

Marcel MIHALOVICI

PIANO MUSIC

PASSACAILLE (POUR LA MAIN GAUCHE), OP. 105

QUATRE PASTORALES, OP. 62

QUATRE CAPRICES, OP. 29

RICERCARI, OP. 46

SONATINE, OP. 11

SONATE, OP. 90



Deutschlandfunk Kultur

Matthew Rubenstein

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

MARCEL MIHALOVICI Piano Music

Sonatine, Op. 11 (1922–23)	4:20
1 I <i>Allegro moderato</i>	1:04
2 II <i>Andante semplice</i>	1:41
3 III <i>Toccata (Vivace)</i>	1:35
Quatre Caprices, Op. 29 (1928)	6:37
4 No. 1 <i>Con eleganza</i>	0:51
5 No. 2 <i>Mosso</i>	1:14
6 No. 3 <i>Andantino e misterioso</i>	2:31
7 No. 4 <i>Allegro furioso</i>	2:01
Ricercari, Op. 46 (1941)*	21:57
8 Theme: <i>Poco lento (tempo di passacaglia)</i>	3:26
9 Var. 1: <i>Un poco più mosso</i>	1:11
10 Var. 2: <i>Andante, non troppo</i>	1:16
11 Var. 3: <i>Allegro ben ritmato</i>	1:05
12 Var. 4: <i>Allegro giusto</i>	0:47
13 Var. 5: <i>Lento sostenuto</i>	1:39
14 Var. 6: <i>Leggiero, con moto</i>	2:08
15 Var. 7: <i>Andantino</i>	1:58
16 Var. 8: <i>Allegretto capriccioso, ma molto ritmato</i>	1:14
17 Var. 9: <i>Molto vivace</i>	2:06
18 Fugue: <i>Grave, più tosto moderato</i>	5:07
Quatre Pastorales, Op. 62 (1950)	6:42
19 No. 1 <i>Andantino</i>	1:36
20 No. 2 <i>Allegro</i>	1:31
21 No. 3 <i>Lento</i>	1:38
22 No. 4 <i>Allegro</i>	1:57

Sonate, Op. 90 (1964)*	17:13
23 I <i>Allegretto piacevole</i>	5:03
24 II <i>Lento improvvisando – e sempre con un sentimento assai barocco</i>	6:01
25 III <i>Allegro giacoso</i>	6:09
Passacaille (pour la main gauche), Op. 105 (1975)	17:25
26 Theme: <i>Grave – Mesto</i>	0:39
27 Var. 1	0:52
28 Var. 2	0:44
29 Var. 3: <i>semplice</i>	0:40
30 Var. 4: <i>espressivo – sognando</i>	0:47
31 Var. 5: <i>Più mosso</i>	0:39
32 Var. 6	0:41
33 Var. 7: <i>tranquillo</i>	0:40
34 Var. 8	0:43
35 Var. 9: <i>Lento senza alcuna espressione</i>	0:40
36 Var. 10: <i>Più animato</i>	0:46
37 Var. 11: <i>Mosso subito – virtuoso</i>	0:20
38 Var. 12: <i>Lento subito</i>	1:01
39 Var. 13: <i>Stesso</i>	0:55
40 Var. 14: <i>Vivo (con virtuosità)</i>	0:30
41 Var. 15: <i>Meno</i>	0:39
42 Var. 16: <i>Moderato pensieroso</i>	1:11
43 Var. 17: <i>Calmo, sempre pensieroso</i>	2:03
44 Var. 18: <i>Liberamente – quasi una cadenza</i>	2:30

Matthew Rubenstein, piano

TT 73:52

ALL EXCEPT * FIRST RECORDINGS

MEMORIES OF MIHALOVICI

by Charles Timbrell

My introduction to Marcel Mihalovici was through his music, when the French pianist Monique Haas played his *Quatre Caprices* in a recital at the University of Michigan in 1967. I remember being struck by the distinctive idiom of the piece, which held its own in a programme of works by Chopin, Messiaen, Webern, Debussy and Ravel. A decade later, still not knowing that her husband was Mihalovici, I wrote to Mme Haas about the possibility of having some lessons with her. She agreed, and we arranged to meet for a purely social visit when I was in Paris in January 1978. Their apartment was on the top floor of a venerable old building on the rue du Dragon (off the boulevard St-Germain), in the Sixth Arrondissement. Before knocking, I paused at the door for a few moments to listen to the faint sounds of a piano, and then I obeyed the large handwritten sign on the door: 'Frappez fort! Musiciens au travail!' They greeted me warmly, offered me a drink ('Scotch, naturellement, pour un Américain,' he said), and proceeded to ask me about myself, where I had studied, where I was staying in Paris, and what restaurants I had enjoyed. In fact, they were so outgoing and friendly that I had to work to turn the conversation to themselves. During a week of memorable lessons with Haas in January 1979, I remember that Mihalovici usually greeted me at the door for brief exchanges before he excused himself to resume work at his small desk, which was in a room next to the one with the piano. I was struck by the fact that he could concentrate on composing while hearing my lessons in such close proximity. One day, I happened to notice on his desk a copy of his *Textes* for Viola and Piano, Op. 104. When I expressed an interest in it, he told me that the Romanian-American violist Ernst Wallfisch and

his pianist-wife Lory had visited him just the day before in order to play it for him prior to their recording for French Radio.¹

In 1980 I wrote to Mihalovici, asking if I could commission a short piano piece from him. He replied with characteristic gentility that he was unfortunately too busy to do this, but that if he could, he would not expect payment from me. He mentioned his work on his *Passacaille* for piano and gave me news of his and Haas' recent activities. I had another visit in 1981, when I interviewed Haas for my book on French pianists,² and Mihalovici joined in the conversation, providing pertinent details and recollections.

My final visit to the rue du Dragon, in July 1984, was a sad one. I phoned in the hope of playing again for Haas, but Mihalovici told me that it would not be possible, due to the terrible fire they had had in their apartment earlier in the year. Haas had been severely burned and was still recovering in a clinic. He invited me to visit him, so that he could explain everything in detail. It was an emotional moment for me as he quietly pointed out the burn marks covering the walls and doors of the apartment. On leaving, I wrote, in French, a note of condolence for him to give to Haas, which he happily proofread and corrected. He was to die a year later, and Haas two years after him. This generous, unaffected and devoted couple, who lived simply and only for creating music, made an enduring impression on me.

Charles Timbrell, Professor Emeritus of Piano at Howard University, holds degrees from Oberlin Conservatory, the University of Michigan and the University of Maryland. His postgraduate studies were with Guido Agosti in Rome and with Monique Haas, Eric Heidsieck and Gaby Casadesus in Paris. He has performed extensively in the USA and Europe and recorded for Dante in France and IMC in Japan. His publications include French Pianism: A Historical Perspective, performing editions of piano works by Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin and Schumann (Alfred Publications, Los Angeles) and numerous articles and reviews in international journals.

¹ *Textes* was composed in 1975; the recording, made on 24 January 1979, was released, with works by Koechlin, Milhaud and Mondonville, on INA Mémoire Vive (IMV029) in 1998.

² *French Pianism: A Historical Perspective*, Amadeus Press, Portland, 1992, rev. edn., 1999.

THE PIANO MUSIC OF MARCEL MIHALOVICI

by Lukas Näf

Marcel Mihalovici was born on 22 October 1898, in Bucharest, and died in Paris on 12 August 1985. The son of well-to-do Jewish parents in Bucharest, he began violin lessons and lessons in harmony and counterpoint at an early age. As a young adult, following the advice of George Enescu, Romania's most famous native composer, Mihalovici travelled to Paris, where from 1919 to 1925 he studied violin and composition at the Schola Cantorum. He became an active participant in the Parisian avant-garde and was associated in particular with the so-called 'École de Paris', a group of immigrant composers under the aegis of the music publisher La Sirène musicale. Other members of this loosely defined group included Bohuslav Martinů (Czechoslovakia), Conrad Beck (Switzerland), Tibor Harsányi (Hungary), Aleksander Tansman (Poland) and Alexander Tcherepnin (Russia).

In 1932 Mihalovici became a founding member of the chamber-music collective *Le Triton*, which presented new works by both French and foreign-born composers. During the German occupation of France (1940–44) in the Second World War, Mihalovici was forced to leave Paris and lived in exile in Cannes. Beginning in 1942, he and Monique Haas were active members of the 'Comité de Front national de la musique', a cultural resistance formation that supported composers persecuted by the Nazis.

From 1945 onwards, Mihalovici wrote extensively for the newly expanded French radio. In the 1950s he worked increasingly on musical projects in German-speaking Europe. Musical collaborators in this period included the conductors Ferdinand Leitner (Stuttgart), Erich Schmid (Zurich), Heinz Zeebe (Braunschweig), Paul Sacher (Basel) and, especially, Hans Rosbaud (Donaueschingen). Between

1958 and 1962 Mihalovici returned to his alma mater, the Schola Cantorum in Paris, where he taught music theory. In the 1960s and '70s, as a member of the 'Comité de la Musique', he continued his work for French radio and also sat on the juries of international competitions. Although he was self-consciously not a member of the post-war avant-garde, he received several honours and awards befitting his long and illustrious career. He became a member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts of the Institut de France in 1964; in 1972, he received the Grand Prix of the City of Paris; and in 1979, he was awarded the Grand Prix of the French 'Société des auteurs, compositeurs et éditeurs de musique' (SACEM).

To trace the evolution of Marcel Mihalovici's music for piano is also, in a sense, to retrace his biography as an artist. The piano features prominently in his output from the beginning to the end of his long career. Although Mihalovici himself was a professionally trained violinist, not a pianist, he could rely on his wife, the internationally renowned pianist Monique Haas (1909–87), both as a source of inspiration and as a reliable interpreter of his technically demanding works for the instrument. Her presence can be felt across the length of Mihalovici's stylistic development – a span of some fifty years.

Mihalovici's earliest piano works, the *Sonatine*, Op. 11, and the *Quatre Caprices*, Op. 29 – as well as his later *Quatre Pastorales*, Op. 62 – are short pieces that in their concision and technical simplicity (with one or two exceptions) could be used for didactic purposes. Their style reveals the influence of such predecessors as Béla Bartók or the folk traditions of his Romanian homeland. Only gradually do the elements of a particularly French style become integral to his writing. The *Cinq Bagatelles*, Op. 37 (1934), the first pieces Mihalovici dedicated to his wife, also belong in this group of early pieces. By the time he composed his large works for piano and orchestra, the *Toccata*, Op. 44 (1938), and the *Étude en deux parties*, Op. 64 (1950–51), premiered in Donaueschingen, Mihalovici was writing in a way that was tailored to Haas' formidable technical abilities. The *Ricercari*, Op. 46, a virtuosic set of variations, is the most significant case in point. In one interview, however, Mihalovici denied that his wife

acted as his adviser when writing for the piano.¹ Just once in the *Ricercari* did he have to change a chord – because only the large hand of a man could play it.

The *Sonate*, Op. 90, and the *Passacaille*, Op. 105, belong to Mihalovici's late creative period. The Sonata employs an advanced tonal language, but also points to the strong influence of Romanian folk-music. The *Passacaille*, on the other hand, has the hallmarks of the kind of 'speculative' music a composer writes at the end of his career (as with, say, Bach's *Kunst der Fuge*). Here, Mihalovici made use of learned counterpoint and, inspired by Albrecht Dürer's famous engraving *Melencolia I*, of number symbolism.

***Sonatine pour piano*, Op. 11 (1922–23)**

Following the advice of George Enescu, the 21-year-old Marcel Mihalovici moved from Bucharest to Paris at the end of 1919 and enrolled at the Schola Cantorum. After a rigorous examination, from 1919 to 1925 he attended the courses in composition taught by Vincent d'Indy, while studying harmony under Léon-Edgar Saint-Réquier and the latter's assistant, Paul Le Flem, whom Mihalovici particularly esteemed. Mihalovici was especially inspired by the sound-world of Gregorian chant, which he discovered under Amédée Gastoué's tutelage: as with Debussy before him, its modal harmonies captivated him. Mihalovici's violin studies continued under Nestor Lejeune, culminating in a mark of 'très bien', although without his receiving a violin diploma.

The *Sonatine*, Op. 11, was written between 1922 and 1923, while Mihalovici was still a student, and is dedicated to the Canadian pianist and composer Léo-Pol Morin, who, like the composer, had come to Paris in 1919. Another pianist, Marie-Hélène Bonnet, gave the piece its premiere in 1925. The first of its three simple movements, *Allegro moderato* [1], comes the closest of the three to something like sonata form. An archaic-sounding pentatonic melody unfolds over an ostinato accompaniment. As expected, the second phrase provides a varied reprise of the first, with an added repeated-note motif that will play a central role in the development section (*Plus fort*). There, the material from the exposition is enriched with chromatic elements. The slow movement, *Andante semplice* [2], displays a clear ABA form, with an emphasis on the

¹ Interview with Mihalovici by Alain Pâris, Radio France Culture, 5 August 1982, Phonothèque Nationale, Paris.

B section. With its simple two-part counterpoint and rolling $\frac{6}{8}$ metre, this movement projects the peaceful, nostalgic mood of a lullaby. The juxtaposition of a modal melody in the upper voice with a revolving chromatic accompaniment that spans the interval of a seventh lends the *Andante* a feeling of quiet mystery. In the third movement, *Toccata (Vivace)* [3], Mihalovici invokes a more archaic sound-world. As in the harpsichord toccatas of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (by Froberger and Bach, for example), he makes use of an explicitly contrapuntal style, ending the *Sonatine* with a compact and energetic fugue, complete with theme, episodes and stretti. Baroque and pre-Baroque contrapuntal techniques will go on to play an even more important role in Mihalovici's later works for the piano.

Quatre Caprices pour piano, Op. 29 (1928)

By the time his studies at the Schola cantorum came to an end in 1925, Marcel Mihalovici was well-integrated into the musical avant-garde of his adoptive city. In particular, he enjoyed fruitful collaborations with the Romanian dancer Lizica Codreanu and the Russian painter couple, Michail Larionow and Natalja Gontscharowa. The Swiss composer Frank Martin collaborated as a pianist in the production of Mihalovici's ballet score *Karagueuz*, Op. 23, and the conductor Walther Straram presented works by Mihalovici in the famous 'Concerts Straram'. Mihalovici gradually gained a reputation in musical circles, coming to the attention of the French publisher Michel Dillard. Dillard planned to publish and publicise the works of foreign-born composers in Paris, among them Mihalovici's friends Beck, Harsányi, Martinů and Tansman in the 'École de Paris'.

Among other works, Dillard published Mihalovici's *Quatre Caprices*, Op. 29, in 1929, a collection written in November and December 1928. The set received its premiere in a radio broadcast on 16 June 1931, performed by Tibor Harsányi. Each movement is dedicated to a different person in Mihalovici's circle of friends: the journalist Suzanne Albaran, the Spanish pianist Tomás Terán, the Romanian sculptor Irina Codreanu and the Parisian translator Lily Jumel. The genre title *Caprices* is appropriate to the content of these idiosyncratic little pieces, which avoid traditional forms in favour of spontaneous invention.

The first *Caprice (Con eleganza)* [4] is based on a trill gesture that lends the piece a certain French nobility. Like many of Mihalovici's shorter works from this period, it is composed in a ternary ABA form, with a slow (*Lento*) one-bar coda. The middle section develops elements of the two-bar theme, with the waltz-like second bar splitting itself off, gaining both energy and mass on the way to a climactic high point. The piece is suffused with modal harmonies, lending it the character of folk music. The second piece (*Mosso*) [5] is structured as a series of sharply contrasting episodes. The main idea is a playfully reiterated one-bar pentatonic gesture. In the course of the movement, harmonic elements of peasant music are juxtaposed with diatonic chord structures, chord mixtures and running chromatic passages. The dance-like miniature closes with a marching ostinato beneath a simple melodic declamation in the right hand.

In the third piece (*Andantino e misterioso*) [6] Mihalovici creates an atmosphere reminiscent of the 'night music' of Béla Bartók. The rising and falling melodic figure in the left hand is based on an octatonic scale, recalling the music of Bartók and Stravinsky. Dense mixtures of chords, with subtle rhythmic displacements, overlay the melody. The middle section (*con grazia*) is an 'oriental' arabesque, at once static and effusive. A woodwind-like melody returns obstinately to a central tone, interlaced with ever more intricate ornaments, before flowing calmly into a reprise of the opening material. The fourth piece in the set (*Allegro furioso*) [7] brings to mind the machine-like percussive effects in Bartók's *Allegro barbaro* (1911). But this piece has a will of its own. In particular, Mihalovici is fascinated by metrical games: he creates surprising effects by means of irregular and unpredictably syncopated accents. One rhythmically charged section follows the next, until the pianist slams out a series of *martellato* chords to end the piece.

Ricercari. Variations libres pour piano, Op. 46 (1941)

The *Ricercari*, Op. 46, written between August and October of 1941, are the product of an exceedingly difficult and dangerous period in the composer's life. After the occupation of Paris by the Nazis on 14 June 1940, Mihalovici, the son of a well-to-do Jewish family in Bucharest, fled the French capital. He went to the south of France

together with his friends, Lizica Codreanu and her sister, the sculptor Irina Codreanu. They eventually reached Cannes, where they remained in exile until the summer of 1944. It was there that Mihalovici learned of the pogroms carried out by the fascist 'Iron Guard' in Bucharest, forcing members of his family to leave Romania and emigrate to Palestine. For Mihalovici these years in exile with his 'little family' – Lizica and her son François, Irina and later Monique Haas as well – were trying but not unproductive. Besides composing the *Ricercari*, while in Cannes Mihalovici wrote his Second Sonata for violin and piano, Op. 45 (dedicated to Martinů), and his *Symphonies pour le temps présent*, Op. 48. The *Ricercari* received their premiere only after the war, in Paris on 2 November 1945, not surprisingly with Monique Haas at the piano.

The musicologist Claude Rostand, a friend of the composer, described Mihalovici's *Ricercari* in 1950 as follows:

The *Ricercari* [...] are free variations for piano. The title does not indicate that the composer wanted to update the ancient form of the *ricercar* by using a modern language, but is rather inspired by its spirit: these are 'studies' in sonority, rhythm, harmony and pianism. The work makes use of canon, imitation and fugue. It is based on a *Passacaille* – opening with a sombre theme of eight bars, atonal in its extreme chromaticism, and presenting the theme from six different vantage points. Ten grand variations follow, which amplify, vary and transform the theme by means of canonical, rhythmical, harmonic and polyphonic techniques, variations of sonority, of virtuosity and finally a fugue.²

In the first part of the piece, the 21-note theme 8 is the subject of short variations: a variation set within a variation set. The theme appears in the right and then in the left hand; it is doubled at the octave; it appears in the context of a sparse linear counterpoint or as part of a grander chordal texture. Beyond its stark chromaticism, softened at the end by diatonic gesture, the theme itself displays an interesting harmonic feature: it outlines the keynotes F, A flat, D and B, which form a circle of minor thirds. In the context of extended tonality, as found in the music of Bartók and analysed by the Hungarian

² Claude Rostand, *Petit guide de l'auditeur de musique. Les chefs-d'œuvre du piano*, Éditions le bon Plaisir, Paris, 1950, pp. 309–10.

theorist Ernő Lendvai, this tetrachord corresponds to a ‘tonic axis.’³ In the course of the movement Mihalovici explores other harmonic possibilities of his theme – for example, by reaching the ‘subdominant axis’ via transposition by a fourth. Before returning to the tonic, the theme appears transposed by a tritone, beginning on B instead of F.

Ten free variations follow, developing the previously presented material in a multiplicity of ways. The first variation (*Un poco più mosso* [9]) takes up the overarching idea of the work of ‘studying’ or ‘searching’ (*ricerca*) by means of a canon: two canonical voices follow each other two octaves apart at the rhythmic distance of a crotchet (quarter-note). Like the Passacaglia theme, the ‘theme’ of this movement consists of 21 notes. The two thematic voices are joined by a musico-rhetorical figure similar to a ‘lamento’ falling fourth – only here the tonal material takes the form of a gyrating accompaniment flowing alternately beneath each voice of the canon.

In the second variation (*Andante, non troppo* [10]), logically enough consisting of 21 bars, more polyphonic possibilities are explored, this time with a three-voiced texture in the mode of a Romantic piano étude. The theme is integrated into the demisemiquaver (32nd-note) double-note figures in the right hand, while the left hand presents a modified version in augmentation. A second voice in the left hand provides an added counterpoint, thus creating a complex dialogue of three individual layers.

The following section (*Allegro ben ritmato* [11]) is a kind of harmonic variation. The transposed theme now appears as octaves in the left hand. The indication *ben ritmato* points to how the material is treated compositionally: the theme appears not as a continuous melodic line but fragmented, so as to emphasise a simple rhythmic pattern. Against this background, the right hand plays a chordal expansion of the theme, with at times harsh dissonances. The ‘search’ for a characteristic sound-type in this case is given over to the accompaniment.

The fourth variation (*Allegro giusto* [12]) can be described as a ‘rhythmic variation’ in the sense sketched above by Claude Rostand. Marked *scherzando*, it is at once playful and motoric, with imitative, Brahms-like pilings-on of short rhythmic motives over

³ Ernő Lendvai, *Béla Bartók: An Analysis of his Music*, Kahn & Averill, London, 1971.

local pedal points. Also Brahms-like (or perhaps Bartók-like) are the technical demands made by the double-note figures in both hands.

The next variation (*Lento sostenuto* [13]) is, in Rostand's terms, a study in sonority. Its chorale texture contrasts sharply with the polyphonic variations that surround it. The characteristic intervals of the passacaglia theme, in particular the perfect fourth and the tritone, are integrated into its dense harmonies. The long melodic arch, comprised largely of chromatic intervals, has the sweep and tension of a Romantic adagio. Rounded off by a reprise of its opening phrase, the movement ends, *molto diminuendo*, on a low, resonant D, a tritone away from its initial tone, A.

In contrast to the other variations with their harder sound, the sixth variation (*Leggiero, con moto* [14]) stands out for its gentleness. The theme appears as a songful melody in the bass, embedded in a texture reminiscent of one of Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte*. This bass melody reiterates the same dotted rhythmic figure throughout, while the characteristic colour of this section is derived from its free, quasi-tonal harmonies fluctuating between G flat and C flat.

The seventh Variation (*Andantino* [15]) belongs once again to the category of studies in sonority, made all the more explicit by the designation *molto armonioso*. In this case, Mihalovici limits himself mainly to a simple two-voiced texture, making use of canon and imitation. As in a Bach invention, the material is based largely on a single motivic idea, here consisting of a dotted figure and a demisemiquaver gesture, the two elements alternatingly juxtaposed in the two voices.

As Rostand indicates in his gloss of the *Ricercari*, the subsequent variations require at times extreme virtuosity from the performer, and Variations 8 (*Allegretto capriccioso, ma molto ritmato* [16]) and 9 (*Molto vivace* [17]) make exceptional physical demands of the pianist. Indeed, Variation 9 tests the very boundaries of the playable, with its fast unison passages, leaping ornaments and *martellato* canons.

The cycle closes in the venerable tradition of large keyboard variations since Beethoven, with a free fugue [18], the longest movement of the piece. The opening fugue theme refers back to the rhythmic shapes in Variation 7, adding to the dotted motif a characteristic sextuplet figure. Of course, this is not a fugue written according to normal

tonal procedures; but there are clear subject entries, variegated episodes and even stretti. Toward the end, the fugue gives way to an exalted restatement of the original passacaglia theme in bass octaves, dramatically offset by a lush chromatic accompaniment in the upper register. After this cyclical framing, the fugue subject makes a last, exhausted appearance before the piece descends to a meditative close (*pianissimo*) on a two-voiced open fifth.

Quatre Pastorales pour piano, Op. 62 (1950)

The *Quatre Pastorales*, Op. 62, written between October and December 1950, were dedicated to the pianist Geneviève Joy, who premiered them the same year. Joy and her husband, the composer Henri Dutilleux, came to know Mihalovici and Monique Haas during the period of the anti-Nazi resistance, when all four of them belonged to the 'Comité de Front national de la musique'. The *Quatre Pastorales* were composed during a time when Mihalovici had intensified professional contact with the post-war music worlds of Germany and Switzerland. Mihalovici's opera *Phèdre*, Op. 58 (1948), was premiered in 1951 in Stuttgart under the direction of Ferdinand Leitner. In 1950 Mihalovici received a commission from the Swiss music impresario and conductor Paul Sacher. The result was the *Sinfonia giocosa*, Op. 65, which was premiered in Sacher's home town of Basel in late 1951. In addition, the prominent new-music personality and director of the West German Südwestrundfunk (SWR radio) Heinrich Strobel commissioned Mihalovici's *Étude en deux parties*, Op. 64, for piano and orchestra. This work was premiered by Monique Haas under the baton of Hans Rosbaud in 1951 at the famed festival for new music in Donaueschingen, on the same programme as Pierre Boulez's *Polyphonie X* for chamber orchestra. Mihalovici was thus able to expand his professional horizons beyond the domain of the French radio, with which he had a long-standing relationship, to include major new-music festivals throughout German-speaking Europe.

The *Quatre Pastorales* show a certain formal and stylistic resemblances to the earlier *Quatre Caprices*. The four movements are short, mainly in an extended ABA form, and display both modal and diatonic features, as well as making use of the octatonic scale.

The first piece (*Andantino* [19]), which at times uses chromatically altered modal scales, has a folk-like character befitting the title of the set. Its free-floating melody is full of syncopations and subtly evasive accents. The second piece (*Allegro* [20]) provides a sharp contrast to the gentle lyricism of the first. It is playfully mechanical, making use of diatonic and bitonal harmonic material. The tightly wound melodic figures often revolve around a central tone, with an ostinato bass that contributes to the feeling of stasis. In the middle section, Mihalovici varies the melodic material, playing with shifting registers and articulations. The meditative third piece (*Lento* [21]) provides a clear contrast in character to the previous movement, but has a similar harmonic coloration, strongly stressing the interval of a fifth (E flat–B flat) in the accompaniment. Mihalovici makes use of both octatonic elements and modal cadences. The refined and touching lyricism of this movement stands out in the cycle. The rhapsodic closing piece (*Allegro* [22]) opens with a single-voiced ornamented theme (*molto marcato*) based on a diatonic scale. A chordal gesture punctuates the monophonic opening and reinforces its diatonicism. A dialogue between melodic utterances and percussive chordal outbursts ensues, and extramusical noises are at times intimated by the cascading clusters.

Sonate pour piano, Op. 90 (1964)

The *Sonate pour piano, Op. 90*, was the fruit of an especially productive time in Milhalovici's life. He wrote the piece in May–July 1964 in Paris and in Mont-Saint-Léger, in the home of the cellist André Huvelin, where he could compose in peace. Since 1960 Mihalovici had written several important works, including the opera *Krapp ou La dernière bande*, Op. 81, based on a libretto by Samuel Beckett, with whom he collaborated closely; the operetta *Les jumeaux* ('The Twins'), Op. 84; and the *Sinfonia variata*, Op. 82, premiered in Zurich under the direction of Hans Rosbaud. Beyond tending to his own compositions, Mihalovici was now also engaged by the 'Comité de la musique' of the French broadcaster RTF, which was partially responsible for the programming on public radio. Since the end of the war, Mihalovici had played an active role in shaping the direction of French musical life – for instance, as a jury member of the International Society for New Music.

Mihalovici's Sonata is dedicated to his friend, the Romanian composer and pedagogue Mihail Jora. It was successfully premiered by Monique Haas in November 1967 at the 'Festliche Tage neuer Kammermusik' in Braunschweig. In a letter to a composer friend, Edward Staempfli, on 5 December 1976, Mihalovici provided some important hints about the nature of this work, which is among his most 'Romanian' creations.⁴ This fact was not lost on a critic present at the premiere, who wrote: 'The three-movement piece displays a unique mixture of Romanian and Bulgarian rhythms with post-Impressionist French sonorities.'⁵

The lyrical, somewhat melancholic tone of the first movement (*Allegretto piacevole* [23]), replete with elegant grace-notes, evokes the flavour of Romanian folk-music, intimations of which are reinforced by modal scales or scale fragments, appearances of the 'Hungarian major mode' (or 'Gypsy scale') and shifting steps of the scales in question. But Romanian traditions are only a part of how Mihalovici integrates folk- and art-music in this work. The composer himself explained: 'The first movement [...], a monothematic sonata form: the theme circulates throughout the entire piece, not in the manner of cyclic music, but the 2nd and 3rd movements always return to this theme or its variants, also with respect to the harmonies.'⁶ In the first movement the use of monothematic procedures is easy to detect, since the theme appears and reappears in different transpositions and forms the basis of the entire movement. A second theme-area is harder to make out; the likeliest candidate is a section with a new, impetuous tempo and free, dance-like rhythms. Here, *unisono* passages alternate with free ornamented (*sciolto*) passages in a game of stark, dramatic contrasts.

According to Mihalovici, the second movement (*Lento improvisando – e sempre con un sentimento assai barocco* [24]) is a two-voiced duet: 'The 2nd movement [...] is a duo where a motto [Ex. 1 presents it in Mihalovici's own hand] is heard like a tolling bell, constantly and in every register.'⁷ The motto in question, an oscillating auxiliary-

⁴ Letter from Marcel Mihalovici to Edward Staempfli, 5 December 1976, Mus NL 77: LM 33, Zentralbibliothek, Zurich.

⁵ Erich Limmert, 'Ein Fest für Darius Milhaud in Braunschweig', *Melos*, No. 35 (1968), H. 1, pp. 24–25.

⁶ Letter from Mihalovici to Edward Staempfli, *loc. cit.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

or neighbour-note figure, has the feel of Baroque ornamentation, and the movement can be compared to a pre-Classical, improvisatory *fantasia*. Mihalovici complicates a purely historicised reading of this figure, however, by referring to it as a *glas* or death knell.

Ex. 1



The ringing of the funeral bell permeates the movement, reaching a point of saturation toward the middle. At first glance, the death-knell motif doesn't appear to take part in the two-part polyphony the composer describes in his letter. As the movement begins, long held notes and fast demisemiquaver figures seem to alternate independently of each other. But a closer look reveals that E, the main note of the motto, is exactly the note missing in the faster chromatic passages.

Mihalovici comments on the third movement (*Allegro giacoso* [25]): 'The finale [...] is a sonata-rondo with two themes – it is more or less an elaborate dance, ending, as I mentioned above, with a return of the slow, nostalgic theme “del principio” (like any self-respecting Moldavian-Wallachian!!).'⁸ In accordance with the designation *giacoso* and the lively tempo, the character of this movement can be described as impish, almost impudent, befitting the genre of the rondo finale. An opening motive consisting of a semitone and a major third serves as the main rondo theme. This motif and its variants dominate the entire movement. A second theme with leaping octave grace-notes underlines the special folk-musical character of the piece, mentioned by the composer himself in letters and interviews. The melodic lines are characterised by a combination of A flat major and F minor, as well as the 'Hungarian minor mode'. Bars of $\frac{3}{8}$ are

⁸ *Ibid.*

inserted into the predominant $\frac{2}{4}$ metre, lending the movement its irregular ‘stumble’. Bartók called such irregularities ‘Bulgarian rhythms’, but they were common rhythmic procedures in traditional dance music (in the Turkish *aksak*, for example). The sprightly dance affect permeates the movement, spiced here and there with sharp accents, brash dissonances and chromatic ornaments.

Passacaille (pour la main gauche) pour piano, Op. 105 (1975)

In the 1970s, Mihalovici began taking stock of his long career. He completed works to honour important people in his life, among them the Fifth Symphony, Op. 94, dedicated to Hans Rosbaud. Now occupying a seat on the jury of the ‘Prix de Composition Musicale’ in Monaco, Mihalovici spent correspondingly large amounts of time in Monte-Carlo. He was himself proud to receive honours, such as the ‘Prix musical de la ville de Paris’. But there was no slowing down his own compositional activities: work after work flowed from his pen, including the *Cantilène*, Op. 100, for chamber orchestra and mezzo-soprano, *Textes*, Op. 104, for viola and piano (dedicated to the memory of Enescu) and the Corelli-inspired *Follia*, Op. 106, for large orchestra. (Mihalovici commented acerbically that it was ‘Folie’ to write ambitious works for orchestra at a time when no one was interested in new music to begin with.⁹) Nevertheless, he also found time for travelling, including a 1972 trip to the United States, where he accompanied his wife on a concert tour and visited his brother, Leo, in California.

The *Passacaille (pour la main gauche)* (1975) is a major work of this final period of Mihalovici’s life. It is dedicated to Lélia Gousseau, a renowned pianist and teacher at both the Conservatoire and the École Normale de Musique in Paris who had lost the use of her right hand. The premiere, at the Salle Rossini on 4 March 1976, was a significant occasion in the Parisian music world, since the concert was to be Gousseau’s last in Paris. It was attended by a host of musical luminaries, including Maurice Duruflé, Olivier Messiaen and his wife Yvonne Loriod, as well as Gousseau’s students Pascal

⁹ Letter from Marcel Mihalovici to Erich Schmid, 24 January 1977, in Erich Schmid, *Lebenserinnerungen*, Band 2: Briefe, ed. Iris Eggenschwiler and Lukas Näf (Zürcher Musikstudien 8/2), Peter Lang, Bern, 2014, pp. 331–33.

Devoyon and the fourteen-year-old Émile Naoumoff, who contributed a work of his own to the programme.

In a late echo of his *Ricercari*, written a generation earlier, in his left-hand Passacaglia Mihalovici returns to the form of a large variation set. As a student, he had already become thoroughly familiar with the possibilities inherent in the passacaglia form. Vincent d'Indy, his teacher, dedicated a large section to this form ('ostinato variations') in his *Cours de composition musicale*.¹⁰ On the other hand, Mihalovici was undoubtedly influenced by the many precedents provided by other twentieth-century composers of passacaglias, among them Berg, Hindemith, Reger and Webern.

In the above-mentioned letter to Edward Staempfli, Mihalovici provides some insights into the origin and structure of his *Passacaille*. (Here he jokingly remarks that, since it is a piece for the left hand alone, the pianist can use the right hand during the performance to scratch his head or pick his nose.) He points to the direct inspiration he received from Albrecht Dürer's famous engraving, *Melencolia I* (1514), and explains that the Passacaglia theme represents the angel in the foreground of the tableau, morosely leaning her head on her hand while staring off into the distance. The variations are the items that surround this central figure: a polished orb, a chiselled block, a ladder, an hourglass, a rainbow, the sleeping animal, the dozing cherub and so on. Inspired by the magic square in the upper right-hand corner of the engraving, Mihalovici had even planned to write a four-voiced canon that could be read both backward and forwards, but then rejected the idea as too abstractly mathematical.

Nevertheless, the numerology of the magic square finds expression in the theme itself [26], which is composed of sixteen tones, connected by additional notes to the ensuing variations. Mihalovici mentions that he conceived of the piece as essentially polyphonic – another echo of his *Ricercari* – with up to five independent voices at once. The theme is not limited to a fixed position in the bass but reappears in various locations in the multi-voiced fabric. The first four variations [27]–[30] present the unaltered theme in various textures in relief. The theme wanders from the bottom to the top voice and back

¹⁰ Vincent d'Indy, *Cours de composition musicale*, Vol. 2, 1ère Partie, Durand, Paris, 1909, pp. 457–59.



Albrecht Dürer's hugely influential 1511 engraving, Melencolia I

again. The polyphony is largely restricted to two voices, and the dynamics to a range between *piano* and *pianissimo*; but the accompaniments become increasingly ornate, leading to virtuoso demisemiquaver figurations and a crescendo to *forte* in Variation 3. The fourth variation [30], loosely canonical and marked *sognando* ('dreaming'), provides a short moment of calm. In the fast fifth variation [31], the theme sounds in long note-values in the upper voice, offset by an irregularly accented *arpeggiato* accompaniment that progressively accelerates. The theme is transposed for the first time in the fifth and sixth variations. In Variation 6 [32] it appears in Liszt-like bass octaves in what can otherwise be called a harmonic variation.

As the work progresses, sparse polyphonic movements, such as Variation 7 [33] and 8 [34], are juxtaposed with dense chordal ones, such as Variation 9 [35]. In the latter, a slow movement (*Lento*) marked *senza alcuna espressione*, the theme appears as the upper voice of a series of large chords, while the bass unfolds an inversion with altered rhythms. Variation 10 [36] extends the *miserioso* character of the previous sections; below the transposed theme fleeting, improvisational semiquaver and demisemiquaver passages can be heard. Variation 11 [37] is a virtuoso *perpetuum-mobile* étude, introduced by the tones of the theme in a hammered articulation. Mihalovici intensifies the bravura effect by adding tone repetitions and jagged octave leaps. The explosive bass chord that initiates this variations becomes the basis for the following variation, number 12 [38], where chromatic seconds wedged into dissonant chords occupy the foreground. Mihalovici describes Variation 12 as a double variation, since the theme is both in the lowest voice and forms the uppermost voice of the chords. After a quiet variation that sets ornamented fragments from the theme against ethereal runs in the accompaniment (No. 13 [39]), two bravura variations ensue, where the tempo increases, the dynamics intensify and the articulation hardens. Variation 14 [40], monophonic like Variation 11, is a kind of virtuoso gigue. Variation 15 [41] then offers a sharp textural contrast, presenting the theme in percussive three-note outbursts, first with parallel thirds in the middle register, then echoed as octaves in the bass. Mihalovici extends this idea of fragmenting the theme – not unlike in twelve-tone technique – in the next variation. Now [42] the

theme tones appear in the bass like the roots of a vast tree the branches of which are nocturne-like, chromatic arpeggios in the upper register.

The calm deepens (*pensieroso*) in Variation 17 [43], where the theme and its retrograde are counterpointed in high and low registers. This play of contrasting registers harkens back to Variation 15, but events are now reduced to an austere two-voiced texture and a subdued, expressive chromaticism. An extended, statically improvisatory interlude connects this variation to the conclusion. In the final, eighteenth variation [44], the now familiar theme, transposed up a semitone, sounds as a series of bell tones atop rushing *glissandi*. Mihalovici's last piano work, which begins with learned polyphony, ends with a temperamental rhapsody, 'quasi una cadenza'. As in his *Ricercari* some decades before, he concludes this large work with a sombre postlude in the deepest register of the piano. The foot aids the hand with a complex pedal effect, where a long-held cluster in the upper register gradually dissipates above a last iteration of the opening motto. It is worth observing how, despite his aesthetic distance from the post-war avant-garde, Mihalovici produced one of his formally and harmonically most progressive works at the advanced age of 77, during the last phase of his eventful life in music.

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Born in Washington, D.C., **Matthew Rubenstein** studied piano at the Manhattan School of Music in New York and the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. Among his teachers were Edward Aldwell, Ian Hobson, Jerome Lowenthal, Daisy de Luca (São Paulo) and Charles Timbrell. He has performed as soloist, chamber musician and accompanist on four continents and garnered prizes in several international competitions. In 1999 he received a Fulbright grant to pursue doctoral studies in Berlin, where he now lives. A performer with a wide repertoire, extending from Bach to the present, he has championed the music of neglected twentieth-century composers, and has recorded albums of the piano music of Aribert Reimann (cpo 777-236-2) and Heinz Tiessen (Toccatà Classics tocc 0291), as well as *Berlin im Licht*, a portrait of the composers who were active in the Berlin-based Novembergruppe in the 1920s (Berlin Classics bc0300196).





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