

MOTIVE AND FORM
IN LOWELL LIEBERMANN'S FOUR SONATAS
FOR VIOLONCELLO AND PIANO

by

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ABSTRACT

This manuscript explores the four sonatas for cello and piano by Lowell Liebermann, and is accompanied by my recording of the works, in collaboration with pianist Kevin Chance. These works were composed between 1978 and 2008, but are not yet part of the standard repertoire. Given the lack of well-known sonatas for cello and piano since the mid-20th century, there is a distinct need to promote high-quality new music of this genre. Not only do Liebermann's sonatas fill a void, but with more exposure, they would appeal to a majority of performers and listeners alike.

In this manuscript, I will focus my analysis on Liebermann's use of sectional forms and simple motives in the sonatas. I will also explore the marked difference between the atonal first sonata and the tonal, lyrical later ones that reflect a much more mature composer, able to fuse highly sectional forms with his own unique sense of style.

As only one recording of the sonatas, featuring cellist Dmitri Atapine and pianist Hyeyeon Park, has been publicly released, our new recording will present the works to a wider audience and will offer a different interpretation based on observations developed in the manuscript. My hope is that, in consequence of this project, these sonatas will become more widely performed and recorded, and will form a significant addition to the cello and piano repertoire.

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INTRODUCTION

The four sonatas for cello and piano, composed by Lowell Liebermann between 1978 and 2008, are relatively unknown; a majority of cellists and pianists playing classical and new music repertoire have likely never heard them. The Liebermann sonatas are not considered part of this standard repertoire, but are significant enough to warrant more exposure. Currently only one recording of the sonatas has been publicly released, featuring cellist Dmitri Atapine and pianist Hyeyeon Park. According to Liebermann's website, he intends to record the sonatas with cellist Andres Diaz at some point in the future. Pianist Kevin Chance and I have also recorded these sonatas. Our interpretations of the sonatas differ from Atapine and Park, and while both recordings reflect the composer's indications, there is room for even more varying interpretations.

Liebermann visited Samford University, where I teach, for a brief residency in 2013. In anticipation of his visit, Chance and I prepared Sonata No. 3, and were fortunate to receive some rehearsal comments from Liebermann before performing it in a concert of his works. Since that point, I have been eager to study and perform all four of the composer's sonatas. In the process of learning them, I discovered an appreciation for Liebermann's lyrical, sectional style that seeks to juxtapose extremely contrasting characters. Throughout all four single-movement sonatas, sections of serene beauty are interrupted by sections of savage intensity. I have also discovered Liebermann's strong use of motive that provides unity within the sectional form.

My interest in Liebermann's sonatas for cello and piano was merely exploratory at first. But in the always challenging quest to find interesting modern works for my instrument, I have found that these works exhibit great compositional clarity, and showcase fine examples of lyricism and virtuosity for both cello and piano. Besides the liner notes in the Atapine/Park recording, there is virtually nothing written about these works. This manuscript and this new recording featuring myself and Kevin Chance will help bring more exposure and appreciation to these under-recognized sonatas.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

The cello and piano combination has produced some of the finest sonatas in the repertoire, from Beethoven, Brahms, and Rachmaninoff to Debussy, Shostakovich and more. When considering modern sonatas for cello and piano, musicians and music scholars may point to works by Barber (1932), Shostakovich (1934), Carter (1948), Poulenc (1948), Hindemith (1948) Prokofiev (1949), Martinu (1939, 1941, 1952) and Britten (1961), or solo cello sonatas by Kodaly (1915), Ligeti (1953), or Crumb (1955). After the wealth of works produced up through the mid-20th century, it is rare to find a recital program that includes a cello and piano sonata from the late 20th or 21st century. Liebermann's four sonatas for cello and piano deserve their inclusion in the standard contemporary repertoire. Arguably reminiscent of Barber and Shostakovich, critics may always pan these works as unoriginal. Upon closer inspection, however, the four sonatas draw distinction from their modern and Romantic counterparts through a highly-sectional, through-composed form, and extensive development of simple motives. When I asked Liebermann if he drew inspiration for his sonatas for cello and piano from Romantic or 20th century composers, he stated that he was not *directly* inspired by any other works, although he greatly appreciates Beethoven's sonatas for cello and piano.¹ Despite his appreciation for these sonatas, the four works of Liebermann bear little resemblance to them.

A major factor that has held these sonatas back from added recognition is a compositional career dominated by accolades in the world of piano, flute and opera. Liebermann has been

¹ Lowell Liebermann, e-mail message to author, August 15, 2014.

type-cast as a Neo-Romantic specializing in those specific instruments or genres. Whereas a large number of flute or piano recital programs include works by Liebermann, the sonatas for cello and piano are scarcely performed, recorded, or written about.

Rather than simply Neo-Romantic, a more fitting descriptor of Liebermann's work would be polarizing. This can be said of his compositional style, alternatively admired by performers and audiences, and often loathed by critics and contemporaries favoring a more or less complete absence of tonal harmonies. Liebermann has both been positively described by artists such as James Galway ("genius") and negatively derided by critics such as Scott Cantrell (not "intellectually demanding").² In his review, Cantrell yearned for music by Elliott Carter to offset the perceived lack of depth in Liebermann's writing. While a certain segment of modernist critics would agree with this opinion, Galway and other performers enjoy presenting Liebermann's music. The composer's career achievements and accolades suggest that general audiences and educated listeners—not only performers—appreciate his work.

Liebermann himself winces at the term Neo-Romantic because it fails to take into consideration the breadth of compositional styles he employs such as atonality, serialism, modality, synthetic and octatonic scales.³ Liebermann's lyrical sonatas for cello and piano do not attempt to completely represent the stylistic scope of his musical production, although Sonata No. 1 (1978), which Liebermann composed as a college student, has elements of atonality and polyrhythm. Composed decades later, the subsequent three sonatas are primarily tonal, with some atonal and modernist elements sprinkled in. That harmonic tonality and lyricism are dominant characteristics need not make these pieces sound derivative; rather, these

² Barbara Kevles, "Can This Man Save Classical Music?" Salon.com. November 21, 2002, 4, <http://www.salon.com/2002/11/21/liebermann/> (accessed August 1, 2001).

³ New Music Box staff. "Would You Consider Yourself As A Neo-Romantic? Why (not)?" www.newmusicbox.org September 1, 2003, <http://www.newmusicbox.org/articles/Would-you-describe-yourself-as-a-neoromantic-Why-not-Lowell-Liebermann/> (accessed August 15, 2014).

characteristics highlight lyrical and virtuosic possibilities of both the cello and piano. Using a uniquely sectional, single-movement form and creative development of simple themes and motives, the composer generated works that hold fast to his foundational tenets of formal balance and organic unity.⁴

One of the most distinguishing characteristics of Liebermann's four sonatas, which I focus on here, is form. These single-movement works have multiple sections, often without any transitional material. Their sectionality is defined alternatively by sudden character changes, seamless transitions, or—sometimes—silence. Moments of breathtaking, linear melody invoke romantic idioms, only to be suddenly and savagely disrupted by a new, extremely aggressive section. All four sonatas demonstrate varying numbers of sections, while striving to engage a wealth of motivic material in one uninterrupted movement. While through-composed sectionality is not entirely unique, it is not found in the standard repertoire sonatas for cello and piano.

Just as Liebermann's compositional style has polarized critical opinion, his music explores extreme opposites in character, while retaining continuity through the prevalence of simple motivic and thematic statements. It is essential that a collaborative duo learning these works discover their motivic elements, and to understand their distinct sectional form. These characteristics contribute mightily to the brilliance of the four sonatas.

If forced to provide a stylistic label for his works, Liebermann might begrudgingly accept neo-Classical because of his belief in organic unity and formal balance.⁵ Whereas many parts of the sonatas for cello and piano demonstrate Romantic ideals, such as rich tonality and overt lyricism, they retain an overall Classical-style balanced form, albeit with several contrasting

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

central sections. Loud sections are balanced by soft sections, fast movement balanced by slow. The transitions, or absence of transitions, create unpredictability, but ultimately the contrasting characters, tempos, and dynamics balance each other. Connecting these sections are simple, pervasive, unifying motives and themes.

CHAPTER 2: FORM – SONATA NO. 1

Liebermann never includes Sonata No. 1 (1978) among his master compositions, but thinks it “stands as a totally acceptable work by a young composer.”⁶ Immediately apparent is the atonal nature of this work. The work of a young composer is often influenced by current trends, and this sonata is no different. Liebermann’s first composition teacher at age 14, Ruth Schonthal, warned him not to be seduced by the “tremendous aesthetic dictatorship in the profession,” which allowed “no melodies, no lyricism, nothing but dissonance.”⁷ Her words surely influenced Liebermann’s composition of Sonata No. 1, as did his Juilliard and SUNY Stony Brook teacher, David Diamond, with whom he began studies at age 17. At the time, Diamond had abandoned his trademark lyrical tonality for the prevailing dissonant style, and likely influenced Liebermann’s comparatively atonal early period. Despite Schonthal’s warning against modern trends, the young Liebermann seemed to largely side with the trending Juilliard atonalists at first. Ultimately, however, the tonal finality of Sonata No. 1 hints at an underlying reticence toward atonality—an idea further reinforced in the lyrical later sonatas.

Less immediately apparent than the atonality of Sonata No. 1 is the form. The single-movement ten minute work is framed in sections ABA’. The form is not sonata-allegro, however, because the B section does not develop A; in fact, it is completely unrelated. This simple form, in addition to the atonality, set Sonata No. 1 apart from the later sonatas. Formal balance is a common characteristic, with Section A material returning as a final A’ in all four

⁶ Liebermann, e-mail message to author, August 15, 2014.

⁷ Barbara Kevles, “Can This Man Save Classical Music?”

works. But the atonality and ABA' form used by the young Liebermann in his initial offering give way to tonality and increased sectionality in Sonatas 2, 3, and 4.

Table 1. Liebermann, Sonata No. 1, form.

A (mm. 1-23)	B (mm. 24-114)	A' (mm. 115-end)
Introduces Theme 1 and Theme 2; slow, wandering, dream-like	Introduces fast, accented theme, as well as lyrical, mixed-meter theme	Themes 1 and 2 return; once again tempo slow, wandering, and dream-like

Section A

Section A (mm. 1-24) is soft and slow, and introduces two atonal themes that oppose and complement each other simultaneously, heard both in the cello and piano (Figures 1.1 and 1.2).

Figure 1.1. Liebermann, Sonata No. 1 for Cello and Piano, Theme 1.

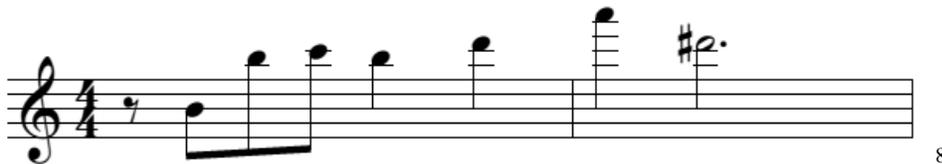


Figure 1.2. Liebermann, Sonata No. 1, Theme 2.



⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Both motives contain seven unique pitches and pitch classes, built around intervallic tritones, minor 6ths, and minor 7ths. These interval leaps never resolve tonally, but instead continue leaping around, creating a perpetual unanswered question. The only obvious tonal harmony occurs at the very end of the piece—a final D-major chord, a triad that foreshadows Liebermann’s move away from atonality.

Besides a short, intense “quasi cadenza,” the character of Section A remains wandering and dream-like. However, the listener is abruptly jolted from this dreamlike haze by the entrance of Section B, in measure 24. This new section is loud, strident, and characterized by accents, mixed meter, and polyrhythm. Section B has its own themes—the first one punctuated by accents, the second smooth and lyrical.

Section B

Like a fanfare, an accented theme in the piano heralds the start of this new Allegro section B (Figure 1.3). Heavy accents ensure that the character is forceful and abrupt. The cello announces its entrance with the same motivic fanfare in measure 30, and the relationship between instruments is canonic and contrapuntal throughout the section. Juxtaposed to the accented theme is a mixed meter, lyrical theme (Figure 1.4) that appears later in the section. The faster tempo, louder dynamics, accents, and mixed meter all combine to create significant intensity throughout Section B.

Figure 1.3. Liebermann, Sonata No. 1, Section B, Accented Theme



Figure 1.4. Sonata No. 1, Section B, Lyrical Theme (mixed-meter, marked “legatissimo”).



The stormy B section climaxes with the cello’s dramatically drawn out sounding of Theme 1 from Section A, set in polyrhythmic relation against the piano’s jaggedly bombastic octaves. It is as if Theme 1 has returned triumphantly to defeat the chaos of Section B (Figure 1.5).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Figure 1.5. Sonata No. 1, climax (mm. 114), polyrhythm.

The musical score for Figure 1.5 is a polyrhythmic passage from the climax of Sonata No. 1. It is written in 2/4 time and consists of three systems of staves. The first system features a cello part with a 'quasi cadenza' marking and a piano part with a 'fff' dynamic. The piano part is characterized by a complex polyrhythmic texture, with multiple layers of rhythmic patterns. The second system continues the piano part with a 'lunga' marking. The third system shows the piano part with a 'sf' dynamic and a '(secco)' marking. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

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The climax of the piece is followed by a wandering and introspective cello cadenza that reminisces mainly on Theme 2, with a brief mention of the Theme 1. The lack of meter or measure lines creates a fantasia-like character. Although Sonata No. 1 has had no tonal center up to this point, the end of this cadence is somewhat of a tonal resolution: C–C#–D, with the upper neighbor (D#) preceding the final D. Although no harmony supports the true cadence, the D sounds like a tonal resting place following the wandering, atonal cadenza (Figure 1.6).

¹² Ibid.

Figure 1.6. Sonata No. 1, cadenza ending, C–C#–D, as tonal resolution.



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Section A'

Following this cadenza is Section A'. Although it starts with the B Lyrical Theme, in A' Liebermann returns to the A section character, forgoing the mixed-meter rhythmic drive of Section B. The B Lyrical Theme gives way to alternating variations of Themes 1 and 2. Reflecting perhaps his inner preference for tonality, Liebermann ends the piece with Theme 2 resolving to a D-Major chord. The questions posed in the wandering, dreamy A themes have been answered with this tonal ending (Figure 1.7).

Figure 1.7. Sonata No. 1, Theme 2 and final resolution.



¹³ Ibid.

The ABA' form exhibited in Sonata No. 1 is simple yet effective. Written twenty years prior to Sonata No. 2, the form seen here stands in stark contrast to the later sonatas, which are framed in several contrasting sections, and rooted in tonality.

CHAPTER 3: FORM – SECTIONALITY OF SONATAS NO. 2 & NO. 4

In 1998, twenty years after the completion of Sonata No. 1, Liebermann composed Sonata No. 2 for cellist Steven Isserlis and pianist Stephen Hough. Although again framed within a single movement structure, the newer work demonstrates much more patience and variety in the development of a central motive. Unlike the form of Sonata No. 1, which resembles the traditional sonata allegro, the 2nd sonata has an extremely sectional ABCDEA' form (Table 2).

Liebermann composed his most recent sonata in 2008, written for then 13-year-old cello prodigy Joel Sandelson.¹⁴ Similar in scope and character to Sonata No. 2, Sonata No. 4 is alternately dreamy, reverent, or intensely dramatic. And like Liebermann's previous cello and piano sonatas, Sonata No. 4 is sectional and heavily motivic. The form, ABCDEFA', constitutes the most sectional of all the sonatas (Table 3).

Table 2. Liebermann, Sonata No. 2 for Cello and Piano, sectional form.

A mm. 1-113	B mm. 114-177	C mm. 178-203	D mm. 204-240	E mm. 241-408	A' mm. 409-end
Dreamlike; Primary and Secondary Motives introduced	Strident, forceful, soaring range; Primary Motive embellished	Slow, introspective, languid, motivic	Lyrical, serene, slow; melody based on Secondary Motive	Building intensity, range and speed; climax combines Section D melody with Primary Motive	Soft, slow; dynamic and upward glissando end at <i>niente</i> ; reminisces on both motives and melodies

¹⁴ D. Moore, *Liebermann: Cello Sonatas 1-4; Album Leaf*, Blue Griffin, CD, liner notes for Sonata No. 1 for cello and piano.

Table 3. Liebermann, Sonata No. 4, sectional form.

A mm. 1-19	B mm. 20-44	C mm. 45-78	D mm. 79-91
<i>Calmatissimo</i> ; dolce; Central Motive in piano; conjunct lines	Increased dynamics, tempo, and accents create new intensity; Central Motive in cello; bombastic cello cadenza gradually transitions to relaxing Section C	Rather short, ethereal section featuring the Central Motive with artificial harmonics in the cello	Very brief, fast, tumultuous, motivic
E mm. 92-199	F mm. 200-209	G mm. 210-302	A' mm. 303-end
<i>Cantando</i> ; beautiful, soaring lines in the highest register of the cello; includes short, disconnected bridge to Section F	Brief, humorous, deliberately aimless; disjunct cello melody over inverted Central Motive in piano	Intense, complex section including motivic fragments, melody, variation, and mixed meter	Reprises section A in a lower transposition; quick, quasi-coda leads to humorous ending

Liebermann ends all four of the sonatas with an A' section, returning the themes and character of the opening sections. The most recent three works, however, are the product of a mature composer, committed to including several contrasting sections, while retaining just the movement-less structure from Sonata No. 1. Although similar in some respects, Sonata No. 3 stands apart from No. 2 and No. 4 because of its symmetrical arch form, whereas the multiple middle sections of the other two works do not return in a symmetrical manner. In this chapter, I will focus on the transitions between sections in Sonata No. 2 and Sonata No. 4.

Sonatas No. 2 and No. 4 have multiple, non-mirroring middle sections. Liebermann accomplishes great changes of character between sections by using a variety of transitional techniques. Some transitions are smooth and seamless, some abrupt and jarring, and other

sections are separated by silence. The unpredictability of each new section adds excitement and intensity that would be lacking if all sections transitioned similarly.

I analyze Sonata No. 2 as ABCDEA' form, and Sonata No. 4 as ABCDEFGA'. As similar as these forms are, Liebermann transitions between sections in different ways. Out of the five transitions in Sonata No. 2, three are gradual, with two using *accelerando* and one using *ritardando*. The other two transitions use silence. Sections B and C are bridged by a short cello cadenza that tapers off in volume, and in my interpretation - tempo. A simple quarter rest, this transition is naturally interpreted as coming to a complete stop.

The transition between sections C and D uses silence, as indicated by an apostrophe (breath mark). However, unlike the previous silent transition, sections C abruptly ends in the middle of a *stringendo* and *crescendo*. This abruptness is more akin to the transitional nature of Sonatas No. 3 and 4, where Liebermann seems to prefer shockingly sudden sections changes.

Table 4. Liebermann, Sonata No. 2, section transitions

A→B	B→C	C→D	D→E	E→A'
Gradual, <i>accelerando</i> and <i>crescendo</i>	Gradual, but with silence	Abrupt, uses brief silence to transition from loud and fast, to soft and slow	Gradual; short bridge uses <i>crescendo</i> and <i>accelerando</i>	Gradual, uses "calmato" and <i>diminuendo</i>

Sonata No. 4, while similar in form, discards the more traditional, nuanced approach to transitioning between sections of contrasting character. Masterfully blended transitions are hallmarks of great works and great composers, but in true post-modern style, Liebermann goes

against tradition, including that of his own Sonata No. 2 for cello and piano. Of the seven transitions in Sonata No. 4, all but two are abrupt.

Table 5. Liebermann, Sonata No. 4, section transitions

A→B	B→C	C→D	D→E	E→F	F→G	G→A'
Gradual, uses accelerando and crescendo	Gradual, silence before bridge to C	Abrupt, soft and slow interrupted by fast and loud	Abrupt end to short, loud, and fast section D; after fermata rest, section E starts slow and lyrical	Abrupt; section E builds up intensity to an intense climax, followed by fermata rest	Abrupt; short, wandering Lento section transitions suddenly to Presto	Abrupt; another fermata rest follows climactic end to section G

While the 2nd and 4th sonatas are the most similar in their sectional form, there are distinct differences in transitional style. In Sonata No. 2, Liebermann prefers smooth transitions between highly contrasting sections, whereas Sonata No. 4 thrives on sudden, unpredictable changes. With more numerous and generally shorter sections, Liebermann's final sonata for cello and piano favors fragmented, distractible themes over the more continuous build of Sonata No. 2.

CHAPTER 4: SONATA NO. 3 (*SEMPLICE*) ARCH FORM

Sonata No. 3 (2003) is similar in style to the ones immediately preceding and following it, with multiple sections and extensive development of a simple motive. The *Semplice* moniker aptly describes its main motive—repeated quarter notes on the same pitch—a number which can vary from two to five, always followed by two eighth notes. The opening line in the cello states the most extended version of the motive (five quarter notes), followed by two other variants. Of the five sections, the second and fourth transform the *Semplice* character by increasing tempo, dynamic, and manipulating the motive itself. Section C, the centerpiece of this work, features simple lyricism, including a quote from the Bach-Gounod *Ave Maria*. The unique, non-motivic nature of this section, combined with the parallels in sections two and four, leads me to analyze Sonata No. 3 as a variant of arch form (Table 6). Liebermann retains the style and tone from Sonata No. 2, but with a distinctive, symmetrical form.

Table 6. Liebermann, Sonata No. 3, sectional arch form.

A mm. 1-144	B mm. 145-211	C mm. 212-277	B' mm. 278-333	A' mm. 334-end
<i>Semplice</i> motive, serene	Tumultuous, <i>Semplice</i> motive and variants introduced	Non-motivic Lento; <i>semplice</i> character builds from minimal, “pale” harmonies to soaring melody; <i>Ave Maria</i> quote	Frenetic, intense, contrapuntal use of both motives; extreme contrast to <i>semplice</i> ;	<i>Semplice</i> motive returns, sandwiched by Section C <i>Ave Maria</i>

The Oxford Companion to Music defines arch form in its simplest as ternary ABA. Another example might be ABCBA, where symmetry is created by the repetition, in reverse order, of sections A and B, with a central section C.¹⁵ Because sections A and B repeat in this fashion, but not verbatim, A' and B' indicate this alteration within Arch form.

The piece begins with this simple, repeated quarter-note motive in the cello, around which Liebermann designs larger themes and melodies (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1. Liebermann, Sonata No. 3, opening



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Section A' begins identically to A, only transposed one semitone higher (Figure 2.2). In fact, nearly the entire section is this way, except that Liebermann begins and ends the final section with a variation of the Bach-Gounod *Ave Maria*, although minus the Gounod melody (Figure 2.3). Back in section C, we hear a quote that includes a portion of Gounod's *Ave Maria* melody. The inclusion of the short Bach (Gounod) quote in A' does not diminish from the symmetry of the first and last sections. At the beginning of the final section, the quote is merely

¹⁵ "Arch Form." *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed January 12, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e365>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

an incomplete thought that bridges back to the original melody. The final statement serves as a coda, and maybe Liebermann's acknowledgement of the perfect *semplice* of the Bach/Gounod *Ave Maria*.

Figure 2.2. Liebermann, Sonata No. 3, section A'

Tempo primo (♩ = 100)

The musical score is written for piano. It features a 5/4 time signature. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melody in the first system, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The left hand (bass clef) plays a bass line in the first system. The second system shows a continuation of the melody and bass line.

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¹⁷ Ibid.

Figure 2.3. Liebermann, Sonata No. 3, coda, return of Bach quote

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Sections B and B' are extreme opposites in character from the pure, innocent sounds of sections A, C, and A'. The entrance of B shatters the previous stillness, with relentless, driving tempo and fortissimo accents (Figure 2.4). Liebermann achieves shock, and counterbalance to the largely placid nature of sections A, C, and A'.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Figure 2.4. Liebermann, Sonata No. 3, section B begins suddenly

Più mosso (♩ = 120)

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Seven measures into section B, driving, rhythmically unison sixteenth notes begin in both the cello and piano (Figure 2.5). B' begins immediately in measure 278 with this sixteenth note passage interrupting the *Ave Maria* quote (Figure 2.6), but despite slight differences, the symmetry between the two sections is very evident.

Figure 2.5. Liebermann, Sonata No. 3, section B driving sixteenth notes

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¹⁹ Ibid.

Figure 2.6. Liebermann, Sonata No. 3, section B' suddenly interrupts the *Ave Maria* quote

The image displays a musical score for Liebermann's Sonata No. 3, section B'. The score is written for piano and is divided into two systems. The first system is in 4/4 time and features a cello line at the top with a long, sustained melodic line marked *ppp*. Below it, the piano accompaniment consists of a right hand with a rapid, rhythmic pattern marked *pppp* and a left hand with a steady, pulsating accompaniment. The second system is in 2/4 time, marked *Allegro* with a tempo of quarter note = 120. It features a right hand with a rapid, rhythmic pattern marked *ff* and a left hand with a steady, pulsating accompaniment marked *f*.

The middle section in arch form is the centerpiece upon which the symmetry is built. In Liebermann's *Sonata No. 3*, section C is slow, simple, and plaintive, with dissonant, pulsating piano chords offsetting the sensitive *espressivo* of the cello. This starkly beautiful section stands out from the rest of the piece because of its intensely lyrical character and the use of original melodies that completely disregard the quarter note motive found throughout the other sections. The individuality of section C makes it an ideal centerpiece for arch form (Figure 2.7).

²⁰ Ibid.

Figure 2.7. Liebermann, Sonata No. 3, Section C opening

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Sonata No. 3 *Semplice* epitomizes Liebermann's desire for formal balance and organic unity. The symmetrical arch form along with strong use of motive combine to produce a work that I find to be the strongest of the four sonatas.

²¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5: MOTIVE, THEME, AND MELODY IN THE 2ND AND 4TH SONATAS

Similarly to Sonata No. 3, the 2nd and 4th sonatas are built melodically upon simple pitch patterns, either motives or themes. Liebermann develops these motives and themes into complete melodies. At the heart of Sonata No. 2 is a simple, two-note motive of a descending semitone. In the opening, the motive is rhythmically drawn out over several measures, while the piano plays one of the central themes (Figure 3.1). The motive is heard throughout the piece, in various forms, and is at times extended into a melody (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.1. Liebermann, Sonata No. 2, opens with motive in cello and a theme in piano



The image shows the first four measures of the opening of Liebermann's Sonata No. 2. The score is written for cello and piano. The cello part (top staff) begins with a descending semitone motive (G4 to F4) in a 2/2 time signature, marked *pp*. The piano part (bottom two staves) begins with a theme in the right hand, marked *fp*, consisting of a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The left hand of the piano part provides harmonic support with chords and single notes.

Figure 3.2. Liebermann, Sonata No. 2, melody sprung from descending semitone motive



The image shows a single staff of music in the cello part, illustrating a melody derived from the descending semitone motive. The melody is written in a 2/4 time signature and consists of a sequence of notes: G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3. The notes are connected by a slur, and a fingering '5' is indicated below the final note.

²² Ibid.

Among other instances of the two-note motive, we hear in the cello a plaintive, questioning variant in section C. The left hand of the piano is also playing this motive, as well as a simultaneous, inverted version (Figure 3.3). Close inspection of Sonata No. 2 reveals motivic material, in many different forms, throughout all six sections.

Figure 3.3. Liebermann, Sonata No. 2, motivic variant in cello sounds hesitant; piano left hand also has the motive embedded

Languido (♩ = c.66, **con rubato**) *espr.*

The image shows a musical score for Liebermann's Sonata No. 2. It consists of two staves: a cello staff (top) and a piano staff (bottom). The tempo is marked 'Languido' with a quarter note equal to approximately 66 beats per minute, and the mood is 'con rubato' with 'espr.' (espressivo). The cello part features a two-note motive (G4 and A4) with a 'p' dynamic and a 'piano' hairpin. The piano part features a similar motive with triplets and a 'p' dynamic. The piano part is marked 'una corda' and 'tre corda'.

Besides this simple motive, which is central to the piece and from which Liebermann spins seventeen minutes of melodic material, there is also an important, not-motivic theme that is prevalent throughout all the different sections. In the very beginning, the piano plays this primary theme while the cello plays the two-note motive. Another example is in section D (Figure 3.4).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Figure 3.4. Liebermann, Sonata No. 2, primary theme in cello, section D



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This primary theme is every bit as central to Sonata No. 2 as the descending semitone motive. Liebermann weaves this theme into a beautifully melodic D section. And to further underscore the significance, the piece ends with a final statement of the theme in the cello, before fading to *niente* (Figure 3.5. Liebermann, Sonata No. 2, final statement of theme).

Figure 3.5. Liebermann, Sonata No. 2, final statement of theme (mm. 438)



26

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

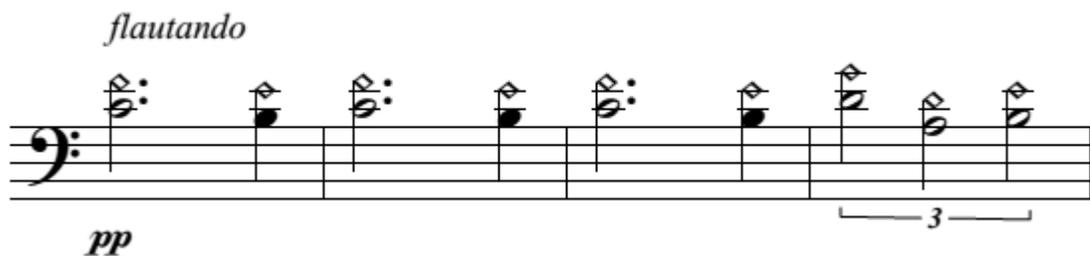
Unlike in Sonata No. 2, the fourth sonata does not contain anything I would consider to be a motive. Instead, Sonata No. 4 is melodically built on a nine-note theme in many rhythmic variations (Figure 3.6). Of the eight sections, only the short, wandering section F does not include this theme. In fact, section F is wryly devoid of anything remotely melodic.

Figure 3.6. Liebermann, Sonata No. 4, theme (pitch pattern representation only)



Liebermann manipulates this theme to fit the meter and character of each section. For example, section C sounds this central theme in artificial harmonics (sounding two octaves higher than if normally indicated) and *flautando*. This creates an eerie sound – the likes of which we haven't heard in any of the previous sonatas (Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7. Liebermann, Sonata No. 4, section C, theme in artificial harmonics



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Besides using this rather repetitive theme to create affect and unify the many sections, Liebermann expands it into a soaring melody in section F (Figure 3.8). For the first twenty-nine

²⁷ Ibid.

measures of this section, the melody is completely new material, seemingly unrelated to previous sections. In measure 121, Liebermann deftly works the theme into the melody.

Figure 3.8. Liebermann, Sonata No. 4, section F, melodic expansion of theme



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Penultimate section G builds up to the climactic moment of the piece. Liebermann begins the build to this climax with a rhythmically intense variant of the theme (Figure 3.9). Of the seven sections containing a version of the theme, this is the most rhythmically challenging to execute. Even in a soft dynamic, the tempo, rhythmic complexity and tremolo create forward motion that will eventually lead to the climax of the piece.

²⁸ Ibid.

Figure 3.9. Liebermann, Sonata No. 4, theme at beginning of section G, rhythmic drive

Presto (♩.=c. 60)
(norm.)

p

mf

29

A simple, repetitive, nine-note theme heard in seven of eight sections gives unity to Sonata No. 4. There is much variety in how the theme is presented each time, so rather than coming across as tedious, Liebermann's use of this simple pitch pattern is creatively diverse. Similarly, a two-note motive and simple theme grant unity throughout the many sections of Sonata No. 2. Just as Liebermann always achieves structural balance within his sectional form, his use of motive and theme gives each sonata a sense of unity.

²⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Lowell Liebermann's Sonata No. 1 for cello and piano (1978), was composed thirty years before Sonata No. 4 (2008), yet his four sonatas remain largely unrecorded and unexplored in cello repertoire studies, appearing only occasionally on recital programs. All single-movement works, ranging from ten to twenty minutes, any one of the sonatas would fit effectively into a recital program, or all four as a program of their own. They equally exhibit virtuosity and lyricism, and are set apart from Classical, Romantic, and 20th-century masterpieces of the genre by their unique use of sections, motives, and themes. In each uninterrupted work, extreme contrasting sections balance each other, culminating in a recapitulation. Simple motives or themes run throughout each sonata, creating the unity that Liebermann desires. "Organic unity and formal balance" might not be an entirely innovative approach to composition, but for Liebermann's four sonatas the results are outstanding.

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