

CHAPTER 8: MEADOWMOUNTETUDES (1996), SAMUEL ADLER

Samuel Adler (1928-) is a German born, American composer and conductor with over two hundred published works. His compositions are published by: Boosey and Hawkes, Carl Fischer, Ludwig, Peters, Presser, and G. Schirmer. He has received grants from the Rockefeller and Ford foundations, has served on the compositional faculties of The Eastman School of Music and The Juilliard School, and has had his works performed by major orchestras in Europe, Israel, South America, and the United States.¹

On the title page is written, “A recording of this work is available on Gasparo GSCD-297, William Steck, violin.” As of this writing, the recording can still be purchased from the publisher, Gasparo Records. Another notable observation is that the four etudes do not include any theatrical effects or the use of mutes.

Etude I, Irregular Meter

With a metronome marking of the quarter note equaling 132 beats per minute, this etude changes meter every measure, with the exception of measures 1-2, which stay in 2/4; measures 14-15 are in 2/4; 42-43 stay in 7/8; 44-45 stay in 8/8; 55-57 in 8/8; 63-64 in 5/8; and measures 70-71 stay in 5/8. In measures 55-57, while the meter does not change, the groupings of the eighth note change (3+3+2; 3+2+3; 3+3+2). Eighth note groupings also change in measures 63-64 (2+3; 3+2), and measures 70-71 (3+2; 2+3). There are no irregular accents or complex rhythms, and the rhythm groups used can be described as traditional (i.e. quarter notes, dotted quarter notes, duplets and triples). Also representing traditional usage are the use of bow and left-hand. Changes of color/timbre do happen, but sparingly. There are two natural harmonics in measure 48, and a single

¹Marie Rolf, “Samuel (Hans) Adler,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanlie Sadie, vol. 1, 160-161. (New York: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001), 160-161.

pizzicato, marked *sff* in the last measure. These timbral changes represent traditional usage of such effects.

Dynamics represent excellent practice in the modern concept of extreme dynamic changes. With the exception of *mp*, all dynamics between *pp* and *ff* are included for a total of thirteen dynamic changes. In addition, there are five instances of *crescendi* and six instances of *subito* changes in dynamics.

The intervals, double stops, and chords found in this etude represent those intervals considered important to contemporary music. If one simply counts the intervals present, that is, counting *only* the movement from single interval to single interval, the combined percentage of contemporary intervals, (second, fourth, Tritone, fifth, seventh, ninth, and eleventh) is 78.17%, of which the perfect fourth represents 49.30%. A similar amount of contemporary double stops are used as well. The combined total of unisons, seconds, fourths, Tritones, fifths, sevenths, ninths, and elevenths is 77.32%, of which the tritone represents the most frequently occurring double stop at 24.23%. The minor second double stop follows close behind at 23.71%. Only three chords are used, and have been notated in Figure 8.1. These chords contain important, contemporary intervals, most notable the perfect fifth and the major seventh. Also, they do not pose any major difficulty due to the use of open strings.



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Figure 8.1. Chords, measures 33, 36, 70.

In review, “Irregular Meters” provides good training in changing meter, a wide range of dynamic changes that include quick, subito changes, contemporary intervals with an abundance of perfect fourths, and a large percentage of contemporary double stops, of which the tritone and minor second predominate.

Etude II, A Waltz in Fast Shifting Tonalities

This fast moving waltz, in which the dotted half equals 72 beats per second, moves quickly in and out of various key centers. Minor thirds represent the various key areas the melody might be in for the moment, while movement in minor seconds represents a shift from the present key area to a new key area. Extended eighth note passages, usually no longer than three measures, tend to be bi-tonal.

Bow use can be considered traditional. Different colors are provided by détaché and spiccato passages. There is a large range of dynamics. All dynamics from *pp* to *ff* are included, but no subito demands are made. Left-hand use is traditional as well. Color or change of timbre is provided briefly with natural harmonics in measure 24 and measure 26. Traditional, right-hand pizzicato is found in measures 38-40, and measure 112.

All intervals, from the second to the tenth are present, of which 46.57% are contemporary. The most used contemporary interval is the minor second, which is chiefly used to move to other key centers. The minor second appears 25.77% of the time. The minor third, representing the various key centers, is the most frequently occurring interval, at 28.60%. There are no double stops or chords.

This Waltz provides excellent training in contemporary practices of rhythm and meter. Irregular accents, in the form of irregular slurs, take place in 48 of the 112 measure etude.

In summary, this waltz can develop the skills of irregular accents, in the form of irregular bowings. In addition, it utilizes both tonal and contemporary intervals, of which the minor second and minor third are most prevalent.

Etude III, Large Skips and Harmonics

As the title suggests, large skips and harmonics play a significant role in these etudes. Some of the leaps in pitch are made considerably easier by the use of harmonics. A closer examination of the harmonics in this etude reveals that only the natural and fourth harmonics (artificial harmonic) are used.

Bow usage is *détaché* and *legato*, and, therefore, can be described as traditional. The student's bow skills are developed, however, through the extensive use of dynamics. All dynamics, from *ppp* to *fff* are presented, for a total of 40 dynamic changes in a composition that is only 17 measures long. Measures 2, 3, 6, 8, 11-12, and 13-14 display sudden or *subito* changes which happen without rests in between.

The left-hand provides some amount of color, with *glissandi* in measures 6, 7, 10 and 13. A small and quick foray into the high position (eleventh position if one uses the third finger), by way of a *glissando*, happens in measure 10. A *glissando* is combined with the major sixth double stop in measure 7. A combination *glissando* and double stop in measure 13 is interesting in that it begins on a minor sixth and moves upward into the position of a major sixth.

All intervals from the second to the tenth are used, of which 33.33% are contemporary, and 45.30% are traditional. Contemporary double stops appear more frequently at 51.79%, versus the 48.21% occurrence of traditional double stops. Sevenths are the most used contemporary double stop, appearing 35.71% of the time, and sixth represent the most used traditional double stop, appearing 32.14% of the time. There is only one chord, notated in Figure 8.2, and found in measure 6. It is a combination of the major seventh and perfect fourth. The chord is not difficult, in that it fits within the span of the hand and no stretches are required. In addition, the slow tempo gives the violinist plenty of time to execute this chord.



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Figure 8.2. Chord, measure 6.

This etude proves to be a very good exercise in contemporary issues of rhythm and meter. The meter itself changes every measure with the exception of measures 12 and 13. The fundamental pulse of most measures is the quarter note, exceptions occurring in measures 4, 9, 10, 12, and 13, which have meters of 13/8, 27/8, 17/8, 17/8, respectively. There are irregular accents in the form of intermittent rests, or rests that do not fall on primary subdivisions of the beat, in measures 2, 4, 7, 9, 13, 14, 15 and 16. Irregular slurring occurs in measures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16. It should be noted that at such a slow tempo of the quarter note equaling 56 beats per minute, this irregularity does not pose too much difficulty. There are contemporary rhythm groups of quintuplets in measures 6, 10 and 16, septuplets in measures 6 and 8,

cross rhythms in measures 4, 5, 9 and 12 (3:2 or 3:4, depending how one is subdividing the pulse), and a 5:2 (or 5:4) cross rhythm in measure 10.

“Large Skips and Harmonics” utilizes harmonics to facilitate leaps, thus making some of the leaps easier, as well as providing good aural training in octave displacement. These harmonics do not provide the training in those artificial harmonics important to contemporary technique, namely the harmonics of the minor third, major third, perfect fifth, and minor sixth. Approximately only 1/3 of the intervals are contemporary. Half of the double stops are contemporary, with the seventh double stop occurring most frequently. The very wide range of dynamics include many subito changes, and provides excellent practice in this necessary, contemporary bowing skill. With the exception of the occurrences of harmonics, the timbres explored are minimal and consist of a few glissandi. Rhythm skills are extensively developed, with changing meters, irregular accents, and contemporary rhythm groups. The slow tempo can allow a student who might be uncomfortable, or unfamiliar with, this aspect of rhythm to incorporate these skills in a non-threatening way.

Etude IV, A Fast and Furious Not To Tonal Perpetual Motion

With a quick pace of a quarter note equaling 116 beats per minute, it becomes a challenge to negotiate the ‘not to tonal’ intervals, double stops and chords found in this etude. With the exception of the octave, all intervals from the second to the eleventh are found. A majority of the intervals are contemporary, and appear 63.26% of the time. The majority of double stops are contemporary as well, occurring 68.22% of the time. Of these contemporary double stops, only the perfect fourth, tritone, and major/minor seventh appear. There are a variety of contemporary chords utilized.



Figure 8.3. Chords, measures 12, 21, 63 & 65, 66, 84, 88.

Like the other etudes in this collection, bow usage is traditional. *Détaché* and *staccato* are the primary technical uses of the bow. Because of the quick tempo, a student may choose to use *spiccato*. The dynamic is predominantly *forté*, with the exception of a *subito pp* in measure 20. This *pp* quickly crescendos in just one measure back to *forté* in measure 21.

Left-hand usage, as it relates to timbre, is minimal. A combination of a glissando to a high B harmonic in measures 42 and 56 are identical.

The meter is predominantly 2/4, with occasional changes of meter in measures 11, 27, 38-40, 46, 64 and 80, with meters of 3/8, 3/4, 5/8, 5/8, 3/8, and 5/8, respectively. Irregular accents, in the form of irregular bowings, form the primary rhythmic challenge. Irregular bowings can be found in measures 4, 6, 19, 26, 28, 29, 37, 67, 68, 73, 74-76, and 83.

Of the four *Meadowmoutetudes*, “Perpetual Motion” best supplies the violinist with training in contemporary intervals, double stops, and chords. The ability to negotiate the large number of contemporary intervals at a fast tempo is one of the largest benefits of learning this work. In addition, one can have meaningful practice with the irregular accents, in the form of irregular bowings.

Conclusions

As a whole, the *Meadowmountetudes* contain techniques that make them overwhelmingly traditional, as well as techniques that emphasize contemporary concerns. Completely traditional are both the placement and use of bow. Left-hand categories on the *Content Analysis Form for Recording Contemporary Violin Etudes* reveal some timbre changes, but most often, those changes happen infrequently, or they are produced in a traditional fashion. For example, harmonics occur in all four etudes, yet all harmonics are natural harmonics. Pizzicato occurs in these etudes, but all pizzicato is produced with the flesh of the right-hand index finger. There are also fleeting instances of timbre change. Glissandi and the high positions occur, but occur within the span of one measure. There is no use of mute or any theatrical effects found in any of the *Meadowmountetudes*.

Nevertheless, there exist techniques that provide significant, contemporary practice. These areas include rhythm and meter, intervals, double-stops, and to a lesser extent, the sudden change of dynamic and the use of contemporary chords. Frequent meter changes occur in Etudes I and IV. Irregular accents, in the form of irregular bowing, occur in Etudes II and IV, and finally, the use of cross rhythms and contemporary rhythmic groups occur in Etude III.

Intervals, double-stops, and chords are overwhelming contemporary. Exceptions are found in Etude II, which contain no occurrences of double-stops, and Etude II, which contain a majority of tonal intervals. The use of contemporary chords occurs anywhere from none in Etude II to six in Etude IV. Similarly, the use of sudden dynamic changes mirrors the frequency of contemporary chords, from none in Etude II to six in Etude III.

Thus, the best contemporary uses of the *Meadowmountetudes* by Samuel Adler are his use of rhythm and meter, intervals and double-stops, and to a lesser extent, the use of contemporary chords and sudden dynamic changes.