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Chinese Folk Elements in Dunnan Liu's Piano Concerto The Mountain Forest

Boya Li

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Chinese Folk Elements in Dunnan Liu's Piano Concerto *The Mountain Forest*

by

Boya Li

A Doctoral Project
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Arts and Sciences
and the School of Music
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Approved by:

Dr. Ellen Elder, Committee Chair
Dr. Joseph Brumeloe
Dr. Michael Bunchman
Dr. Edward Hafer

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ABSTRACT

The Mountain Forest is a piano concerto composed by Chinese-American composer Dunnan Liu in 1979. The *Concerto* was inspired by the folk elements of the Chinese Miao ethnic minority group, including the elements of one of their most famous folk tunes, the “Fly Tune,” as well as folk instruments, dance, and festivals. The purpose of this project is to address how the Miao minority folk materials influence this work.

The project contains a brief historical background of the piano in China, a brief biography of the composer and historical background of the *Concerto*, as well as an introduction of the Chinese Miao ethnic minority elements in the work. Lastly, I will offer some performance suggestions for pianists related to the influence of the folk elements.

My goal is to provide knowledge of the cultural background, and tasteful performance notes for the pianists who want to study or perform this work.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my major professor, Dr. Ellen Elder, who advised, encouraged, and supported me throughout my doctoral program.

I am also thankful to my committee members: Dr. Elizabeth Moak, Dr. Michael Bunchman, Dr. Joseph Brumeloe, Dr. Edward Hafer, and Dr. Christopher Goertzen. I am grateful their constant encouragement and generous guidance during my years of doctoral study.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this document to my parents and grandparents, who provide their unconditional love, support, and encouragement.

To my cats, MeiMei Li and Simba Liu, who stayed by my side through my doctoral studies.

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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

1.1 A brief historical background of the piano in China.

The Mountain Forest piano concerto was composed in 1979 by Dunnan Liu. It was written during the time of Chinese economic reform and open-door policy.¹ The work is in three movements, each with its own descriptive title. It is inspired by the folk elements of the Miao ethnic minority, including elements of one of their most famous folk tunes, as well as folk instruments, folk dance, and festivals.

A brief summary of the development of Chinese piano history is necessary in order to provide context for the *Concerto*. The first period began around the 1930s. The compositions of this period were not controlled by political influence. Western music theory, compositional techniques, and instruments such as piano, violin, and cello were widely used during that time.² Composers tried to combine Chinese musical elements with Western compositional techniques and genres. The compositions of this period are short in length, and limited to about three minutes. The most representative work of this period is “The Cowherd’s Flute” by Luting He (Musical Example 1).³

1. Xiuyu Shi, “Liu Dunnan Gangqin Xiezouqu *Shanlin Qianxi*” [A brief analysis of Liu Dunnan's piano concerto *The Mountain Forest*], *Huabei shuilishuidianxueyuan xuebao* 26, no. 3 (2010): 72.

2. Meng Bian, *Zhongguo gangqin wenhua zhi xingcheng yu fazhan* [The formation and development of Chinese piano culture] (Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1996), 9.

3. Tingting Zhou, “Zhongguo gangqin yinyue fazhan de yuandongli: Qiantan geshiqi gangqin yinyue chuanguo zhongde ‘zhongguo fengge’” [The source of development of Chinese piano music: A brief introduction to the “Chinese style” in piano music composition in various periods], *Northern Music* 250, no. 4 (2014): 1.

Musical Example 1: “The Cowherd's Flute” by Luting He (1934)

牧童短笛

贺绿汀 (1934)

The image shows a musical score for the piece '牧童短笛' (The Cowherd's Flute) by He Luting (1934). The score is written for piano and consists of two systems. The first system is marked 'Commodo' and begins with a piano dynamic marking 'mp'. The second system includes dynamic markings 'mf', 'f', 'p', and 'dim.'. The music is in 3/4 time and features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes with various articulations and phrasing.

In 1927, Youmei Xiao founded the first conservatory in Shanghai with the support of Yuanpei Cai.⁴ The Shanghai Conservatory adopted the educational system of European conservatories and employed many foreign teachers. Therefore, this conservatory cultivated a large number of musicians and music enthusiasts.

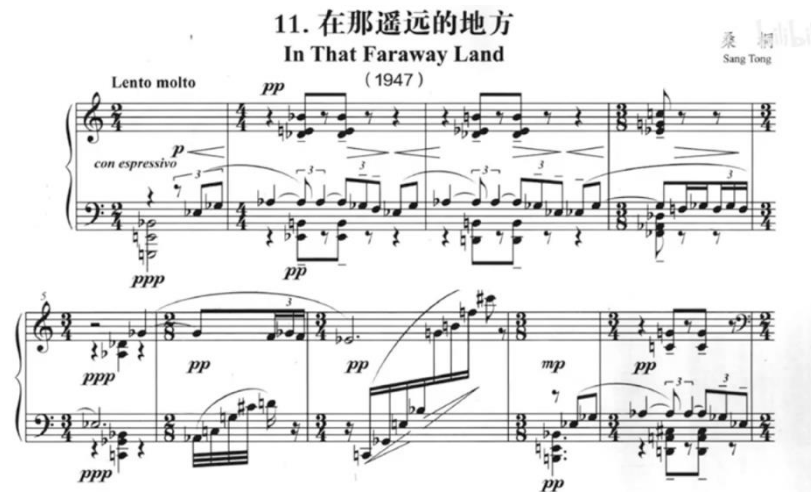
The first piano concerto in China was composed by Wenye Jiang in 1936, when he was a student in Japan between 1930 and 1940. The *Concerto* is a single movement work. Since then, the genre of the concerto has been further developed by Chinese composers.⁵ Most of the concerti in China have retained the traditional Western structure of three movements (fast-slow-fast) and combine these Western ideals with elements of Chinese culture. However, these early piano concerti were small in length, and the melody, harmony, and compositional techniques employed are relatively simple.

4. Meng Bian, 16.

5. Jiajun Wu, “Zhongguo zuoqujia chuanguo de gangqin xiezouqu fazhan jianshu” [A brief description of the development of piano concertos composed by Chinese composers], *Yinyue shenghuo* 11, no. 3 (2015): 59.

Chinese piano composition developed rapidly during this time. Many pianists and composers were studying music in Western countries, and were inspired to write works such as overtures, character pieces, and two-part inventions.⁶ In 1947, Tong Sang composed the first atonal piano work in the history of Chinese piano music, “In That Faraway Land” (Musical Example 2).⁷

Musical Example 2: “In That Faraway Land,” by Sang Tong (1947)



After the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, piano music continued its positive development. Composers were not only experimenting with new harmonic languages such as atonal music, but also borrowed and developed folk tunes from other ethnic groups. “Two Xinjiang Dances” by Shande Ding, and “Days of Emancipation” by Wanghua Chu are examples of this.

However, the arrival of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) interrupted the development of Chinese piano music due to government intervention. Government

6. Minqiang Li and Yunlin Yang, *Zhongguo gangqin duzou zuopin bainian jingdian* [A century of piano solo works by Chinese composers] (Shanghai: Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2015), 97-99.

7. Xiaoguang Gao, Qiong Wu, and Guozhu Wu, *Gangqin yishu dabaike* [The Encyclopedia of Piano Art] (Shanghai: Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2009), 15.

officials believed that music should only serve politics. Scholars, musicians, and music teachers who held different views were forced to farm and raise livestock in the countryside, and suffered from mental anguish as a result. The music of this time was restricted to following political guidelines. Only music that served the needs of the government could be performed and composed.

Some composers were successful at adapting melodies and songs with revolutionary and inspiring characteristics.⁸ These include the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, adapted from the *Yellow River Cantata*, and *Fighting the Typhoon Piano Concerto*, adapted from “Fighting the Typhoon,” originally a concerto for *guzheng*. The performers were required to be uniform in their dress, makeup, and musical gestures on the stage.⁹

Some argued that the music of that period lost its function to freely express the composer’s true intentions. Music critic Harold C. Schonberg commented that the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* is “a bland and even vulgar eclecticism with every cliché of the Socialist Realism style.”¹⁰ The impact that the Cultural Revolution had on the development of Chinese piano music cannot be denied.

After the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, the open-door policy brought hope to the development of Chinese piano music, and the third period began. The economy and

8. Ibid., 17.

9. Sheila Melvin and Jindong Cai, *Rhapsody in Red: How Western Classical Music Became Chinese* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2004), 250-51.

10. Harold C. Schonberg, “Yin Spoke Only Chinese, Ormandy Only English,” *New York Times* (October 14, 1973):19, accessed February 28, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/10/14/archives/yin-spoke-only-chinese-ormandy-only-english-you-have-to-look-at-me.html>.

culture gradually began to recover. Deng Xiaoping¹¹ and many leaders advocated that art should be avoided as a political tool and that composers could convey their personal thoughts through any subject matter of their choice.¹² The policy offered musicians hope and marked a new beginning in the growth of Chinese piano music. More composers began experimenting with new styles and subject matter in their music.¹³ It was no longer necessary to create music for the sole purpose of serving the government.¹⁴

The Mountain Forest piano concerto was a product of the Chinese Reform and open-door policy. The work won first place in the First National Competition of Symphonic Works in China (1981), and was also selected as one of the Twentieth Century Masterpieces by Chinese Musicians in 1993.¹⁵

1.2 A brief biography of the composer and historical background of the Concerto.

The work's composer, Dunnan Liu, was born in Sichuan, China in 1940. He developed a system of music composition which he termed "tonal twelve-tone aggregate," which combines Chinese and Western techniques (this technique is not used in the *Concerto*, however).¹⁶ His father was a priest and music lover who encouraged him

11. Deng Xiaoping was a Chinese revolutionary leader, military commander, and statesman who served as the paramount leader of the People's Republic of China from 1978 to 1989.

12. Melvin and Cai, 313.

13. Ching-chih Liu, *A Critical History of New Music in China*, trans. Caroline Mason (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2010), 510.

14. Xiuyu Shi, 73.

15. "Preface," in *Piano Concerto: The Mountain Forest* (Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, 1983).

16. Ibid.

to study many instruments during his childhood. Dunnan Liu also received professional training on the piano beginning at the age of seven. He began to compose piano music at fourteen years of age, but did not have any composition training at that time. His formal training in composition began in the pre-college program of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1957 with Professor Erjing Deng. Later, he received a bachelor's degree in composition from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1966. From 1974 to 1983, he worked at the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra as composer-in-residence, and taught in the composition department of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Later, he continued to study composition in the United States with financial support from Mrs. Robert Downs III.¹⁷ Mr. Liu earned a master's degree in composition from Indiana University in 1986 and a doctoral degree in composition from Boston University in 1993.

The Mountain Forest was completed and premiered in 1979. The inspiration for this work came when Dunnan Liu returned to his hometown of Guizhou in 1978 for the purpose of ethnomusicological fieldwork. Guizhou province is one of the main regions where the Miao ethnic minority settled in China. He was influenced to incorporate folk elements of the Miao ethnic minority in the *Concerto*, including the elements of one of their most famous folk tunes, as well as folk instruments, dance, and festivals.

The *Concerto* follows the basic structure of the Western classical concerto. In an interview, Dunnan Liu is quoted as saying that the first movement is fast and employs sonata form; the slow and lyrical second movement is in compound ternary form; and the

17. "Preface," in *Piano Suite: Four Folk Songs* (Shanghai: Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2018).

third movement is also fast and uses sonata rondo form.¹⁸ Each movement bears an individual programmatic title: “Spring in the Mountain Forest,” “Night Song of the Mountain Forest,” and “Festival in the Mountain Forest.”

The use of programmatic titles is an important feature of the work, and is used by many Chinese composers in association with extra-musical connotations.¹⁹ According to Chinese scholar Houyong Gao, Chinese program music embodies the meaning of its programmatic title, in addition to human psychology, emotions, and implied meaning.²⁰ Scholar Juan Zhao states that there are many possible meanings of the titles of the three movements of the *Concerto*. For example, the words “mountain forest” can not only be understood as a type of terrain, but also can represent China and its people. “Spring” represents hope and vigor; “night” means longing and fantasy; and “festival” symbolizes enthusiasm and the hope for a beautiful life.²¹

On the title page of the work, Mr. Liu writes the following: “To express my admiration for the beautiful motherland and our ardent love for the native country—The mountain forest.”²² Throughout this work, the composer expresses not only his personal emotions, but also those related to the Miao people and their culture. According to Yange Wei, “The composer's heart beats with the pulse of the times. It is his love for the

18. Dunnan Liu, interview, “Musician—Liu Dunnan” (video), June 16, 2015, accessed February 28, 2023, 0:19, <http://oralhistory.sava.sh.cn/visual/video/2015-12-28/1303597.html>.

19. Kuo-Huang Han, “The Chinese Concept of Program Music,” *Asian Music* 10, no. 1 (1978): 18.

20. Houyong Gao, *Minzu qiyue gailun* [Introduction to national instrumental music] (Nanjing: Jiangsu People’s Publishing, 1981), 206.

21. Juan Zhao, “Yibu zhuangmei de shuqing yinshi: Qianxi gangqin xiezouqu *Shanlin*” [A magnificent lyrical musical poem: A brief analysis of the piano concerto *The Mountain Forest*], *Yinyue chuanguo* no. 3 (2006): 99.

22. Dunnan Liu, “Preface,” in *Piano Concerto: The Mountain Forest*.

motherland and his optimistic expectations for the country's future that are condensed into such a melody.”²³

1.3 Chinese Miao ethnic minority.

Dunnan Liu lived in the Miao region during his childhood and was strongly impressed by the music of that ethnic group. China is officially composed of fifty-six ethnic groups. The Han-Chinese is the largest population group in China, and the other fifty-five ethnic groups accounted for approximately eight percent of the population; therefore, they are referred to as the minority. Despite the small population, ethnic minorities are widely distributed. Each ethnic minority has its own culture, language, music, instruments, and clothing.

The Miao ethnic group was officially recognized as one of the fifty-five ethnic minorities in China after the People’s Republic of China was established in 1949. Their population is about six million people, and they inhabit several provinces in southwest China, such as Guizhou, Yunnan, and Sichuan.²⁴ The history of the Miao ethnic group dates back 5,000 to 6,000 years ago. At that time, they were referred to as the Jiuli tribe, inhabiting the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River. The Miao language is from the Sino-Tibetan language family.²⁵ Unfortunately, their writings were lost or destroyed as a result of migration and warfare, so they used phonetic symbols instead of words and

23. Yange Wei, “Xiandai minzu fengge de youxiu chengguo: Ping gangqin xiezouqu *Shanlin*” [Great work of modern ethnic style: Review of piano concerto *The Mountain Forest*], *Renmin yinyue* 9, no. 5 (1982): 18.

24. Jin Jie, *Chinese Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 96.

25. Shuping Yang, *Miaozu jianshi* [A brief history of the Miao] (Beijing: Minzu Publishing House, 2008), 4.

text. Currently, most Miao people are mainly using simplified Mandarin. Therefore, the lyrics of their folk songs are written using both Miao phonetics and Mandarin.

Miao people mainly live in remote mountain areas which are surrounded by rivers and a dense growth of trees. Such living conditions prompted the people to talk and sing across the mountainside. One of their most popular folksongs was the “Fly Tune.” The characteristics of the “Fly Tune” include the use of high pitches, falsetto voices, loud dynamics, and leaps. The lyrics may be on the topic of love, blessings, politics, or a sacrificial subject. The Miao people also enjoyed playing a wind instrument called the *lusheng* (Figure 1), which is similar to Western double reed instruments, made in different sizes, each with its own pitch and range. The *miaogu* (Figure 2) is another folk instrument favored by the Miao people, which is a percussion instrument made of wood or bronze. Miao people in the Guizhou area usually use the *miaogu* in their performances.²⁶ Because Miao’s texts and words were lost or destroyed, they used dance to commemorate important events such as hunts, wars, weddings, or to pay homage to their ancestors. This was passed down from generation to generation.²⁷

The tradition of telling ancestral stories through dance and the use of instruments is still alive today. The *lusheng*, *miaogu*, and dance performances are an essential part of their festivals (such as the Miao New Year Festival and Dragon Boat Festival).²⁸ The

26. Xiaolei Zhai, “Qian dongnan miaozu yueqi yanjiu” [A study of Miao musical instruments in southeast Guizhou], *Yishu keji* no. 4 (2013): 169.

27. Zhiping Zhang, “Guizhou miaozu wudao qiantan” [A brief exploration of Miao dance in Guizhou], *Guizhou daxue xuebao* 20, no. 4 (2006): 82.

28. Yuan Yuan, “Guizhou qian dongnan miaozu wudao de yuanshengtai yiwei” [The original meaning of Miao dance in southeast Guizhou], *Guizhou minzu yanjiu* 36, no. 6 (2013): 81.

choreography of the dance and its story showcases their bravery, hard work, and positive attitude towards life.²⁹

Figure 1. *Lusheng*



Figure 2. *Miaogu*



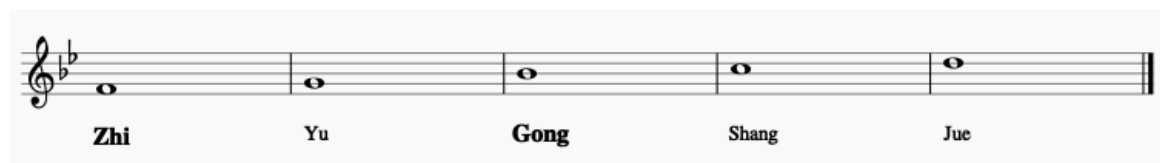
29. Rongrong Zheng, “Guizhou miaozu wudao de tedian he fazhan qushi yanjiu” [Study on the characteristics and development trend of Miao dance in Guizhou], *Yishu pingjian* no. 15 (2018): 94.

CHAPTER II - MIAO MUSICAL ELEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE SUGGESTIONS IN
THE *CONCERTO*

2.1 *The first movement, “Spring in the Mountain Forest”*

The first movement is in sonata form composed in F *Zhi* mode (please see Musical Example 3).³⁰ The Chinese *Zhi* mode is frequently employed in the “Fly Tune,” and it is presented in the four-measure introduction of the first movement.”³¹

Musical Example 3: Chinese F *Zhi* scale



According to Tianjian Cheng, the augmented second interval on *Gong* is a typical feature of the “Fly Tune.”³² The movement begins with an ascending repeated chord on the notes A–B-sharp–C-sharp–E. The chord contains the augmented second interval (A to B-sharp). According to Chinese scholar Yange Wei, this becomes a prominent chord in the *Concerto*, and can be referred to as the “Fly Tune” chord.³³

According to Chinese scholar Juan Zhao, there are extra-musical meanings that are worthy of note in this movement, “Spring in the Mountain Forest.” Just as spring serves as a symbol of new growth after a cold winter, it can also symbolize the new

30. Xiuyu Shi, 72.

31. Yaxiong Du, *Zhongguo ge shaoshuminzu minjian yinyue gaishu* [Overview of folk music of ethnic minorities in China] (Shanghai: Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, 2014), 465.

32. Tianjian Cheng, *Zhongguo minzu yinyue gailun* [Introduction to Chinese folk music] (Shanghai: Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, 2017), 60.

33. Yange Wei, 18.

beginning of China under the open-door policy during the Chinese Reform. The growth of plants in the mountains is like the expectation of the Chinese people for the future of the country.³⁴ She suggests that the “Fly Tune” chords which ascend from the lower register to the higher register of the piano serve as imagery of the Miao mountain range.³⁵ Dunnan Liu writes *fortissimo* in the piano part for both left and right hands with accents on each beat (Musical Example 4).

Musical Example 4: The “Fly Tune” chord, mm. 1-3 (I)

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system is for Piano I, with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). It shows three measures of music. The chords are marked with blue circles containing a 'V' and an '8', indicating accents and octave jumps. The second system is for Piano II (Orchestra), with a grand staff. It shows three measures of music. The tempo is marked 'Moderato brillante' with a metronome marking of 80. The music features a melodic line with triplets in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

Performers should play the accents with an energetic and expansive sound. The hand position of the chords needs to be prepared in advance due to the octave jumps. Pianists should shift their body weight in each measure as they move from the bottom to the top of the keyboard. It is necessary to feel each measure as one unified gesture, which will help the phrasing and line. It is important to keep the shoulders, elbows, arms, and wrists relaxed.

34. Juan Zhao, 99.

35. Ibid.

The main theme of this movement, which can also be seen in other movements of the *Concerto*, uses the “Fly Tune” melody which is heard in measures 7 through 14 in the strings. This “Fly Tune” melody outlines a B-flat major chord in measures 7 and 8 and is featured in the orchestra. As mentioned earlier, a characteristic of Fly Tune singing is the use of leaps. In the main theme of the *Concerto*, Dunnan Liu uses many large intervals as a way of imitating these leaps, including octaves and fourths (Musical Example 5 shows the use of leaps and the B-flat major chord).³⁶

Musical Example 5: “Fly Tune” melody of “Spring in the Mountain Forest,” mm. 7-8 (I)

The image displays two systems of musical notation. Each system consists of a piano part (grand staff) and a violin part (single staff). The piano part features a melody with large leaps, including octaves and fourths. The violin part features a melody with large leaps, including octaves and fourths. Blue circles highlight specific intervals in the violin part, illustrating the use of leaps and the B-flat major chord.

Maintaining the forte dynamic while also producing a singing, melodic tone is a challenge for the second pianist when playing the orchestra reduction. This is partly due

36. Xiaohui Hu, “Guizhou miao zu yinyue wenhua de tedian yu yishu jiazhi: Yi maiozu feige yu lusheng weili” [Characteristics and artistic value of Miao music art in Guizhou], *Yishu pinjian* no. 23 (2020): 56.

to the awkward nature of the reduction with its octaves, chords, leaps, and grace notes. It is not as easy for one pianist to connect the octaves, like multiple string players can. However, it is important to maintain the length of the phrase. Pianists can use the damper pedal to assist with this issue. It is important to sustain the bass note, so I would suggest changing the damper pedal based on the markings that I have included in Musical Example 6.

Musical Example 6: “Fly Tune” melody of “Spring in the Mountain Forest,” with suggested pedal markings, mm. 7-10 (I)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano reduction. Each system consists of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a separate staff for the right hand. The first system is marked with a first ending bracket (I) and includes a blue horizontal line under the right-hand staff, indicating a suggested damper pedal marking. The second system also features a blue horizontal line under the right-hand staff. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'p' and 'f'. The right-hand part of the score shows a complex melodic line with many octaves and grace notes, which is the focus of the damper pedal suggestions.

Beginning in measure 5, there is an arpeggiated “Fly Tune” chord in the solo piano part. One of the characteristics of the “Fly Tune” is the use of augmented seconds, major thirds, perfect fourths, fifths, and octaves. In measure 5, Dunnan Liu writes an augmented second interval (B-flat to C-sharp), and a major third interval (B-flat to D) within the same arpeggio (Musical Example 7).³⁷ Fast thirty-second notes alternate between both hands in an arpeggiated figuration and extend up and down the keyboard. This phrase repeats ten times, and should be smooth and fluid. Therefore, the pianist needs to avoid creating accents as a result of the hands alternating back and forth. The fingers should stay as close to the keys as possible in order to reduce unevenness created by the hand crossings. Pianists should shape the phrases based on the rise and fall of the

37. Qi Li, “Cong *Shanlin* kan zhongguo gangqin xiezouqu zhi minzuhua” [The nationalization of *The Mountain Forest*], *Gansu gaoshi xuebao* 9, no. 3 (2004): 100.

arpeggiated figure. The composer does not mark this in the score, but it is implied. The pedal should not be changed on the highest chord in order to avoid losing the bass note.

Musical Example 7: Arpeggiated “Fly Tune” chord in piano part, m. 5 (I)

Measures 15 to 17 contain a dialogue between the piano and orchestra through the use of imitation (Musical Example 8). A portion of the “Fly Tune” theme heard earlier in the strings is used in imitation between the piano and orchestra. The phrases in this section are short and maintain some of the leaping intervals noted earlier. The challenge in this passage is the communication between the piano and orchestra. Since rehearsal time with the orchestra will be limited, the pianist should sing the orchestra melody during their practice, and attempt to mimic the phrasing and dynamic shaping of the orchestra. The left-hand sextuplets in these three measures can provide dynamic support for the right-hand melody.

Musical Example 8: Dialogue between piano and orchestra, mm. 15-17 (I)

The first theme of the exposition may have been inspired by the *lusheng*. As mentioned earlier, this instrument is a Miao reed pipe wind instrument. In the Guizhou region, *lusheng* has six pipes with six pitches. Its range is limited to an octave.³⁸ According to the research of scholar Talimu Zhao, the tones of the *lusheng* and Miao languages are related.³⁹ The earliest *lusheng* music has no notation, and the Miao people used the instrument as a way to imitate speech.⁴⁰ Therefore, the melody and phrasing of *lusheng* are not long or complex.

38. Xiaolei Zhai, 169.

39. Talimu Zhao and Shunshun Yu, “Miaozu ‘lusheng shuohua’ jizhi de jiedu” [Interpretation of the Miao “lusheng talking” mechanism], *Zhongguo yinyue* 3, no. 8 (2020): 67.

40. Huan Du, “Guizhou miaozu huangguan yueqi de yinyue wenhua yu chuancheng yanjiu: Yi Guizhou Miaozu Lusheng weili” [Study on the musical art value and inheritance of Miao woodwind

Lusheng can be performed as a solo instrument, or in duet or accompanimental settings, such as accompaniment to dance music.⁴¹ According to the book *Miao Lusheng*, when *lusheng* is played as an accompaniment, it is usually using parallel fourths and fifths. However, when it is played in unison, the sound is like only one instrument.⁴² It is used prominently in the folk music of the Miao people. The most frequently used intervals in *lusheng* music are perfect fourths, fifths, and octaves, followed by thirds or intervals of a second.⁴³

An example of the influence of *lusheng* appears in the first theme of the first movement. When the first theme enters, the time signature of the *Concerto* changes to six-eight time, from the previous indication of four-four. The character of this theme is dance-like, and an indication of *Allegretto scherzando* is used. The *staccato* left-hand accompaniment moves by perfect consonant intervals of an octave, fourth, and fifth, which imitates the characteristics of the *lusheng*. The combination of right and left hand also produces intervals of a fourth and fifth (Musical Example 9). The composer indicates an accent on the fifth beat of the measure which serves as an interruption to the duple meter, but aids in the *scherzando* character of the theme.

Pianists should carefully note the detailed articulations that the composer marks. The left hand is always *staccato*, while the first four beats of the right hand are *portato*. I would suggest that the performer slur the last two notes of the right hand (as indicated in

instruments in Guizhou: The example of *lusheng* of Miao people in Guizhou], *Yishu pingjian* 14 (2020): 18.

41. Xiaohui Hu, 57.

42. Huan Du, 18.

43. Talimu Zhao and Shunshun Yu, 67.

Musical Example 9), in order to separate the six beats into two ideas, and to aid in the dance-like feel. The first four beats of the measure can be thought of as one gesture, and the last two beats, which are lower in register, are the second gesture.

Musical Example 9: *Lusheng* imitation in first theme, m. 39 (I)



Measures 41 and 42 feature four sets of ascending short phrases. The right hand is technically challenging because the pianist must play fast *legato* intervals of a third and fourth which are awkward. Choice of fingering for this passage is important. I would suggest thinking of each group of six notes in two segments. Therefore, a suggested fingering for measure 41 would be 1-2, 1-3, 2-4, 1-3, 2-4, 3-5; 1-2, 1-3, 2-4, 1-2, 1-4, 2-5 (Musical Example 10). The pianist should also be aware of the sound quality of the *lusheng* when playing this passage. It is not a loud instrument, but the *timbre* can be bright or rich depending on the size of the instrument. Due to the technical demands of the passage, pianists need to use a light touch, and maintain a smooth and even sound.

Musical Example 10: Fingering suggestion, mm. 41-42 (I)

The second theme is a lyrical melody that is first stated in the orchestra. It is repeated three and a half times from measures 73 to 112. The theme uses a “Fly Tune” style melody characterized by leaps and intervals of a minor third and perfect fifths which are played by the clarinet and piccolo. Horns and trombones play perfect fifths in the accompaniment to imitate the characteristics of the *lusheng* (Musical Example 11).

Musical Example 11: Second theme, mm. 73-76 (I)

Here the composer states the second theme “Fly Tune” in unison between the clarinet and piccolo. The piano enters in measure 85 and states the same melody and rhythm in parallel fourths with the clarinet and piccolo. In order to aid in the ensemble of

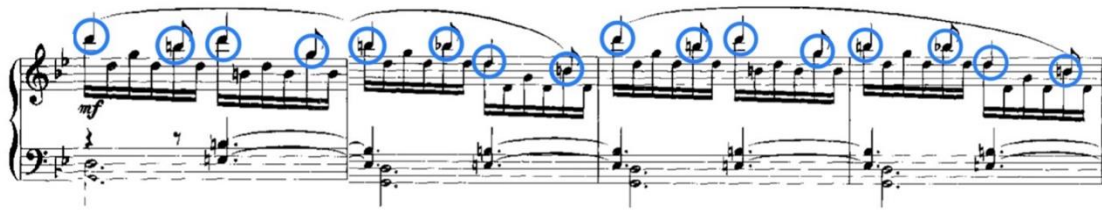
this theme, the pianist must watch the conductor or second pianist carefully. In addition, I would suggest playing the melody using a *tenuto* on each quarter note, and adding slurs as indicated in Musical Example 12. Of course, the piccolo and clarinet will have to agree to match these articulations. As a result, the melody will have a more lilting quality, and the repeated rhythmic patterns will be more interesting musically.

Musical Example 12: Second theme, mm. 85-88 (I)

The image shows a musical score for measures 85-88 (I) of the second theme. The score is in 3/4 time and features a two-voice texture in the right hand of the solo piano. The top voice plays quarter notes, and the bottom voice plays thirty-second notes. A blue box highlights the first four measures, with the text "Parallel fourths" written in blue above it. Green slurs are placed over the quarter notes in the top voice. The score includes parts for Clarinet (Cl.) and Piccolo (Picc.), both marked "8". The piano part is marked "mf" and includes slurs over the thirty-second notes. The score ends with "etc." in the piccolo part.

Second theme material appears again in measures 97 to 108, with a two-voice texture in the right hand of the solo piano. The pianist must voice to the quarter and eighth notes in the top voice of the hand, while making the accompanimental thirty-second notes in the bottom of the hand softer. A good practice suggestion here can be ghosting the thirty-second notes while playing the melody.

Musical Example 13: Second theme with two-voice texture, mm. 97-100 (I)



The development section is from measures 113 to 128. Dunnan Liu changes the character here. Almost every note in both the orchestra and piano is accented (Musical Example 14). The orchestra continues to perform the second theme material in unison. The pianist has the same dynamic level as the orchestra, but a thicker chordal texture is used. Here the piano imitates the *miaogu* drum mentioned earlier, so a powerful sound is required, using the full weight of the arms and support of the body.

Musical Example 14: Accent markings in piano and orchestra, mm. 113-116 (I)



2.2 Second Movement, “Night Song of the Mountain Forest”

The second movement is a lyrical and slow movement in A-flat *Zhi* mode. The tempo marking is *Lento fantastico*. It uses a compound ternary form, including a lengthy

B section, and a short A1 section.⁴⁴ The character of the movement is fantasy-like, but with rhapsodic moments filled with great passion and grandeur.

The theme of this movement is similar to a portion of the “Fly Tune” theme from the first movement in its basic contour and intervals. It uses the augmented second interval ascending from *Gong* (D-flat to E-natural), and the major third ascending from *Gong* (D-flat to F). “Glide” notes are also a unique characteristic of Fly Tune singing.⁴⁵ “Glide” notes are a type of vocal *portamento* technique, and usually involve descending intervals. In an interview, Dunnan Liu mentions that he uses a descending half step and minor third in order to imitate glide note singing in this movement⁴⁶ (Musical Example 15).

Musical Example 15: First theme of the second movement, mm. 8-11 (II)

The title of the second movement is “Night Song of the Mountain Forest,” but it is also sometimes translated as “Monologue” or “Dialogue Between Mountain and Forest.” This dialogue between piano and orchestra is one of the distinct features of this movement. After a short introduction, imitation is used in the A section from measures 8 to 17. The “Fly Tune” melody noted above is heard in the right hand of the piano, while

44. Xiuyu Shi, 72.

45. Yi Lv, *Xhongguo minjian gequ jicheng* [Chinese folk songs collection of Guizhou] (Beijing: Zhongxin Publishing House, 1995), 217.

46. Dunnan Liu, interview, “Musician—Liu Dunnan” (video), 0:34.

the left hand accompanies with triplet arpeggios. The orchestra then imitates the piano using the same melody and rhythm. This passage is like a conversation between the piano and orchestra. The composer employs *mezzo piano* in the piano part and *piano* in the orchestra part, which can be interpreted as an echo in the mountains. I suggest that the pianist use a flatter fingertip in the right hand, in order to produce a warm and rounded sound in the melody (Musical Example 16).

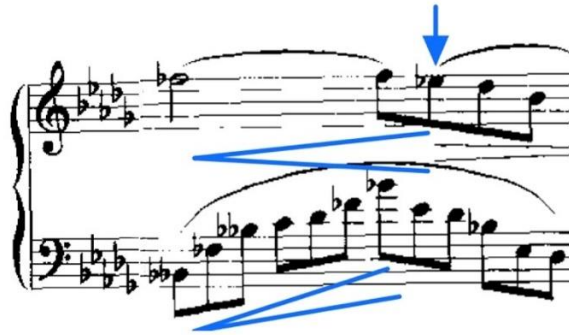
Musical Example 16: Imitation between piano and orchestra, mm. 5-11 (II)

The image displays a musical score for Musical Example 16, consisting of four systems of staves. The first system shows the piano part (treble and bass clefs) with a melodic line in the right hand and triplet arpeggios in the left hand. A first ending bracket labeled '1' is placed over the final measure of the piano part, which contains a triplet of notes. Annotations include 'mp' (mezzo piano) and 'dolce' in a yellow circle, and a blue box highlights the final notes of the triplet. The second system shows the orchestra part (treble and bass clefs) with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The piano part continues with the same melodic line. The third system shows the piano part with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The piano part continues with the same melodic line. The fourth system shows the piano part with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The piano part continues with the same melodic line. Annotations include 'p' (piano) in a yellow circle, and green boxes highlight specific chords in the piano part.

In measure 11, some performers trained in Western music performance practice might choose the F-flat as the most prominent note of the phrase, and then *decrescendo* into the E-flat “glide note.” Through my study of “Fly Tune” singing, I suggest instead that pianists *crescendo* to the E-flat, and then begin to *decrescendo*. This will provide a

more accurate interpretation of traditional “Fly Tune” singing. The left-hand arpeggio figuration can serve as support of this dynamic plan (Musical Example 17).

Musical Example 17: Suggested dynamic plan for interpretation of the “guide notes,” m. 11 (II)



From measures 30 to 37, the violins and cellos present the first theme, while the pianist showcases parallel chromatic double fourths descending in both hands (Musical Example 18). In an interview, Dunnan Liu states that “the combination of contemporary technique and glide notes in the ‘Fly Tune’ melody represents the sense of the times and the style of the Miao nationality.”⁴⁷ The “glide notes” can be heard in the strings, while the pianist accompanies using the technique of chromatic double fourths. The passage demands extremely light and delicate fingers to make the music sound like a “soft breeze in the mountain of night” as Juan Zhao states.⁴⁸

47. Dunnan Liu, interview, “Musician—Liu Dunnan” (video), 0:34.

48. Juan Zhao, 99.

Musical Example 18: Parallel chromatic double fourths accompanying strings melody, m.

31 (II)

This is the most conspicuous technical challenge in the second movement. The fast thirty-second notes are moving quickly in fourths, which are not just in one hand, but both. It is critical to play this passage with a light touch, and with very little arm weight. The sound must be very controlled, and the phrases should be as long as possible. I would suggest thinking of each phrase in one measure segments. I would also recommend separating the double notes into two voices. The top lines of both hands should be legato, while the bottom lines can be played *detaché*. Connecting both notes of the fourth could cause the performer to have technical trouble, or fall behind.

Beginning in measure 59, a cadenza is featured. According to Hao Lu, this cadenza imitates the plucked string instruments of the Chinese orchestra.⁴⁹ For example, the opening grace note figure is reminiscent of the plucking of the *guzheng*. Two repeated groupings are repeated several times as noted in Musical Example 19. The pianist should use rubato in this passage, and a possible interpretation is included in the below example. This cadenza serves as a transition before the “Fly Tune” melody returns as an unaccompanied piano solo.

Musical Example 19: Repeated groupings in the cadenza, and possible interpretation, m. 59 (II)

The image shows a musical score for two staves, likely piano and a second piano or a different instrument. The score is in a key with two flats and a 3/4 time signature. It features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. A red line is drawn across the middle of the score, indicating a tempo change. Below the score, there are five tempo markings: 'rit.' (ritardando), 'accel.' (accelerando), 'a tempo' (return to original tempo), 'rit.', and 'accel.'. Two blue boxes highlight specific groups of notes in the score, corresponding to the first and fourth 'rit.' markings. A dashed line with the number '8' above it is positioned at the beginning of the first blue box.

Beginning at the end of measure 98, the music from the A section returns, but this time the section is shorter. The imitation between piano and orchestra is still heard, but this time octaves and thick chords are featured, and the music is more rhapsodic and bravura in character. The second movement ends quietly (*ppp*), suggesting its title, “Night Song of the Mountain Forest.”

49. Hao Lu, “Qiantan gangqin xiezouqu *Shanlin de yanzou jifa fenxi*” [A brief introduction about analysis of the performance technique of *The Mountain Forest*], *Guangxi jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* 131, no. 3 (2014): 174.

2.3 Third Movement, “Festival in the Mountain Forest”

The third movement is marked *Allegro con fuoco* and features a sonata rondo form in F *Zhi* mode. This movement depicts the Miao people celebrating during their festivals. Irregular time signatures are used frequently in this movement, including five-four and seven-four. The orchestra introduction begins with an imitation of the *miaogu* drum.⁵⁰ It is usually used to accompany dancing, along with the *lusheng*.⁵¹ It is similar to a Western drum, but the *miaogu* sits on the drum stand in a transverse direction. Players can hit either one side or both sides of the drum with drumsticks. Drumheads are made of animal skin, and sizes can be from twenty-three to forty-five centimeters in diameter.⁵²

The *miaogu* drummer often introduces the tempo and style for the dancers and the other members of the *lusheng* band.⁵³ As stated earlier, the four-measure orchestra introduction at the beginning of the third movement imitates the *miaogu* as well as the *lusheng*. The use of five-four time signature and *Allegro con fuoco* tempo contribute to the fiery character of the movement. The rhythm imitates the *miaogu*, and the use of fourths and fifths in the harmony imitates the *lusheng*. The music is marked *forte* with accents, and thick chords and octaves are featured in the orchestra. The rhythm is mainly syncopated and should be played clearly and accurately. Performers can count this figure as a group of two quarter notes followed by a group of three (Musical Example 20). After

50. Juan Zhao, 103.

51. Zhiping Zhang, 82.

52. Huaqiang Wu, “Xiangxi miaozu yueqi yanjiu” [Miao musical instrument research], *Guizhou daxue xuebao* 22 no. 1 (2008): 39.

53. Hanjing Li, “Xiangxi Miaozu guwu tanxi” [Study of Miao drum dance], *Jishou daxue xuebao* 36 (2015): 82.

the four-measure orchestra introduction, the piano enters, and the same syncopated rhythm is heard.

Musical Example 20: The four-measure orchestra introduction imitating the *miaogu*, mm. 1-4 (III)

Beginning in measure 5, the first theme of the exposition continues to simulate the rhythm of the *miaogu* and combines elements of *lusheng*. However, this time Dunnan Liu removes the augmented second interval from the “Fly Tune.” Instead of octaves, the composer adds the note “F” in both hands on beats 1 and 2 of measure 5, which creates intervals of a fourth and fifth and a fuller harmony. This is one of the characteristics of *lusheng* noted in previous examples. Both the *miaogu* and *lusheng* join together in tutti on the first two beats of these measures. The chords are marked with accents, and pianists should emphasize them in order to imitate the imposing sound of the *miaogu* and *lusheng*. However, on beats 3, 4, and 5, the texture is thinner due to the use of octaves and reminiscent of the *miaogu* (Musical Example 21).

Musical Example 21: Imitation of *miaogu* and *lusheng*, mm. 5-8 (III)

The composer removes the accents beginning in measure 17, and the music is marked *mezzo piano*, which produces a contrasting effect. The melody is played by both hands in unison octaves in the treble range of the piano. The rhythm of the piano and orchestra parts are also in unison. The higher register and the lighter texture create a sound that is reminiscent of young dancers. Pianists need to use a light touch with very little arm weight, and a *detaché* articulation on the eighth notes. It will be helpful to think of dancing when performing the quarter notes, and the performer should use an “up” motion with the arm, rather than a “down” motion (Musical Example 22).

Musical Example 22: Measures 17-20 (III)

A four-measure orchestra transition introduces the second theme. Although the time signature is still in five-four, its rhythm can be grouped into three quarter notes followed by a group of two. At measure 63, the flute, piccolo, and clarinet state the

second theme, which simulates dancing of the Miao girls. In festivals, the female Miao dancers wear silver ornaments to decorate their costumes, which symbolizes health, safety, happiness, and luck.⁵⁴ Dunnan Liu’s use of the triangle and tambourine as well as the fourth beat trills in the flute, piccolo, and clarinet imitate the sound of the collision of these silver ornaments (Musical Example 23).

Musical Example 23: Second theme featuring three plus two rhythm and imitation of silver ornaments, mm. 63-66 (III)

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Cl.), Piccolo (Picc.), and Piano (II). The score is in 3/4 time and features a 'three plus two' rhythm. The Flute, Clarinet, and Piccolo parts are circled in red, and the Piano part is circled in blue. A red box highlights the first four measures, and a blue box highlights the first two measures. The text 'Imitation of silver ornaments' is written in red above the Flute, Clarinet, and Piccolo parts.

The silver ornaments are found on gowns, crowns, hats, shawls, as well as earrings and bracelets. Sometimes, the festival costumes can weigh up to sixty-six pounds, and most of the costumes are handmade by the Miao people.⁵⁵ Therefore, the dance steps are not strenuous due to the heavy weight of the costumes. Miao dance is mainly based on jumping and stepping.⁵⁶ The first beat includes a jump, and the following four beats are steps. The melody in the flute, clarinet, and piccolo of Musical Example 23 imitates this jumping and stepping choreography.

54. Mingsan Fan, Wenbin Yang, and Cairu Lan, *Miaozu fushi yanjiu* [Research on Miao costumes] (Shanghai: Southeast University Press, 2018), 285.

55. *Ibid.*, 286.

56. Rongrong Zheng, 94.

Figure 3. *Miao dancers wearing their silver costumes.*



Beginning in measure 71, the piano repeats this theme in the top part of the right hand, but it is accompanied by eighth notes in the bottom part of the hand. For this passage, pianists need to voice to the top part of the hand. The thumb should be softer, and accents should be avoided. In addition, I suggest that the second and fourth beats of the left hand should be regarded as *tenuto*, which highlights the syncopated rhythm (Musical Example 24).

Musical Example 24: Second theme, mm. 71-72 (III)

From measures 95 to 102, the first theme is presented again in a five-two time signature, marked *fortissimo*. Pianists should use their full body weight to achieve the sound that is needed in this *risoluto* return of the theme. The first two half notes, which are stated at the beginning of each measure, are difficult to coordinate in the piano and orchestra. This is due to the changing tempo, time signature, and the grouping of three quarter notes at the end of each bar. Pianists should subdivide carefully and use clear body language to show the conductor or second pianist the arrival of the downbeat. Rushing should also be avoided on the last three quarter notes leading into the downbeat of each measure.

The development section begins at measure 103, and is in seven-four time signature. According to Juan Zhao, it is a *toccata*-style fugue.⁵⁷ The quarter note accompaniment features elements of *lusheng* through its use of perfect fifths. The composer uses *staccatos* and rapid eighth notes to imitate a *miaogu* solo. Performers need

57. Juan Zhao, 103.

a fast *staccato* touch for this dazzling drum-like passage. The composer groups the eighth notes into a group of six, a group of four, plus another group of four. He also adds accents on the first and the eighth of these eighth note groupings, which further disrupts the regularity of the rhythm.

In measure 106 the piano presents the “Fly Tune” melody from the first movement, and the orchestra answers with toccata-style eighth notes. Coordination between the piano and orchestra is challenging. If the soloist is able to rehearse with a second pianist then putting it together with orchestra will be easier. A suggestion which will aid in coordination is for the second pianist or orchestra to place a slight emphasis on the fifth eighth note “C,” and the thirteenth eighth note “A” of the answer in measure 106 (Musical Example 25). The pianist should also subdivide the “Fly Tune” melody carefully since longer note values are used.

Musical Example 25: *Toccata*-style fugue section, mm. 104-109 (III)

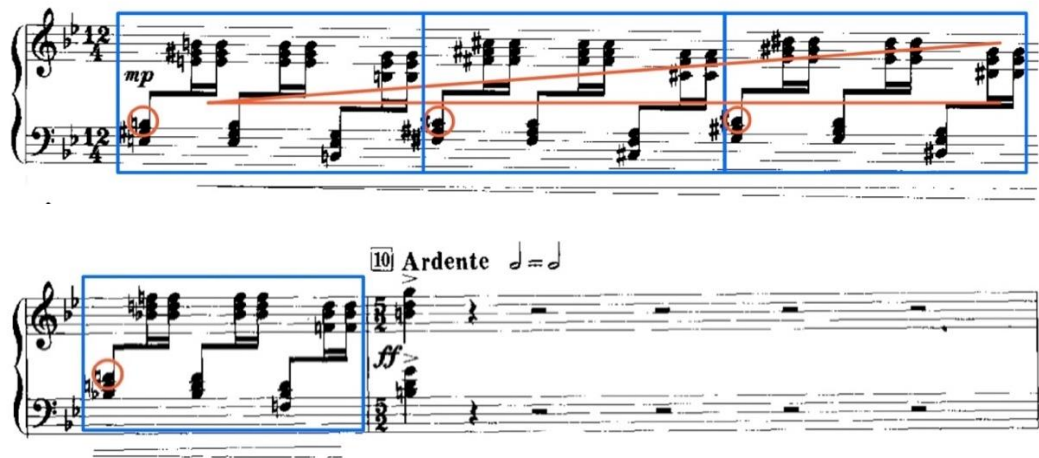
The musical score consists of two systems of staves. The first system shows the right hand (RH) playing a subject in *mp* (mezzo piano), marked with a blue box and a red circle. The left hand (LH) is silent. The second system shows the left hand playing an answer in *mp*, also marked with a red circle. The right hand is silent. The third system shows the right hand playing a *mf* (mezzo forte) passage, marked with a red circle. The left hand continues with a rhythmic accompaniment. The score includes dynamics such as *mp*, *p*, and *mf*, and a 'Fly tune' from the first movement.

There are two passages that contrast rhythmically in the development section. In measures 112 to 113, there are four groups of ascending eighth note chords which crescendo from *piano* to *forte*. In measures 122 to 123, there are four groups of ascending chords which start a whole step higher and *crescendo* from *mezzo piano* to *fortissimo*. In the second instance, the composer changes the rhythm of the right-hand chords to two repeated sixteenth-note chords, instead of an eighth note. This change of rhythm and dynamic serves to increase the energy of the second statement and to lead to the high point on the downbeat of measure 123 (compare Musical Examples 26 and 27).

Musical Example 26: Contrasting rhythmic passages, mm. 112-113 (III)



Musical Example 27: Contrasting rhythmic passages, mm. 122-123 (III)



From measures 123 to 136, the composer combines the *toccata*-style texture of the development section with the first theme of the third movement. *Fortissimo* is indicated, and this moment marks the climax of the movement (Musical Example 28). This climax is created through the exciting combination of these two themes, along with the use of repetition, accent markings, and energetic dynamics and articulation.⁵⁸

58. Yange Wei, 17.

Musical Example 28: Climax featuring toccata-style texture of the development combined with first theme of the exposition, m. 123 (III)

The image displays a musical score for Musical Example 28, featuring a climax with a toccata-style texture of the development combined with the first theme of the exposition, m. 123 (III). The score is written for piano and includes the following elements:

- Tempo/Character:** *Ardente* (Ardent), indicated above the first staff.
- Staff 1 (Right Hand):** Contains a rapid, repetitive melodic line. A red box highlights this section, labeled "toccata-style texture of development".
- Staff 2 (Left Hand):** Contains a series of chords and arpeggiated figures. A blue box highlights this section, labeled "first theme".
- Dynamic:** *ff* (fortissimo), indicated below the first staff.
- Time Signature:** 5/8.

The following section is a sweeping piano cadenza which according to Juan Zhao, appears like the “speech of an elder in a Miao festival.”⁵⁹ There are moments of improvisatory arpeggiated passages, contrasting with recitative-like passages featuring intervals of a fourth and fifth which suggest speech. There are five statements of the recitative-like intervals, with the fifth statement being the longest. Each recitative-like “speech” is interrupted by the improvisatory arpeggiations.

59. Juan Zhao, 103.

Musical Example 29: Cadenza featuring recitative-like passages featuring intervals of a fourth and fifth contrasting with improvisatory arpeggiated passages, m. 137 (III)

The musical score for Musical Example 29 is presented in three systems. The first system begins with the tempo marking 'Quasi adagio' and the dynamic 'pp'. It features a recitative-like passage with intervals of a fourth and fifth, followed by an improvisatory arpeggiated passage marked 'ppp' and 'veloce'. The second system continues with a recitative-like passage marked 'pp' and an arpeggiated passage marked 'ppp'. The third system is marked 'poco mosso' and 'pp', featuring a recitative-like passage with intervals of a fourth and fifth, followed by an arpeggiated passage marked 'pp'. The score is written for piano and includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

After the cadenza, the recapitulation begins in measure 123. Cyclicity is featured in measure 138 when the first theme of the first movement is stated. The composer indicates *fff* for this passage, it is the most energetic part of the entire *Concerto*. The reappearance of this theme reminds the listener of a bustling Miao village, and its people who are celebrating a festival.

CONCLUSION

In *The Mountain Forest*, Dunnan Liu not only expresses his admiration for his hometown but also presents the music and culture of the Chinese Miao minority to the world. Although the *Concerto* represents the unique Miao musical style and character, it also incorporates many Western techniques such as fast octaves, chordal gestures, double note intervals, and fast fluid passagework.

Many pianists may be hesitant to approach a new style of music that may be unfamiliar. Through an examination of the different Miao elements, performers can gain a better understanding of this Chinese work, which will undoubtedly guide their interpretation. The performance suggestions will also serve as an aid for pianists who are studying this work. My hope is that an understanding of the cultural background and practice suggestions will provide performers with a path for their success, and ultimately help to achieve a wider audience for this worthy composition.

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