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Style and Performance of Bohuslav Martinů's Deux Pièces pour Clavecin, H. 244: A Study of Twentieth-Century Harpsichord Music

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Abstract The twentieth century saw a remarkable revival of Western early music, with the harpsichord emerging as a pivotal instrument in this movement. Beyond its renewed role in historical performance, the harpsichord also gained increasing recognition as a medium for new music. However, a limited understanding of the instrument's unique characteristics led some modern works to lack depth and authenticity. This raises an important question: how can the harpsichord be revitalized and infused with new life without compromising its historical essence? Bohuslav Martinů's harpsichord music offers a compelling answer to this challenge, effectively bridging the gap between tradition and innovation while offering valuable insights for future exploration.

Keywords Harpsichord Music, Twentieth Century, Bohuslav Martinů, *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*

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During the early twentieth century, while many were still adapting to the sweeping changes in the music world, a group of musicians with a passion for early music brought forgotten sounds and instruments back to life. Their efforts sparked the early music revival movement, which focused on uncovering and restoring the traditions of Baroque and earlier music, emphasizing authentic performance styles and expressions. This revival has not only reignited interest in historical music but also left a lasting impact on both the music scene of its time and contemporary musical practice.

Among them, the harpsichord, as one of the representative instruments of early music, garnered widespread attention from composers, performers, and even instrument makers. According to data compiled by scholar Frances Bedford in *Harpsichord and Clavichord Music of the Twentieth Century* (1993), it was estimated that over 2,600 composers wrote more than 5,600 works for the harpsichord between 1902–1993, covering a wide range of musical forms and combinations from solo to ensemble, concerto, and symphony.¹ Additionally, the growing number of early music and harpsichord concerts in many forms, the discovery and study of Baroque and earlier music, and the introduction of harpsichord performance courses in universities in Europe and the United States were all announcing the instrument's renaissance. The revival movement, originating in Europe, gradually crossed the Atlantic to the United States and expanded to other continents with the migration of musicians and the process of globalization.

With a considerable body of new music for the harpsichord having been composed, one might wonder why these works have not received the same recognition as many twentieth-century compositions, such as those written for the piano. There is no denying that the harpsichord, as a relatively niche instrument, has received limited attention. Although interest in the instrument is growing as more musicians choose to perform Baroque music on it, a lack of in-depth understanding of the harpsichord's unique characteristics among composers and audiences can still be a barrier to wider acceptance of new works. For example, composers may be unfamiliar with performance on the harpsichord and its appropriate techniques, and may consider piano techniques, such as its typical thick texture, strong contrasts of intensity, and the need for layering of different voices and large interval jumps, to be transferable to the harpsichord. Thus, if one examines some of the harpsichord compositions of the twentieth century, even if they are labeled "for piano or harpsichord," they still reflect a piano-centered mindset. In addition, the composer may rely on intuition and adopt new techniques that are not possible in harpsichord music due to a lack of understanding of the harpsichord's sounds and its different timbral transformations. All these factors can affect the technique and style of playing and may even result in compositions that are not appropriate for the instrument, making them impossible to play, let alone promote.

As Kirkpatrick wrote in his article "The Challenge of the Harpsichord":

Writing for the harpsichord can be a first-class discipline for the composer. It's very limitations...force the composer's attention to the fundamental elements of musical expression, to flawless melodic declamation, sustained rhythmic pulse and eloquent gesture, to perfectly knit harmonic phrases...It is to be hoped that future composers, increasingly familiar with the instrument, will contribute to it a rich new literature.²

This article focuses on the Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959) and his solo harpsichord piece *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*. Martinů's harpsichord works, created across both Europe and America, offer valuable insights and guidance for the composition and interpretation of modern harpsichord music.

Martinů's Harpsichord Composition

Martinů's music was profoundly influenced by various factors throughout his life, particularly the diverse cultures of the countries and regions he lived in, which significantly shaped his compositional style. He composed rapidly, seldom revising or reworking his music and showing little concern for the performance and reception of his music. The uneven quality of his output led to a fluctuating reputation.³ As Large has remarked, "He was like a bad parent who had no time for his children once they had been brought into the world."⁴

In his diary, Martinů reflected on the idea of revising a musical work:

Why doesn't a composer revise his work and adjust it according to his new experience? Because the moment he composed it, the work as an organism is complete.... A work is the expression of a specific movement, situation, and

¹Frances Bedford, *Harpsichord and Clavichord Music of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: Fallen Leaf Press, 1993), xxvii.

²Ralph Kirkpatrick, "The challenge of the Harpsichord," *Modern Music* 23, no.4 (Oct. 1946), 276.

³Brian Large, *Martinů* (London: Duckworth, 1975), 139.

⁴Large, *Martinů*, 139.

creative state of the composer—even with its mistakes, which become a characteristic of the work over time and which we accept as an element and not a mistake. The work is irreversible, a *fait-accompli*, a certain level of perfection and order. If this were not the case, a composer would be constantly revising his work without ever reaching perfection. And the more he would revise it, the more the original organism would fall apart.⁵

Martinů's compositional approach was not a relentless quest for abstract "perfection" but rather an active reflection of his present thoughts and states. Consequently, his style is intimately tied to the specific periods in which each work was composed and can be broadly divided into four phases:

- His formative years in his homeland of Czechoslovakia (1890–1923), which laid the foundation for his musical development.
- His time in Paris (1923–1940), during which his musical style gradually matured.
- His creative period after moving to the United States (1941–1953), characterized by a prolific output.
- His final years in Europe, spent in France, Italy, and Switzerland (1953–1959).

As one of the most prolific composers of the twentieth century, Martinů wrote in a wide range of musical genres in his work. According to German musicologist Harry Halbreich's comprehensive study *Bohuslav Martinů: Werkverzeichnis, Dokumentation, Biographie* (1968), Martinů composed 384 pieces, including operas, symphonies, chamber music, and sonatas for various instruments. Despite this remarkable and diverse output, his work has not garnered the attention it deserves. Among the three major biographies by Harry Halbreich, Brian Large, and Milos Šafránek, there is considerable focus on his choral, orchestral, opera, and ballet music, but his significant contributions to keyboard music have been relatively overlooked. The sections dedicated to keyboard music are limited, occupying only a few pages, with even less attention given to his harpsichord music. Though harpsichord is a creative blind spot for many composers, Martinů found inspiration in it, composing five works ranging from solo to concerto to chamber music: *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*, H. 244 (1935), Concerto for Harpsichord and Small Orchestra, H. 246 (1935), Harpsichord Sonata, H. 368 (1958), Two Impromptus for Harpsichord, H. 381 (1959), and *Promenades* for Flute, Violin and Harpsichord (Piano), H. 274 (1939). The first four pieces were all commissions.

The Harpsichord Concerto was composed in 1935 at the request of the distinguished French harpsichordist Marcelle de Lacour (1896–1997). It is regarded as one of the most remarkable harpsichord concertos of the twentieth century. Particularly noteworthy is the way Martinů balances the harpsichord as a solo instrument with the modern orchestra. Despite the harpsichord's soft volume, it is never overwhelmed by the orchestra; instead, its sound is consistently audible and captivating. Martinů achieves this effect by drawing on the baroque concerto grosso tradition, where the alternation between solo and ensemble sections creates a rich and harmonious texture. The Two Impromptus and the Harpsichord Sonata were written toward the end of Martinů's life for the Swiss harpsichordist Antoinette Vischer (1909–1973). Vischer was an outstanding advocate for contemporary harpsichord music, dedicated to commissioning and promoting new music. In addition to Martinů's pieces, she supported at least twenty-four other harpsichord compositions, including some renowned masterpieces such as Luciano Berio's *Rounds* for Harpsichord (1964–1965), György Ligeti's *Continuum* (1968), and John Cage's *HPSCHD* (1968). Her efforts greatly contributed to the revival and modernization of the harpsichord in the twentieth century.

Deux Pièces pour Clavecin, H. 244

Deux Pièces pour Clavecin, H. 244, composed in June 1935, was written for harpsichordist Marcelle de Lacour, also the dedicatee of Martinů's Harpsichord Concerto. As one of Wanda Landowska's star pupils, Lacour emerged as a prominent figure in the French music scene in the mid-1920s, quickly gaining recognition for her extraordinary talent. Her expertise was not limited to Baroque or Classical music, and she became a pioneer in the development of new music for the harpsichord in the twentieth century. Through her colorful career, Lacour actively promoted and performed works written specifically for her by nearly seventy composers, including Martinů, Florent Schmitt (1870–1958), and Alexandre Tansman (1897–1986). She also demonstrated remarkable artistic creativity and musical insight by arranging piano works by composers like Poulenc, Bartók, and Honegger for the harpsichord.

From rare historical photographs, we catch a glimpse of the harpsichord used by Lacour, notable for its grand design and pedal mechanisms. Considering the critical acclaim she received for her "Landowska school" style, it is tempting

⁵ Bohuslav Martinů and Thomas D. Svatos, "The Ridgefield Diary (Summer 1944)," in *Martinů's Subliminal States: A Study of the Composer's Writings and Reception, with a Translation of His "American Diaries"* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2018), 126.

to speculate that she may have played Landowska's iconic Pleyel harpsichord, which merges the qualities of piano and harpsichord. Regarding the adaptability of *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*, Martinů composed with a specific performer in mind, but he did not impose any particular restrictions on the type of instrument or the use of registrations. The pieces cover a range from the lowest C to the highest e-flat 3, comfortably within the regular harpsichord range of FF-f3/g3. This broad applicability means that they can be performed on any harpsichord without special adjustments or considerations.

Deux Pièces pour Clavecin marks Martinů's first venture into solo harpsichord music, comprised of two contrasting pieces: *Lento* and *Allegro con brio*. Although brief, with a combined duration of six minutes, these two works are rich with the composer's distinctive styles. Like his other works from this period, they both embody the eclectic mix of musical influences that characterized early twentieth-century Europe, merging elements of baroque, impressionism, neoclassicism, and even touches of futurism. The result is a lively and engaging interplay of old and new, conveyed through the harpsichord's expressive sonorities, that offers listeners a refreshing and intriguing experience.

Martinů's innovative use of "cell technique," a defining feature of his compositional style, is prominently showcased in both pieces. A "cell" refers to a small unit consisting of a brief melodic phrase, usually spanning three to six notes, coupled with certain rhythmic patterns. Martinů often described his views on music, especially the composition process, as an organism that possesses vitality and autonomy:

I think greatness lies in how naturally we express our idea....when one has the correct attitude, the organism of the composition effectively fills itself in on its own more or less, it emerges complete (I am thinking of a healthy organism), the voices, sound, the inner-workings, the choice of instruments, the entire structure that is already organized will come into being as a single whole.⁶

The cell, the most fundamental element of the organism, permeates the movement, serving as the basis for melodic development; it functions, for example, as transitional material, accompaniment patterns, or recurring motifs through techniques such as extension, diminution, permutation, and fragmentation. The relatively constant rhythms act as clear markers within the melodic contours, and each appearance of the cellular melodic line—whether in its original form or varied—strengthens the internal connections of the composition, providing a sense of coherence and wholeness to what might seem like a fragmented structure. As Miloš Šafránek argues, "In Martinů's compositional environment, content often took precedence over form. For Martinů, the primary concerns were organic unity, the complete realization of an idea, and the perfect alignment of content and expression."⁷ Brian Large also recognizes the significance of this technique, deeming it "the greatest contribution Martinů made to the art of composition."⁸

The first piece, *Lento*, unfolds in a through-composed form; the structure is not immediately clear, and the melodies are not instantly recognizable. While the contrasting textures and continuous rhythm patterns may be striking, the internal interactions and logical connections between cells often reveal themselves only after listening to the piece multiple times, demanding a more nuanced appreciation. Martinů introduces the first prominent cell in the opening bar (see ex. 1), featuring a motif in the right hand that starts on the second beat with three consecutive sixteenth notes that descend and then ascend in minor seconds, followed by four eighth notes. Although the rhythmic pattern and intervals of the three sixteenth notes remain consistent, this gesture undergoes various transformations with each recurrence, including changes in texture, melodic contour, and surrounding intervals. The variant on the second beat of the second bar, for example, retains the general melodic shape of the germinal motif but transforms the single and double notes into chords, while the left hand shifts from double notes to a simpler single-note texture. In mm. 27–29 (ex. 2), three successive variants appear, maintaining only the characteristic rhythmic pattern and U-shaped motif of three semitones, with the third variant reversing the direction of the U.

⁶Thomas Svatos, "Martinů on Music and Culture: A View from His Parisian Criticism and 1940s Notes" (Ph.D. diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 2001), 230.

⁷Milos Šafránek, *Bohuslav Martinů: His Life and Work*, trans. Roberta Finlayson-Samsourová (London: A. Wingate, 1962), 331.

⁸Large, *Martinů*, 145.

EXAMPLE 1 Bohuslav Martinů, *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*, H. 244, *Lento*, mm.1–3. © 1962 Universal Edition, London.



EXAMPLE 2 Bohuslav Martinů, *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*, H. 244, *Lento*, mm. 25–31. © 1962 Universal Edition, London.



In contrast with the freedom and spontaneity of the *Lento*, the second piece, *Allegro con brio*, is in ternary form (ABA'), more straightforward for listeners to follow. Despite the piece incorporating numerous scales and sequences, which might initially blur its tonality and direction, the return of the main motifs clarifies the overall musical vision. In this movement, Martinů's use of ostinato stands out, establishing a framework that is both stable and dynamically engaging for the melodic lines and the entire work. The length of ostinatos varies from one to six measures, navigating freely between melody and accompaniment. At times, they subtly support the accompaniment, while at other moments, they evolve into the melody itself, immersing the listener in a perpetually shifting yet relatively unified musical atmosphere.

In mm. 10–12 of *Allegro con brio* (ex. 3), the composer introduces two four-note ostinatos played simultaneously in both hands, following a three-note ostinato (B-flat–A-flat–E-flat) in the left hand in the preceding two measures. These patterns, primarily structured as tetrachords and presented in agitated sixteenth notes, feature the right hand articulating the sequences B-flat–G–A-flat–F and F–D–E–C, while the left-hand presents G-flat–E-flat–F-flat–D-flat and D-flat–B-flat–D-flat–A-flat. These patterns not only facilitate smooth transitions between sections but also build energy through concurrent ostinatos. As the pitch ascends, they naturally produce a gradual *crescendo* effect, enriching the musical color while heightening the listener's anticipation and tension for the upcoming development.

EXAMPLE 3 Bohuslav Martinů, *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*, H. 244, *Allegro con brio*, mm. 8–13. © 1962 Universal Edition, London.



In *Lento*, ostinatos also play a pivotal role. In m. 20 (ex. 4), the descending sixteenth-note triplets (B–A–G) in the right hand correspond to a broken dominant chord (F–C–A–C) in the left hand. The continuous repetition of these triplets provides a stable background to the more melodic left-hand part, which features a slower rhythmic ostinato formed by repeated broken chords. The interaction between these different ostinatos creates a relationship between the hands that is both contrasting and unified. Notably, whenever the first note of the triplets coincides with a note from the F major broken chord, the resulting dissonances (augmented fifths, major sevenths, and major seconds) deepen the musical tension and make the tonality more unstable. Yet the inherent stability of the ostinato patterns somewhat alleviates the tension, leading to an eventual resolution on an unexpected, surprising C major chord.

EXAMPLE 4 Bohuslav Martinů, *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*, H. 244, *Lento*, m. 20. © 1962 Universal Edition, London.



Apart from the two notable examples previously discussed, ostinatos more typically function as accompaniment, maintaining a certain calmness and creating a stable harmonic atmosphere that evokes tranquility or relaxation. When employing these ostinatos, Martinů liberately avoids introducing overly prominent melodic lines to preserve the purity of the sound. He often writes melodies based on stepwise motion with occasional small intervals, making it difficult to determine whether he views these seemingly ordinary ostinatos as part of the melody (ex. 5).

EXAMPLE 5 Bohuslav Martinů, *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*, H. 244, *Allegro con brio*, mm. 70–77. © 1962 Universal Edition, London.



When examining Martinů's compositional techniques in these two pieces, it becomes clear that, beyond the use of ostinato as a core element, his style is deeply shaped by other neoclassical elements, such as changing time signatures, short motives, contrapuntal texture, linear writing, polyrhythms, and especially harmonic language, which diverges from traditional tonality. Neither of these two pieces is marked with a key signature; however, the triads that appear within the music play an important role in suggesting a tonal center, even if many of triads are colored with semitones. *Lento* begins in B-flat minor and ends in the parallel major, while *Allegro con brio* starts with an F major pentatonic scale (F–G–A–C–D) and closes in F major. Functional harmony is largely supplanted by nonfunctional contexts such as chromatic scales or sequences, resulting in a tonality that is often on the verge of being established only to be swiftly disrupted. The extensive use of dissonances, chromaticism, and nonchord tones generates a tonal landscape that is ambiguous and fraught with variation and uncertainty.

Moreover, the composer's fascination with the conflict between consonance and dissonance is evident in his frequent use of harmonic devices such as bitonality, polychords, compound constructions, and interplay between major and minor modes. In mm. 30–31 (ex. 4.6), the texture shifts from the parallel unison broken chords of the previous measures to descending bitonal arpeggios in major thirds, with the right hand playing E-sharp–G-sharp–B–D–F and the left hand playing C-sharp–E–G–B-flat–D-flat. The harpsichord proves to be an ideal medium for presenting this intricate compositional practice. By avoiding the dynamic fluctuations and pedal effects that the piano can produce,

its crystal-clear tone allows the listener to directly perceive the pure essence of the pitch, focusing entirely on the subtle relationships between intervals and the rich dialogue between voices. Furthermore, if a performer happens to play on a double-manual harpsichord, they can select a different manual for different voice, allowing for clearer tracking of contrapuntal lines while producing a fuller and more engaging sound.

EXAMPLE 6 Bohuslav Martinů, *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*, H. 244, *Allegro con brio*, mm. 29–31. © 1962 Universal Edition, London.



Compared to the significant influence of neoclassicism on Martinů's compositions of this period, the impact of impressionism, though somewhat diminished, still echoes the styles of composers like Debussy in certain melodic and harmonic arrangements, such as parallel harmonies, nonfunctional chords, and heavy chromaticism in *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*. However, given the delicate and somewhat thin tone quality of the harpsichord, Martinů avoids using the dense extended chords—such as elevenths or thirteenths—common in late Romantic music, which are especially characteristic of the piano due to its great tonal power. Instead, he enriches simple chords by adding seconds, sixths, and sevenths to triads or seventh chords, enhancing the harmonic color while avoiding a thickness of sound foreign to the harpsichord. For example, in m. 32, the second chord adds the fourth and seventh to a C minor chord, while the following one adds a fourth and seventh to a C augmented chord. The relationship of these two chords creates a striking contrast between major and minor qualities, but this contrast is slightly softened due to the chromatic ascending motion. The first chord in the same measure is a compound chord; it is formed by the fusion of two triads (B-flat–D–F-sharp and D–F–A), sharing the note D, creating a contrast of light and dark in this major-minor polychord. Also in this chordal melody, there is an intricately planned arrangement of inner voices consisting of two ascending chromatic scales: A–B-flat–B–C–C-sharp–C and F-sharp–G–G-sharp–A–A-sharp–A. A minor third intervallic relationship is maintained between the voices (ex. 7).

EXAMPLE 7 Bohuslav Martinů, *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*, H. 244, *Lento*, m. 32. © 1962 Universal Edition, London.



In the coda of *Allegro con brio*, marked *Poco meno*, both hands shift from the previously chaotic and chromatic style to more structured, conventional harmonic progressions. Martinů aims for a grand and bright conclusion while maintaining a sense of drama. To achieve this effect, he thickens the texture by introducing a sequence of four chords and their transformations: B-flat minor, F major, G minor, and C dominant seventh chords in the left hand. Concurrently, the right hand is divided into two parts. The alto voice features ascending chromatic scales in sixteenth notes, while the soprano voice outlines the left-hand chord progression through ascending arpeggios in the same eighth-note rhythm. The piece concludes with a baroque-style arpeggio of an F major chord (ex.8).

EXAMPLE 8 Bohuslav Martinů, *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*, H. 244, *Allegro con brio*, mm. 85–91. © 1962 Universal Edition, London.



Although these two pieces may not immediately evoke early music, Martinů's use of traditional harpsichord techniques—such as staccato chords, linear textures, and contrapuntal writing—clearly reflects the influence of early music. In contrast to the strict and precise counterpoint writing of the eighteenth century, Martinů's approach is more fluid and favors parallel motion, likely inspired by the English Renaissance madrigal. He recalled hearing madrigal singers in Prague during his early years and being deeply attracted by the “freedom of counterpoint,” which obviously differs from Bach's disciplined style.⁹

While Large, one of Martinů's biographers, notes some misleading elements in the timeline and events related to madrigals and English singers as recounted by Martinů, these styles indeed manifest in his works. Not only is counterpoint a feature in this set of pieces, but it also frequently appears in Martinů's other works. Whether he intentionally considered the characteristics of the harpsichord when choosing counterpoint for the instrument or whether it is simply part of his stylistic exploration remains unclear. However, it is certain that the harpsichord serves as an ideal medium for expressing polyphonic music. The instrument's ability to deliver complex polyphony—whether through the clever distribution of voices across different manuals or the refined articulation of individual contrapuntal lines—proves highly effective. To achieve this result, the performer must understand that each part holds equal importance, rather than relying on pianistic habits that focus on balancing voices through muscular technique.

In addition to the pieces' contrapuntal writing, the brilliant, organ-like sonorities produced by Baroque-era devices of ornamentation, sequence, repetition, and motivic extraction—devices representative of baroque music—combined with powerful rhythmic drive, all unmistakably evoke the grandeur of Bach and Scarlatti's keyboard works. Among these features, Martinů's affinity for sequences stands out, often extending across several measures in continuous progressions. However, sequences frequently relieve musical tension. Charles Rosen argues that “when the strongly articulated periodic phrase is combined with a sequence, particularly a descending one as most sequences then were, the result is not an increase of energy, but a loss.”¹⁰ To counterbalance this potential effect, Martinů enriches the texture while placing consistent emphasis on rhythm and altering tone color. He adopts the baroque technique of *Fortspinnung*, where forward momentum relies more on rhythmic activity than harmonic movement. This approach is especially evident in the toccata-like second piece, *Allegro con brio*, marked by sixteenth notes that nearly fill the entire score.

Sixteenth-note runs are typically found in fast pieces, such as *Allegro* movements of sonatas or virtuosic etudes, evoking a feeling of energy, tension, fullness, or fluidity. In slower movements, such as Baroque preludes or fantasias, sixteenth notes often appear in more intricate and intertwined patterns, creating a sense of continuous generation and expansion. In *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*, sixteenth notes become a crucial structural element in the ongoing thematic development, to the extent that rhythm takes precedence over melody as the driving force behind the music's development. Unlike composers in the classical period, who favored contrasting dramatic themes, Baroque composers typically explored and developed a single emotion within a movement, emphasizing the continuous evolution of the theme. Here, sixteenth notes play a significant role in organizing and propelling this process.

⁹Large, *Martinů*, 140.

¹⁰ Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 48.

An additional challenge is the harpsichord's inability to sustain a musical tone. Some composers choose to work against this discontinuity. As Ligeti discusses in regard to his composition *Continuum*, the compositional concept involves "a series of sound impulses in rapid succession which create the impression of continuous sound."¹¹ Some passages in Martinů's harpsichord music employ this technique. In mm. 32–38 of *Allegro con brio*, both hands play sixteenth notes and chromatic scales, grouped in two-bar segments until m. 36, when the grouping changes to one bar each. Written in divided voice technique, different notes in each hand serve as focal points for their respective melodic developments. The intervals gradually widen, smoothly expanding outward, while the shortening of group lengths further enhances the sense of drive (ex. 9).

EXAMPLE 9 Bohuslav Martinů, *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*, H. 244, *Allegro con brio*, mm. 32–38. © 1962 Universal Edition, London.



For harpsichord music, phrasing and articulations are undoubtedly important, and Martinů provides detailed and thoughtful markings in both pieces. Taking the second piece as an example, the opening theme immediately presents a lively rhythm. The tenuto touch on the right hand's quarter-note C not only highlights the syncopated rhythms common in Czech music but also contrasts with the surrounding lighter notes. Furthermore, in the following sixteenth-note passage, Martinů marks a short slur over the first two notes, separating the preceding eighth-quarter-eighth syncopation from the subsequent staccato sixteenths and creating clear phrasing (ex. 4.10). When the theme reappears in section A', there is a contrasting change in both texture and musical character despite the melodic framework largely remaining the same. The left hand's linear part is replaced with a descending fifth interval pattern, and the lively, crisp articulation is substituted with a smoother legato (ex. 11).

EXAMPLE 10 Bohuslav Martinů, *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*, H. 244, *Allegro con brio*, mm. 1–3. © 1962 Universal Edition, London.



EXAMPLE 11 Bohuslav Martinů, *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin*, H. 244, *Allegro con brio*, mm. 70–73. © 1962 Universal Edition, London.



¹¹György Ligeti, *György Ligeti in Conversation with Péter Várnai, Josef Häusler, Claude Samuel, and Himself* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1983), 22–23.

Conclusion

Martinů's *Deux Pièces pour Clavecin* offer a vivid glimpse into the evolving role of the harpsichord in twentieth-century music, where tradition and innovation meet. His profound understanding of the instrument's unique capabilities allowed him to move beyond the common pitfalls of merely adapting piano techniques to the harpsichord. Instead, he embraced its intrinsic potential, crafting music that combines non-functional harmonies, intricate counterpoint, and rhythmic flexibility to create a sound world that is both innovative and deeply rooted in history.

By engaging with Martinů's works, performers and scholars are invited to explore the untapped potential of the harpsichord, challenging outdated perceptions and encouraging fresh creative possibilities. His legacy continues to inspire, reminding us that even the most traditional instruments can find new relevance in the ever-evolving landscape of music.

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