties of this work. The virtuosic writing, such as the breathless fast tempo, the challenging jumps, numerous accidentals, and complex double-note patterns, made it extremely difficult for many highly equipped pianists. Even the most capable pianist has to spend a large amount of time and effort to technically and spiritually master this work.

CHAPTER FIVE

NOBODY IS PERFECT, OP 151

Nobody Is Perfect was composed in 2013. The title does not give any hints about the style or form, but it implies that no one can play it perfectly. It also sounds like the name of a jazz song. Kapustin marks *Allegretto* at 120 per quarter note for the tempo. Predictably, this work is not as extreme and intense as *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*.

Structure

This work has a clearer and more organic structure than *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*. It can be divided into six sections. The main rhythmic pattern in the opening section is eighth notes with occasional triplets.

The image shows the first seven measures of the piano piece 'Nobody Is Perfect' by Nikolai Kapustin. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto' with a quarter note equal to 120 beats per minute. The music is in 2/4 time and features a melodic line in the right hand and a harmonic accompaniment in the left hand. The right hand consists of eighth notes, often grouped in triplets, with some slurs and accents. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment with chords and eighth notes. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and fingering numbers (1-5).

Example 5.1: *Nobody Is Perfect*, Op. 151, mm. 1-7.

From mm. 1-6, the right hand introduces a long melodic line. This is actually a thematic idea that will be reused in the later sections. Moreover, it can be observed that the left hand imitates the right hand in m. 2.

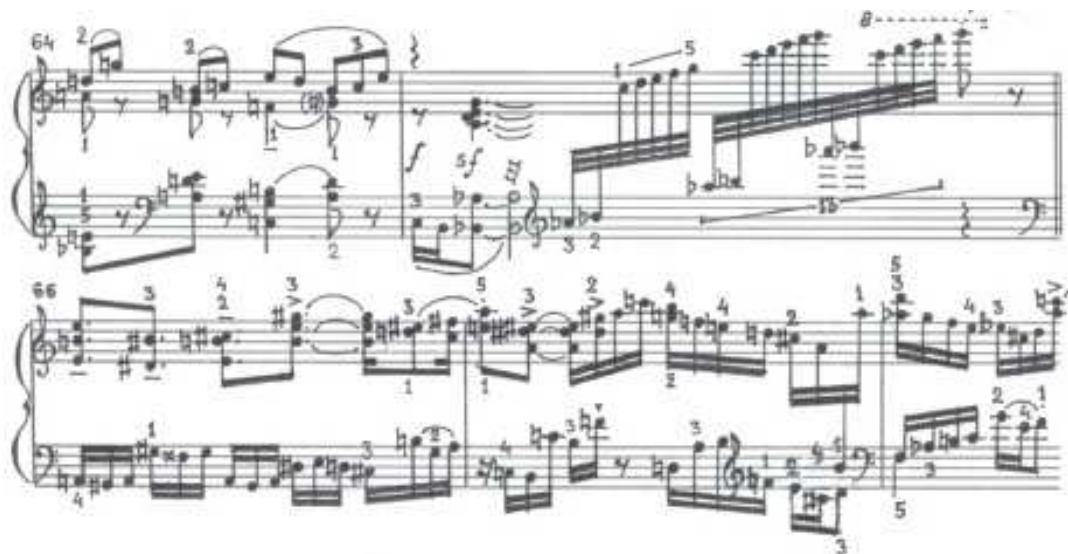
The second section starts at m. 34. The materials become gradually anxious with more sixteenth notes, especially in the left hand.

The image shows a musical score for two systems of piano music. The first system starts at measure 34, marked 'a tempo' and 'p'. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur over measures 34-35, and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 36. The left hand has a rhythmic accompaniment with slurs and fingerings. The second system starts at measure 37, marked 'mp' and 'mf'. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur over measures 37-38, and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 39. The left hand has a rhythmic accompaniment with slurs and fingerings. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, triplets, and dynamic markings.

Example 5.2: *Nobody Is Perfect*, Op. 151, mm. 34-39.

As the example above shows, the tempo in the second section does not change. However, the left hand becomes more active due to more frequent use of sixteenths. The right hand starts to manage thicker texture, and more sixteenth notes are used in the right hand in these passages as well.

A dramatic change of atmosphere takes place in the third section, which starts at m. 66. It is a contrasting section which feels very distinct from the first two sections.



Example 5.3: *Nobody Is Perfect*, Op. 151, mm. 64-68.

Example 5.3 shows the transition from the ending of the second section to the third section. It features a flashy improvisational scalar passage starting with A flat, which leads passionately into the next section.

After this agitated and powerful third section, the fourth section starting at m.86 calms down and recalls the main theme from the first section, but a fifth higher.

Musical score for Example 5.4, measures 85-91 of 'Nobody Is Perfect, Op. 151'. The score is written for piano in two systems. The first system (measures 85-88) is marked 'ritard' and 'Tempo I'. It features a calm and reflective passage that recalls the main theme from the first section, but a fifth higher. The second system (measures 89-91) continues the piece with intricate fingerings and dynamic markings like 'p'.

Example 5.4: *Nobody Is Perfect*, Op. 151, mm. 85-91.

the original theme, but doubles its speed. The whole work ends in a grand manner, and the last chord clearly lands on a remarkable C major triad.

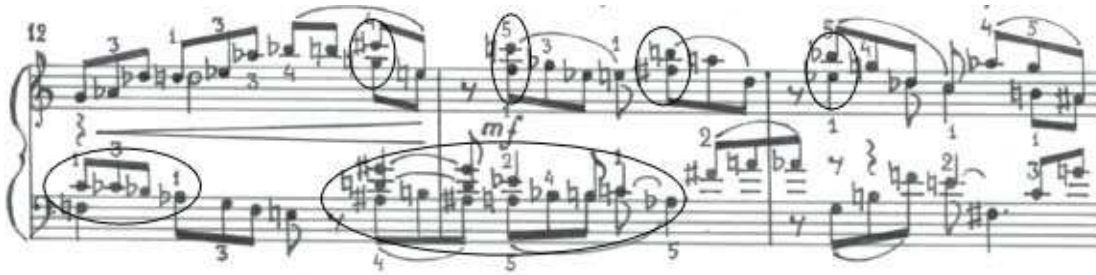
The image shows a musical score for the piece 'Nobody Is Perfect' by Dmitri Kapustin, specifically measures 138 to 141. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems of staves. The first system starts at measure 138 and the second system starts at measure 140. The music is characterized by a steady eighth-note rhythm in the right hand and a more complex, chromatic bass line in the left hand. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings like 'ff' (fortissimo). The piece concludes with a C major triad. A date stamp 'July 02 2013' is visible in the bottom right corner of the score.

Example 5.7: *Nobody Is Perfect*, Op. 151, mm. 138-141.

Compositional Characteristics

Based on the brief analysis of the structure, this work has been well organized. Each section serves a certain musical purpose. The musical texture, the complexity of the rhythm, and the dynamic range are developed one after another. There are two big buildups resulting in exciting climaxes in the third section and the last section.

From the beginning, the steadiness of the straight eighth notes makes it feel more serious than a fun and lighthearted scene. Like many other solo piano pieces Kapustin composed in this period, a tonal center is hard to be traced. The materials are highly chromatic. The intervals of fourth and fifth appear to be his favorites to create the harmonic colors. A typical example is shown below.



Example 5.8: *Nobody Is Perfect*, Op. 151, mm. 12-14.

This example shows how Kapustin treats the chordal texture. The intervals are most likely to be fourths or fifths and the left hand moves chromatically. It delivers an improvisatory sounding, but carefully crafted and written out, passage.

The textures become gradually thicker and sixteenth-note passages are more actively involved in the second and third sections. The most chaotic and technically challenging place begins from m. 66 where the third section starts.

Example 5.9: *Nobody Is Perfect*, Op. 151, mm. 68-77.

This section could be a nightmare for every pianist as the technique is unreasonably demanding. With such a high speed, the left hand has to manage such techniques as sixteenth-note scalar passages, large jumps, different articulations, double-note passages, and needless to say, a large number of accidentals. For the right hand, the first challenge is how to line up precisely the syncopations with the left hand. Moreover, the irregular sixteenth-note passages can be frustrating for finding efficient fingerings.

The next three sections follow the same process of the first three. The dynamic range expands from *p* to *ff* corresponding to the change in textures from thinner to thicker. Furthermore, in order to achieve an impressive grand sound effect and rhythmic intensity at the finale, Kapustin uses the whole range of the keyboard from lowest C to six octaves higher.

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is the right hand, the middle staff is the left hand, and the bottom staff is a lower register. The score is in 3/4 time and features a complex texture with broken octaves in the left hand and fast sixteenth-note runs in the right hand. A circled region in the bottom staff highlights the virtuosic writing in the lowest register.

Example 5.10: *Nobody Is Perfect*, Op. 151, mm. 132-135.

The circled region shows virtuosic writing to produce a massive sound by employing broken octaves at the lowest register. In contrast, the right hand is placed in the highest register with fast sixteenth-note runs. It is noteworthy that the pattern of the right hand is actually quoted from the theme but with doubled speed. Kapustin truly masters his musical materials to achieve unity of this work.

Interpretation

The difficulty of this work could be very deceptive based on the speed marking “Allegretto” at 120 to the quarter note. In fact, this speed feels extremely fast when

getting to the sections where the sixteenth notes become almost constant. Thus, practicing with a metronome is a good way to build up a good sense of a proper speed from the very beginning. The first two sections are not technically challenging, but rhythmically difficult.



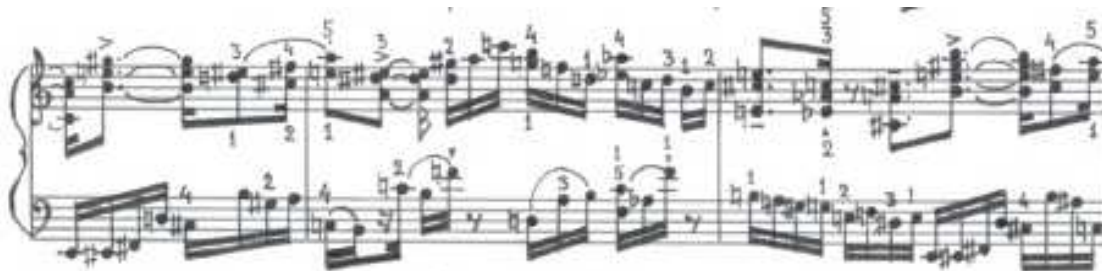
Example 5.11: *Nobody Is Perfect*, Op. 151, mm. 20-25.

This is a typical example to show how Kapustin scores a very complex rhythmic component. At the m. 21, the notation is confusing at first glance. The sixteenth notes are not traditionally grouped and look like triplets. Thus, marking out every beat will help keep the notes steady.

There is no doubt that the third section is the hardest part to play among all the pieces in this project. It is visually intimidating and could frustrate learners easily. In order to effectively learn this part, there are a few necessary steps that performers can follow while practicing.

1. The first step for performers to accomplish is to carefully read and check all the

notes with accidentals. Due to a large amount of accidentals, many of them could be easily misread. There could be multiple accidentals and cancellations on one note in one measure as shown below.



Example 5.12: *Nobody Is Perfect*, Op. 151, mm. 73-75.

The E in mm. 73-74 shifts around natural, sharp, and flat. It can be easily missed. Making some cues on the score is highly recommended.

2. To have a clear sense of how the passages are rhythmically constructed is the second step to accomplish. One should mark the beats whenever necessary.

Kapustin's notation on sixteenth notes is very puzzling. One should be aware that these sixteenths can be easily read as triplets, especially when Kapustin places the emphasis on every three notes in m. 75. (Example 5.12).

3. Making a plan for the dynamics is the next step while practicing. Although it is a very dramatic section, Kapustin does not give any dynamic indications. Thus, performers have liberty to plan the dynamics according to the texture of the music, rhythmic gestures, and shape of phrases.
4. After all fundamental things become solid, it is time to refine the articulations. In general, the sixteenth-note passages would sound better and more transparent if detached. Kapustin has employed all the articulation markings in this section that

have been discussed in the previous chapter. This detailing work is the key to replicating Kapustin's musical intentions for the color, intensity, and drama of thousands of notes.

5. Last but not least, one should set up a reasonable goal for a performing tempo which will not compromise the musical expression. Although it is not a requirement to perform from memory for most of the complicated twenty-first century piano works, it is certainly helpful to have some difficult passages memorized in this section. That will enable performers to bring out all the musical details and secure the accuracy of the piece, while maintaining an ambitious tempo.

Summary

Technically, the difficulty of this work gradually increased with each section, unlike *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, which maintains a high energy level and technical challenges all the way through. *Nobody Is Perfect* is a more spacious and narrative-like work, which is more logically constructed and musically shaped. The jazz elements are still very pronounced, such as the straight eighth notes with triplets, syncopations with accents on the offbeats, and improvisatory passages. Harmonically, it becomes very complex without losing a key center of C. The numerous accidentals on some of chromatic textures can be irritating to read. Again, memorization is very helpful, especially for performers who intend to make studio recordings.

CHAPTER SIX

A PIANIST IN JEOPARDY, OP. 152

A Pianist in Jeopardy for solo piano was finished in July 2013. This suggestive title makes performers wonder what the word “Jeopardy” implies. It is reasonable to speculate that this is a very technically demanding piece, or very contemporary harmonically and challenging to read. Thus, this chapter attempts to help pianists find the story behind this intriguing title.

Structure

This is another very organized work. All six parts combined together actually satisfy criteria of a sonata form. The first section from mm. 1-32 introduces a main theme which is eight measures long.

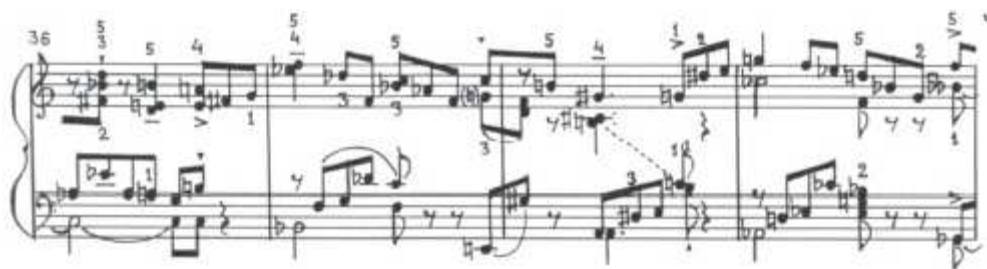
Vivo ($\text{♩} = 100 - 108$)

Example 6.1: *A Pianist in Jeopardy*, Op. 152, mm. 1-11.

The circled areas in the example are the main motivic devices that will be reused frequently and developed in the later sections.

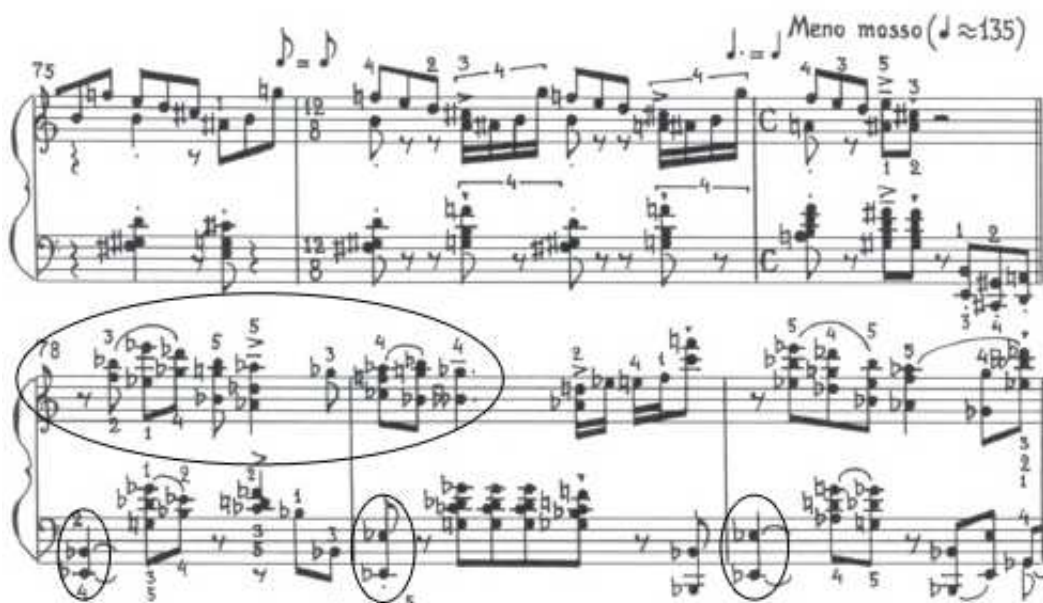
The second section from mm. 33-77 becomes more rhythmically vigorous. The opening motive shows playfulness with a syncopated rhythm as shown below.

32 *poco rit. a tempo*



Example 6.2: *A Pianist in Jeopardy*, Op. 152, mm. 32-39.

The third section, which is from mm.72-101, functions as the development in sonata form. It portrays a completely different character compared to the last two sections.



Example 6.3: *A Pianist in Jeopardy*, Op. 152, mm. 75-80.

As seen in Example 6.3, the materials are built on a very approachable E \flat pentatonic scale. The texture looks thick vertically, but the melody on the top is lyrical and adds an enjoyable flavor to the music.

The opening theme comes back at the beginning of the fourth section, as expected in the sonata form. The example below shows that the eight-measure main theme has been completely preserved.



Example 6.4: *A Pianist in Jeopardy*, Op. 152, mm. 102-109.

The exact rhythmic pattern from the second section can also be found at m. 130 where the fifth section starts. Moreover, the materials used for the grand finale, as shown below, are a transformed version of the first theme. Harmonically, the last chord ends on Eb, which matches the quality of the opening passages which had a pronounced Eb major sonority.



Example 6.5: *A Pianist in Jeopardy*, Op. 152, mm. 162-165.

Compositional Characteristics

Besides the well planned structure, there are several jazz features which can be easily traced. There are a lot of improvisatory-like passages that are well written out for performers. The first one can be found at m. 68.

The image shows a musical score for two systems of music. The first system starts at measure 64 and the second system starts at measure 68. The music is written for piano and features a complex, rhythmic passage with many triplets and sixteenth notes. The right hand has a melodic line with many ornaments, while the left hand provides a steady bass line. Pedal markings are present at the bottom of the staves.

Example 6.6: *A Pianist in Jeopardy*, Op. 152, mm. 64-70.

In fact, the passage before does not prepare the listener for the flashy arpeggio at m. 68. This surprising embellishment effectively adds playfulness for the performers and pleasant color into the music. It is noteworthy that Kapustin creates this sound effect without interrupting the tempo. All the notes in the passage are precisely lined up with the beat.

These colorful embellishments appear even more often in the development. Performers appreciate such a playful jazzy show-off moment.

Example 6.7: *A Pianist in Jeopardy*, Op. 152, mm. 91-98.

Shown in the example above, all the sixteenth notes found in the development actually function as improvisatory devices attached to the melodic line. More interestingly, what make these passages sound very unusual, but classy, is the pentatonic scale as circled in the example. G-A-B-D-E and F-G-A-C-D are two complete pentatonic scales which have been seamlessly attached to sixteenth-note texture. As mentioned earlier, Kapustin also used the Eb pentatonic scale at the beginning of the development (m. 78).

The pentatonic scale is a commonly used device in jazz compositions. Coincidentally, as discussed in the earlier chapter, the third piece from his *Six Little Pieces*, Op.133 has an impressive Eb pentatonic scale at the end.

Furthermore, the Eb is a special note in this work. Certainly, it is not treated as a tonic in a traditional progression but as a reiterated familiar sound. No matter how complex the harmonies are, Eb is always the home. The work starts with a EbM Major 7 chord and ends with an Ebmaj9 chord.

The image shows a musical score for Example 6.8, consisting of two staves: a piano (left) and a right-hand (right) staff. The piano staff begins at measure 170 and features a complex sequence of chords and melodic lines with numerous fingering numbers (1-5) and articulation marks (accents, slurs). The right-hand staff begins at measure 174 and contains a series of chords, some of which are circled in red. A large red oval encircles the final chord in the right-hand staff, which is marked with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic. The score is dated 'July 2013' in the bottom right corner.

Example 6.8: *A Pianist in Jeopardy*, Op. 152, mm. 170-177.

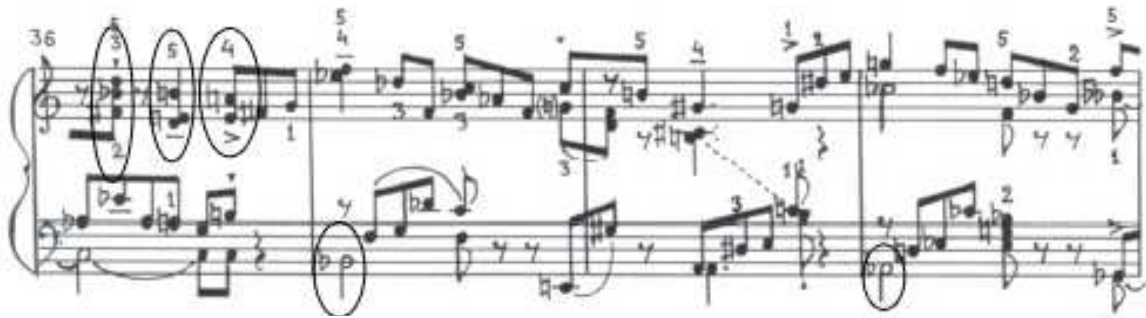
As well as reinforcing the home key, the ending also displays an explosive energy by a series of dramatic repeated chords. What makes these chords fascinating is how Kapustin secretly inserts the main motivic notes into such a chaotic chordal sequence. As circled in the score, F-F#-A-G#-F is extracted from the main motive in the first theme G-Ab-Cb-Bb-F#.

Interpretation

The first impression of this work is that it feels much more lighthearted than *Nobody Is Perfect*. Kapustin does not give very specific indications in terms of dynamics.

to the next C from Db. At m. 83, using 4-3-2 on the triplets of Gb-Eb-Bb is a tough stretch for everyone. Thus, 5-4-2 can be an alternative option.

Once again, like many other works discussed earlier, Kapustin is much more particular on articulations than dynamics.



Example 6.10: *A Pianist in Jeopardy*, Op. 152, mm. 36-39.

At m. 36, it is a typical example that shows how Kapustin attempts to use three different articulation marks on three consecutive chords. This adds extra colors on the harmony but is also very challenging to execute for performers at a fast tempo.

Furthermore, in the same example, there are a few pedal points in the bass as circled. This is typical device that has been commonly used in this work. Kapustin does not give a pedal sign, but cautiously adding pedal is advised to ease the stretch and color the phrase.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there are quite a few improvisational passages which are very fun to play. However, the performer should always keep in mind that all the passages are actually best arranged around strictly steady beats.

Shown in Example 6.7, the fast sixteenth notes in the right hand are closely lined up with the left hand, which features tricky irregular syncopations. It is rhythmically and technically challenging to have both hands locked in precisely with such a fast tempo.

Thus, it is never a bad idea to use a metronome. Counting the subdivision of the beat can also be beneficial when practicing in a slow tempo.

Summary

Does this work truly put pianists in jeopardy? The answer is absolutely “No.” Comparing the tempo of *Etude Courte mais Transcendante*, this work is not as extreme and has more room to breathe. Compared to the texture of *Nobody Is Perfect*, the texture of this work is much thinner and does not contain an overly complex section like the prior work has. Compared to the musical depth of *Dialogue*, this work is much more lighthearted and offers performers music full of playfulness. It is not an easy piece for anyone, but with serious effort, this can be an impressive and pleasing piece to perform in recital.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WANDERING, Op. 153

Wandering for solo piano was finished on November 16th, 2013. This was the latest of the composer's solo piano pieces available for purchase when this project was launched in 2015. The title *Wandering* is even more abstract than those of the other pieces. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, it is defined as "characterized by aimless, slow, or pointless movement: such as winds or meanders ...not keeping a rational or sensible course."⁴⁰ Such definition makes this work mysterious and lets performers wonder how Kapustin's latest piano work will sound.

Structure

This piece starts with a swift sixteenth-note passage, which immediately creates a chilly and mysterious feeling due to its irregular scalar pattern and the unsettled time signature.

⁴⁰ <https://www.merriam-webster.com>, s.v. "wandering," accessed January 18, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/wandering>.

Example 7.1: *Wandering*, Op. 153, mm. 1-9.

As seen in the example, the passage at the beginning can be considered as a short introduction before the actual first section. It starts with a 4/4 beat and shifts to 2/4 until finally settling down at m. 6 where the first section starts. The passage is chromatically shaped, and the second part of the passage (mm. 3-5) is exactly built on the fifth below the first part.

Generally, the contents of the work are complex, but the structure is clear. It follows a format of Introduction-A-B-C-A1-B1-Coda. In other words, it resembles a sonata form.

The main theme in the first section, as seen in Example 7.1 is a typical four-measure phrase which has a very lively feel with syncopations and small slurs.

Harmonically, the key center is very blurred. However, more or less some of the harmonic emphasis can be noticed. As circled in Example 7.1, the Eb is more pronounced than others.

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of three systems of staves. The first system starts at measure 43, the second at measure 46, and the third at measure 49. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, various note values, rests, and dynamic markings such as *mf*. There are also some circled notes in the original image, which correspond to the Eb mentioned in the text. The score shows a complex harmonic structure with many accidentals and a mix of rhythmic patterns.

Example 7.2: *Wandering*, Op. 153, mm. 43-51.

The B section starts at m. 45. It brings more lyrical thematic materials with a softened dynamic level. The rhythmic patterns are similar to the first section, but they are developed gradually and intensified by sixteenth-note passagework, which ignites the fire of the C section.

Example 7.3: *Wandering*, Op. 153, mm. 59-65.

Shown in the example above, the texture is dramatically changed at m. 62 where the C section begins. It features nearly constant sixteenth-note passagework, which gives it an agitated feel all the way till the closing part of this section as shown below.

Example 7.4: *Wandering*, Op. 153, mm. 86-95.

Shown in Example 7.4, the end of the C section gradually calms down with a simple texture in eighth-notes. At m. 90, starting section A1, the main theme comes back with some decorations, but harmonic direction and rhythmic structure are not fundamentally altered. This is how Kapustin treats the next B1 section as well.

From m. 120 to the final measure, the B1 section and the coda can be regarded as an extended long section that gradually builds up to a dramatic finale featuring wide stretches and large jumps in the left hand and a complex rhythmic structure in general.

Example 7.6: *Wandering*, Op. 153, mm. 10-15.

The example here shows where Kapustin places the rest on a heavy beat of a new phrase. This is a rhythmic figure which has been consistently implemented throughout the whole work. Furthermore, in the same example as circled, a phrase typically ends with a strong accent. In other words, all the tension is more likely going to the last note. As used repeatedly, this figure adds more effects of “wandering.”

For the accompaniment, Kapustin has made some challenges for the left hand. Starting from the B section, larger stretches and jumps gradually become a main device in the accompaniment.



Example 7.7: *Wandering*, Op. 153, mm. 54-58.

As seen in this example, the left hand features a rich texture and quickly moves between eighths and sixteenths and different registers on the keyboard to create rhythmic tension and tone colors.

The C section, as the development, is given a completely different texture from the last two sections. It is a breathless, intensified, and hectic section where the fast sixteenth-note has completely taken over.



Example 7.8: *Wandering*, Op. 153, mm. 72-77.

The way that Kapustin constructs these passageworks is highly unusual. Notes are arranged with a complex system of intervals which lacks regularity but truly enhances forceful energy.

As a matter of fact, this setting is quite anticipated. Kapustin has done similar writing in his work, *Nobody Is Perfect*, which has a very contrasting middle section that is extremely challenging to play. Kapustin might jokingly write that way to honor the title that no one can play it perfectly. Thus, the middle section of *Wandering* is also intended to add more effects to characterize the title.

In the same example, an intriguing circumstance in the left hand shows Kapustin's compositional mindset. As circled in the example, there is a traceable pattern in the bass notes that moves downward chromatically. There are three groups shown in

the example, F-E-Eb, Ab-G-Gb-F, and Bb-A-Ab-G. This recalls the walking bass in Jazz but moves chromatically.

As expected, the finale is a final punch that Kapustin uses to give the “wandering” feel. It can be regarded as an extended buildup starting from the fifth (B1) section. Similar to the C section, the main texture is fast running sixteenth notes without regularity, but the rhythmic patterns become even more complicated.

Example 7.9: *Wandering*, Op. 153, mm. 130-136.

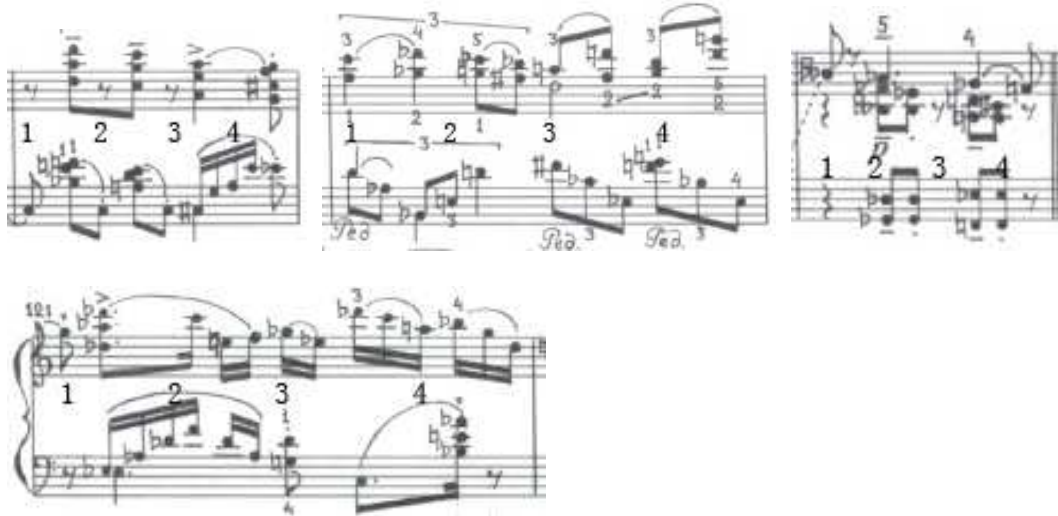
The example here shows the transition before the coda. At m.130, the misplaced accents and slurs eliminate the significance of the beat. In the left hand, again like the C section, the stretches and leaps are extensive and can go up to two octaves. This virtuosic writing truly creates tremendous rhythmic tension and musical colors.

To achieve a final climax, Kapustin utilizes the whole range of the keyboard. At m. 143 (see Example 7.5), starting from the middle register, both hands are heading contrarily to the highest and lowest register at the same time. Rhythmically, the groups of two, three, and four sixteenths are twisted and blended at the same time. Along with an extremely fast tempo and powerful chordal texture, this ending successfully produces an astonishing sound effect and delivers the most “wandering” moment of this work to performers and listeners.

Interpretation

In order to overcome the technical challenges and catch the spirit of this work, there are a few key words that are crucial when practicing and performing.

The first word is “patience.” In fact, for many accomplished pianists, the most challenging part is the beginning stage of learning this work. Unlike the classical compositions with scores that performers can easily read, master the notes, and enjoy the beauty of music, this work might make performers feel clueless and confused about the rhythm and notes during the first few days or even weeks. Therefore, performers need to be patient to analyze rhythmic structure, carefully read accidentals, and make any necessary markings on the score. For instance, shown in the example below, m. 107, 113, 119, 121, 130(Example 7.9), and 142(Example 7.5), are the places where a thorough analysis of the rhythmic structure is needed.



Example 7.10: *Wandering*, Op. 153, m. 107, 113, 119, 121.

Next, “fingering” is another important keyword which can help accelerate the learning process. Performers should not settle down on one fingering option at the beginning of studying and be always prompted to experiment with different options. The sixteenth-note introduction at the beginning of this work is a perfect example. Seen at Example 7.1, at m. 1, it might be a better option if using 1-3-1-2 on E-F-D-Db instead of 1-5-3-2. At m. 3, 1-4-3-2 on A-Bb-Ab-Gb can be replaced by 1-3-1-2. These fingerings can avoid using the weak fingers and awkward hand positions to keep a better consistency of clarity and articulation on the fast notes.



Example 7.11: *Wandering*, Op. 153, m. 136 with modified fingerings.

M.136 is another place that the editorial fingering can be replaced by other options as shown in Example 7.11.

Next, one needs to focus on the articulations after figuring out rhythm and playing all the correct notes with good fingerings. Articulation is one of the most significant components in Kapustin's piano works. He has been consistently particular about the use of articulation signs and making sure the interpreters can totally replicate his musical intentions.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system, starting at measure 125, features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. It includes dynamic markings such as *p sub.* and *f sub.*, and various articulation signs like accents and staccato marks. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-5. The second system, starting at measure 128, continues this intricate texture with similar rhythmic complexity and articulation. The notation is dense, with many slurs and ties connecting notes across measures.

Example 7.12: *Wandering*, Op.153, mm. 125-129.

At mm. 128-129, performers have to interpret four different kinds of articulations in two measures: *staccato*, *staccatissimo*, *accent*, and *tenuto*. This requires performers to do careful study and faithful preparation to be able to accurately perform these indications of what Kapustin wants to hear.

In fact, the varieties of the articulations are closely associated with another key word for this work, the “color.” In music, “color” is an abstract word. For the piano composition, the color can be generally produced by the rhythm, harmony, articulation, dynamic, and pedaling. For this particular piece, performers have lots of freedom to make their own plans for dynamics. For instance, the entire sixteenth-note passageworks from mm. 62-81 in the C section have no specific dynamic sign. Every performer can feel the energy, drama, and intensity coming out of the notes. However, it is not suggested to keep volume loud all the way through. Shifting the dynamics with the direction of the sixteenths is never a bad choice. As shown in Example 7.8, a crescendo sign was added for performers’ reference.

Pedaling also plays an important role in color making. Kapustin has put slurs on the big jumps in the left hand or a pedal point in the bass with other voices on top of that. As seen in Example 7.9, the circled places are where the pedaling is necessary. At m. 135, sensitive pedaling would add a pleasing color into the sixteenth scalar pattern. There are more similar places in this work that performers can explore more about the possibilities of pedaling.

To achieve an ultimate success of interpreting this challenging work on stage or recording in studio, “memorization” is the last piece of the puzzle. It is not a requirement to perform such a harmonically and texturally complicated work on stage from memory. However, memorization can help bring out details of the music as much as possible. For live performances, it also adds extra security and more confidence even with the score when getting to the extremely difficult parts or page turns.

Summary

Wandering is a work with many “wandering” moments that Kapustin has planned out. It stays in a classical form but with contemporary contents inside. This is impressive and fits the title well. It also features a unique design for the shape of phrase, coloristic jumps, leaps in the left hand, and irregular scalar passagework. All these musical characteristics have effectively fulfilled Kapustin’s musical ambition for this work.

For many performers, the learning process can be painful. Thus, patient and effective strategies should be applied in practice. Making marks on the score is never a bad idea, especially at technically challenging or visually intense sections.

Memorization is not mandatory, but is highly recommended. Even partial memorization with the score on the piano can help tremendously in live performance, especially at the moment of the page turn.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussion of all the works in this project, there is no question that Kapustin's recent piano solo works still preserve the identity of his compositional style. The jazz idioms can be traced in all of his works. However, there are a few new trends in his writing that can be observed as well.

The biggest change is the harmony. Unlike his earlier compositions, the key signature is completely gone. The tonal center is weakened and feels constantly modulated. It is hard to foresee where the harmony is headed. The voices move chromatically, and the use of quartal and quintal harmonies seems much more frequent than before. These harmonies create appealing sounds and colors, but on the other hand, they make the music harder to learn and memorize. For performers, it is not a requirement to play these newer works completely by memory on stage. But, in order to have more technical freedom and confidence on stage or perform in a recording session, partial memorization is an inevitable requirement.

Another intriguing discovery is that Kapustin is much more meticulous in his notation of articulations rather than the dynamics. Thus, performers need to carefully read the score and patiently adjust the execution of different articulation signs while practicing.

Since the majority of Kapustin's piano solo works are technically demanding, it makes the *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 133 particularly important. They are short, lighthearted, and fairly easy to learn. Without large stretches and thick textures, they especially suit smaller hands. They are also great pedagogic repertoire for early advanced students who do not have too much experience with complex rhythms.

Performers might find *Dialogue*, Op. 148 particularly interesting to play. It has beautiful colors with a sensitive melody that recalls Berg's famous *Piano Sonata*. It is also not as technically demanding and rhythmically intense as other works in this project. Thus, it could be a wonderful choice to program in a recital for a contrast.

Among others, *Etude Courte Mais Transcendante Pour Piano*, Op. 149 will probably be an audience favorite. The non-stop motion and energetic rhythmic pulse easily makes it an effective piece.

In conclusion, it is a great blessing for piano literature that there is someone in this generation who somehow finds an effective way to blend the jazz style into serious classical structures without losing his originality of genius for the fresh motives, haunting melodies, and sophisticated harmonies.

By the time this project was finalized in 2018, Kapustin was in his early 80's and still composing on a regular basis. His early classics, such as *Eight Concert Etudes*, Op. 40 and *Variations*, Op. 41, have become popular choices for concerts and recordings. However, besides all the pieces recorded in this project, his other recent piano works composed after 2007 still have no recording available. Hopefully, as his reputation continues to grow, more established pianists will perform his newer works and share his compositional brilliance to a larger audience in the future.

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APPENDIX A

A RECORDING OF NIKOLAI KAPUSTIN'S SOLO PIANO WORKS 2007-2013

BY QINGQING YE, PIANO

[Consult Attached Files]

Tracks	Compact Disc
	<i>Six Little Preludes, Op. 133</i>
1	<i>No. 1 Allegro moderato</i>
2	<i>No. 2 Comodo</i>
3	<i>No. 3 Allegretto</i>
4	<i>No. 4 Larghetto</i>
5	<i>No. 5 Allegro non troppo</i>
6	<i>No. 6 Allegro non troppo</i>
7	<i>Dialogue for Solo Piano, Op. 148</i>
8	<i>Etude Courte Mais Transcendante, Op. 149</i>
9	<i>Nobody is Perfect, Op. 151</i>
10	<i>A Pianist in Jeopardy, Op. 152</i>
11	<i>Wandering, Op. 153</i>

QINGQING YE, PIANO