



Discussion About Darius Milhaud and His Work: Double Piano Cento Scaramouch

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Abstract

Darius Milhaud is one of the most influential and productive composers in French during the twentieth century. In his nearly 60 years of music composing career, he created more than 400 pieces of works. Although he spent most of his life of 82 years in France, Brazil and United States served as two important windows for acquiring information from the outside world for him. He traveled back and forth between these three places in a cycle manner, that is, [A] France – [B] Brazil – [A1] France – [C] America – [A2] France, which can also be called a “cyclic” life experience. Milhaud’s double piano cento *Scaramouch* is one of the representative works in the double piano performing form, which is also very popular in our country’s piano field. Although it is a cento consisting of three movements, each movement has many similarities in the structure of musical form, such as the macro structure of each movement is all the compound ternary form, and the first section of which is all the simple binary form, and so on. The main factor that can be used to compare each movement is the music content.

Key words: Milhaud; Life experience; *Scaramouch*

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1. BRIEF DESCRIPTION ABOUT MILHAUD AND HIS LIFE EXPERIENCE

Darius Milhaud was one of the most influential and productive composers in France during the twentieth

century, with works as many as 443.¹ Milhaud was also a longevous composer. He experienced two world wars and traveled to many places in the world. But the three places that imposed important influences on his life and creations were France, Brazil and United States. And Milhaud traveled back and forth among these countries in a cyclic way in the order of France, Brazil, France, America, and France, so the author summarizes this manner as a “cyclic” life experience, i.e., his main place for activities was France, and Brazil and America served as two episodes, which will be discussed in detail in the following section.

1.1 The France Period (1892-1917)

Darius Milhaud was born in the southern part of France Aix-en-Provence on September 4, 1892 and his parents were all Jewish. Since his childhood, Milhaud had been taken good care of by his family in both living and studying, because not only was his family wealth, but his parents were also well-educated. Especially the strong family musical atmosphere is created for Milhaud by his parents during his childhood brought important influences to his later development in music career.

This period can also be divided into two stages: one is the Aix stage (1892-1909), the other is the Paris stage (1909-1917). In his hometown of Aix, Milhaud mainly received an ordinary education. At age seven, he once learned playing violin following Leo Bruguier, which was his initial enlightening music education. This teacher not only allowed Milhaud to play the quartet work he created,

¹ There are disparities for the number of works of Milhaud by different literature. For example, ([France] Lacroix, J. (2005). *The group of six*. In Y. Zhang & S. N. Feng (Trans.). Beijing: Renmin University Publishing, 2005) recorded as 443; ([America] Hansen, P. (1981). *An introduction to music on the twentieth century (first part)*, . In X. F. Meng (Trans.). Beijing: Renmin Music Publishing) recorded as 426; (Qian, R. K. (1989). *Europe music history*. Shanghai: Shanghai Music Publishing) recorded as more than 500. The author here used the record by the France masterpiece *The Group of Six*.

but also let him come into contact with the quartet work created by the then very famous France composer Claude Debussy, which brought a certain influence on Milhaud's later music creation. At that time, Milhaud also learned harmonics from a conductor. During the course of his studies, Milhaud already exhibited rebellion against tradition. In 1909, at age 17 Milhaud was accepted into the Paris Conservatory as the youngest student ever. Since then, he started his professional music career. At the Paris Conservatory, at the beginning he mainly followed Berthelier to learn violin. He also once took part in the string band conducted by Paul Dukas. At the same time, he also followed Widor and Gedalge to learn composing technical theory and how to compose. Especially, Gedalge played a key role in leading Milhaud to the road of becoming a professional composer. At the Paris Conservatory, d'Indy once was also Milhaud's conducting teacher. Later, because of being tired of the boring technical trainings that must be faced as a performer, Milhaud believed that becoming a composer was his later career path to be followed. Therefore, he immersed himself in the learning of composing. At the Paris Conservatory, Milhaud won awards in several areas including composing, counterpoint, fugue, and violin. Besides professional studies, Milhaud was also very interested in the strong artistic atmosphere of Paris at the time, where he had more chances to watch ballet and savor opera. In addition, at Paris Milhaud needed to know several good friends and classmates, among them were composers Erik Satie, Arthur Honegger, Georges Auric, Germaine Tailleferre, litterateurs Jean Cocteau, Paul Claudel, and so on. These classmates and friends had influences of different degrees on Milhaud's later life and creation of works.

1.2 The Brazil Period (1917-1919)

In 1912, Milhaud luckily got to know Paul Claudel who was referred to as the last master of classical literature in France literature history. Claudel was not only a famous litterateur, dramatist, and poet; he was also an outstanding diplomatist. He once served as the France ambassador to Roma, United States, Japan, and so on. He also worked in China's Fuzhou city for 13 years and Chinese local customs and practices left him a deep impression such that he wrote some works using these as the themes. After the First World War broke out, Milhaud was not enlisted due to health reason; instead he performed some work at the Paris "France-Belgium Home" to help refugees and conducted some news work at the News Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Lacroix, 2005, pp.97-98). In 1916, Claudel was selected as the France ambassador to Brazil. Because he needed an assistant, Claudel invited Milhaud to go together with him. In Brazil's Rio de Janeiro, Milhaud was not only deeply attracted by the tropical customs there, but Brazil's folk music and pop music also had since triggered all his Latin connections

deep in his heart, such that his later works exhibited a lot of obvious Latin American customs. Even after he returned to France for a long-time, Milhaud seemed he did not entirely realize that he was French, still indulging in Brazil's tone and rhythm. Also, he went to America on his way back and experienced for the first time in his life in the Jazz music of African American, which also had a great influence on his later creation of works, just as what he said about it:

The music I heard is totally different from any music I have previously heard, it is an enlightenment for me. Set off by each drum beat, the melody part progresses by a breathtaking, uneven and intertwined rhythmic pattern in a crisscrossed way ...the effect resulting from this music was so huge to me that I could not bear to leave. (Hansen, 1981, p.129)

1.3 The France Period (1919-1940)

In 1919, Milhaud returned from Rio de Janeiro to Paris. During this period, what had an important influence on Milhaud was the setting up of a music creation group called *The Group of Six*. The setting up of *The Group of Six* can be traced to the time when Milhaud was studying at the Paris Conservatory. Milhaud entered the Paris Conservatory in 1909, and before that in 1906 Germaine Tailleferre already enrolled in the school. Then, Arthur Honegger and Georges Auric entered the school in 1911 and 1913, respectively. At Paris Conservatory, they learn from each other and help each other, which led to becoming lifetime intimate friends. At the same time, this also laid a solid foundation in the sentiment aspect for the final establishment of *The Group of Six*. The music stage in 19th century France was mostly occupied by the Richard Wagner's operas, while the Claude Debussy's Impressionism in the early 20th century led the France music into the modern track. But soon, because of the wounds brought by the war, many people felt confused about the future and did not hold any hope to some illusory things. In the music field, Erik Satie and Claude Debussy are very good friends in life, however, Satie did not appreciate Debussy's music, and he even thought that Debussy's music broke away from the traditional track of France. Holding the same attitude, France playwright, poet, director and artist Jean Cocteau not only greatly opposed Debussy's music, but also widely publicized and highly praised Satie. It is just under the praise of Cocteau that six young musicians gathered tightly around Satie, they were Darius Milhaud, Arthur Honegger, Germaine Tailleferre, Georges Auric, Louis Durey, and Francis Poulenc. These musicians started from 1916 to discuss problems about music and hold concerts together. Until January 16, 1920, the then France composer, music theorist, music critic, and also the journalist for *Comoedia*, Henri Collet, published an article named *The Book of Rimski and the Book of Cocteau, Russian the Group of Five, France the Group of Six and Eric Satie* (Les cinq Russes, les six Français et M. Satie), since

then, the name of *The Group of Six* was recorded into the France music history. Actually, different from the Russian *The Group of Five*, this group did not have a common guiding principle, what's holding their relationship was: The long-time friendship for one; the rebellion against the "Impressionism" music and strong desire to inherit and develop traditional France music for two. As a creation group, they once jointly created two works, i.e., *L'Album des Six* and *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* (for which Louis Durey did not participate). At the same time, their brochure *Rooster* also published four issues. However, due to differences in creation thoughts from each other, soon this group gradually dismissed. The first one to leave was Louis Durey. He went to the South, and later mainly engaged in some music social activities. In 1938, he once served as the General Secretary for the France progressive musician group "People's Music Coalition" and he also was a France communist party member. In 1949, he once used Mao Zedong's poem *The Long March* to compose to celebrate the Chinese Revolution's great victory. Later, Georges Auric also withdrew from *The Group of Six* and concentrated on the works of film music. As the only female composer of *The Group of Six*, Germaine Tailleferre later settled down in the United States and did not produce influential works. The remaining members of Darius Milhaud, Arthur Honegger and Francis Poulenc all made certain contributions in different areas for the development of France 20th century music; this later was referred to as the *The Group of Three* in France music history.

1.4 The American Period (1940-1947)

In 1940, Fascist Germany occupied Paris. In order to dodge the persecution of the Nazis, Milhaud fled to the United States bringing his wife and son, and taught composing at the Mills College in California in America. At the same time, his wife taught French at the same college. There, they led a frugal but very warm life. To express the feeling of missing to the homeland, Milhaud created a piece of work, i.e., orchestral music *Suite Francaise*. At the time of Paris liberation, on August 25, 1944, he happily started to conceive and write his own memoir *Notes Sans Musique*, and he did not finish the book until he was 80 years old.

1.5 The France Period (1947-1971)

After the war was finished in 1947, Milhaud returned to Paris. Later he was hired as the composing professor at the Paris Conservatory. Meanwhile, he went to the Mills College in America to give lectures and presentations from time to time. As usual, in this period Milhaud received many invited creation plans. For these plans, he always finished them on time.

1.6 Geneva (1971-1974)

In 1971, Milhaud retired from work, and settled down in Geneva. During this period, Milhaud still managed to

finish his last three works, which were the part-song *Ani Maamin*, *String Quartet Etude* and *Wind Quintet*. On June 22, 1974, Milhaud passed away in Geneva at the age of 82.

2. SCARAMOUCHE AND ITS MUSICAL FORM STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

In 1937, Milhaud was invited to write incidental music for the drama *Quack Doctor* by France litterateur Moliere. The place for the premiere of this drama was at the Paris "Scaramouch" theater. Two years later, in 1939, Milhaud wrote double piano cento *Scaramouch* according to this incidental music.

For this work, in China there are three translation names, i.e., *Harlequin*, *Coward* and *Scaramouche*. Its French name is *Scaramouche* and English name is *Scaramouch*, and the Chinese meanings for these two words are: (a) (in ancient Italian comedies) timid and bragging harlequin; (b) bluffing coward or rogue (Li, 1992, p.1357). The Chinese translation name *Harlequin* is a paraphrase for the French name, while *Scaramouche* is a transliteration, and *Scaramouch* is the name for the theater for the premiere of the drama.

The three movements of the *Scaramouch* cento consist of three parts that are in parallel relationship in musical content. Although each movement's musical form keeps its own personality, at the same time, they more reflect their commonness and connections.

2.1 The Musical Form Structure of the First Movement

The first movement is in the compound ternary form structure. The first part of the compound ternary form is the non-repeating simple binary form. The first part of the simple binary form is a parallel expanding period. The first phrase of this period consists of two passages of three-bar-long each, and the second passage is the change repetition of the first passage. The first passage is made up of the theme-motive played by the first piano and the one imitated and extended by one bar by the second piano. In addition, the phrase opens and finishes by the scale of homophonic ^bVII grade, i.e., ^bB major. The second phrase is the first phrase's change repetition of same-opening but changing-end. In structure, the second phrase extends by three bars starting from the 13th bar in the means of free extension. The musical content in the second part of the simple binary form comes from the first part; therefore, this is an extending type development in nature. The distinct characteristics of this extending type development are transposition and inverted image, and the structural form is basically the same as the first part. The music in the second part is mainly established on the homophonic auxiliary tone, i.e., G major, and it starts to return to the homophony from the 28th bar and prepares for the entry of the trio of the compound ternary form.

Because the beginning of the trio is a combination of C major and F major, the second part of the simple binary not only finishes, in homophony, the first part of the compound ternary form at the second piano department starting from the 30th bar, but it also prepares for the entry of the trio compound tonality. In traditional musical form arrangements, it is not common that the end of the first part of compound ternary form prepares for the entry of the trio in the connection means, because it emphasizes the parallel comparison between the trio and the first part of the compound ternary form. The trio of the compound ternary form is a rounded simple ternary form. The first part of the simple ternary form is a modulated two-phrase period, and the first phrase consists of two repeating passages, while the structure of the passage was accomplished with one breath. The second phrase is the first one's change repeat: one is to change the tonality, i.e., turning the music to the subordinate tone F major; the other is to change the rhythm, i.e., changing the first phrase's theme-motive based on crotchet as the rhythm basis to dotted rhythm type. At the same time, this theme passage is moved higher to the ^bE major and ^bA major of minor third to repeat once. The simple trio is developing in nature, which develops the prior music theme in the scale of two phrases. The means of development is changing texture and use of weakened rhythm, i.e., postponing the theme starting from the strong meter by one meter to enter, at the same time, the accompanying texture changed from simple dotted rhythm type to the one with the combination of chord and broken chord. The recapitulation of the simple ternary form is the first part's shortened repeat, only repeating two motive passage structures. The main tonality of the whole trio is also C major, the same as the first part, which is uncommon in the tonality layout of traditional compound ternary form, because the accompanying tonality entry of the trio of traditional compound ternary form is its typical characteristic. Thus it can be seen that the comparison of the first part of the compound ternary form with the trio is not very obvious, more like embodying the fusion of the two parts. Before the entry of the recapitulation of the compound ternary form, starting from the 66th bar, it prepares and connects for the entry of the recapitulation in the means of theme-motive first-appearance on the ^bE major. The recapitulation of the compound ternary form is a shortened repeat, only repeating the first theme passage of the simple binary form in the first part of the compound ternary form. The last three bars are the repetition of the movement's first theme bar, serving as the coda.

2.2 The Musical Form Structure of the Second Movement

The second movement is further written in the compound ternary form structure. The beginning of the music is directed by a bar-length tone from mediant to tonic third descending. The first part of the compound ternary

form is also a non-repeating simple binary form, and the first part of the simple binary form is a three-phrase period structure. Each of the phrases consists of two equal length passages, and the third phrase extends the structure to three bars in the means of imperfect cadence, with the melody of the extending part actually being the anticipation of the core of the theme melody in the next part. The theme melody of this period is expressed in the first piano in the form of monophonic music, while the second piano imitates the long tone of the theme melody in the form of equal rhythm. In addition, the harmony method of this period is very concise, mainly utilizing three chords of the tonic, dominant seventh chord and the dominant ninth chord. The music content in the second part of the simple binary form is all new; therefore it is a parallel development in nature. This theme passage includes two phrases, and these two phrases are parallel in the music content. The first phrase is made up of a half-bar long motive, a change repeat of the motive, as well as a repeat extension. The second piano not only imitates the theme melody of the first piano, but also accompanies it in the form of rhythm-syncoating figures, thus making this phrase performance as the mixed condition of imitating polyphony and harmonic figure in texture. The middle part of the compound ternary form is a trio of a three-phrase period structure. Comparing with the trio in the first movement, the comparison of the trio in this movement with the first part of the compound ternary form is much more obvious in that: (a) this middle changes the meter from 4/4 meter to 6/8 meter; (b) the music in this middle is established on the auxiliary tone F major of the homophony ^bB major. Of course, in order to introduce smoothly the recapitulation, the extended third phrase of the trio returns to the phrase end to the homophony and opens up to the first inversion of the dominant seventh chord. The recapitulation of the compound ternary form is a counterpoint combination of the two themes of the first part, which renders the recapitulation to have both imitation polyphony and counterpoint polyphony, at the same time with harmonic accompanying figure in texture. Therefore, the whole recapitulation performs in texture as a mixture of variety.

2.3 The Musical Form Structure of the Third Movement

As same as the first two movements, the macro structure of the third movement is also a compound ternary form. The beginning of the music is a two-bar introduction written in the means of first accompanying figure. The first part of the compound ternary form is still a non-repeating simple binary form. The first part of the simple binary form is a repeating three-phrase period. The first phrase is made up of a motive, a sequenza to it, and a sequenza extension. The second phrase has a bigger development in the first phrase and this development mainly progresses in the means of repeating rhythm but changing tone. The

third phrase is the repeat of the first one. The continuous progress of the seventh chord is the remarkable feature of this theme period in harmony. The combination of average rhythm of vertical ascending, dot, semiquaver, and syncopation makes the music texture versatile. The music content of the second part of the simple binary form comes from the first part, therefore, this is an extending development. This part also includes three phrases, it still uses the continuation of the seventh chord in harmony. However, tonality changes to the auxiliary tone, i.e., the C major. The middle part of the compound ternary form belongs to the trio, and its structure is a change repeat simple ternary form. The first part of the simple ternary form is a parallel period, and there are two transitional phrases of the same content before the two phrases of this parallel period. But the theme phrase is made up of a motive, one repeat of it, as well as an extension. The tonality of this theme period is the III grade major of the homophony, i.e., A major. The middle part of the simple ternary form is a comparison middle part. The first three bars (214-216 bars) of the theme are an introduction of the first accompanying figure, and this accompanying figure extends through the middle part of the simple ternary form. Its structure is through the combination of the two pianos to make the syncopated rhythm stand out, because syncopated rhythm is the core rhythm of this samba-style movement. The middle part of the simple ternary form consists of four phrases of each four-bar length, with each phrase containing two equal length passages. The texture of this middle part is also a mixture type, i.e., the theme melody of the first piano is imitated, after the first bar, at the second piano freely, and the other parts accompany for it in the syncopated rhythm. Actually, syncopation is also the core rhythm of this theme. The recapitulation of the simple ternary form is the transposition repeat of the first part, i.e., returning to the homophony F major to re-appear. The latter three bars (249-251 bars) prepares as a connection for the entry of the recapitulation of the means of accompanying figure first and free path phrase.

The recapitulation of the compound ternary form is also a shortened one, only repeating in the original form the first passage of the simple binary form in the first part of the compound ternary form.

The macro music form structures of the three movements in the *Scaramouch* cento are all the compound ternary form, and there are many similarities within their inner structures. For example, the first part of the compound ternary form is all non-repeating simple binary form, the recapitulation is all the re-appearance of the shortened-to-passages. There are connections between the major parts of the first part, middle part and recapitulation, especially the connection between the first part and the middle part, which is very uncommon in the structure of traditional compound ternary form. But in this work, this is an obvious characteristic in structure. The middle parts have the most different structures. The middle part of the first movement is a repeat simple ternary form of developing middle part in nature, the middle part of the second movement is a passage of three-phrase, and the middle part of the third movement is a repeat simple ternary form of comparing middle part in nature.

In summary, as the cento that uses parallel combination principle as the main structural principle, when emphasizing the mutual comparison of each music component, it must take some means that can unite music. Only when the comparison and the uniting are in equilibrium can the music content possibly be expressed effectively.

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