

Frank Martin's *8 Preludes Pour le Piano* was composed in 1948. The preludes were originally planned to be a set of 12, however Martin's musical inspiration has been sufficed by the eight preludes, and he contently left the work to be a set of eight preludes. The preludes were dedicated to Dinu Lipatti, however the preludes remained discrete to public for a while due to Lipatti's unexpected death.¹

Martin's extensive education as a composer is well demonstrated in this piece of his late style, and a number of his compositional techniques can be discussed in great depths. During the first two decades of 1900s, Martin produces works with strong affinity to Germanic traditions of Bach and Mozart², and his musical language finds its way to his own uniqueness by further adaptation of Schoenberg's dodecaphonic methods, Debussian sensuality, Greek meters, Stravinsky's rhythm, Berg's atonal synthesis into romantic realm, and Frank's lusciously extended romanticism, just to name a few. Several studies have been done to discuss such influences, yet I point out two traits that my own analysis and interpretations conclude to be most significant: strong connections to the predecessors, and symphonic implications that call for interpretations far surpassing pianistic idiomatic writing.

Martin's *Eight Preludes for Piano* presents the culmination of the genre "Preludes" that has been a preceding composers' interest as the most sophisticated artistry. Not to mention his harmonic and rhythmic language that remind oneself of Debussy, Bartok, Stravinsky and Berg, one is also to find very clear homages to composers who had written the same genre.

Immediately stating an homage to J.S Bach from the very beginning of Nr.1 through the persisting melody in contour of B-A-C-H, Martin gives more literal yet an implicit homage in Nr. 2 where the exact pitch group becomes the motif for the entire prelude. Nr. 3 is a strong reminiscence of Chopin's prelude, reinterpreted in Martin's octatonic scales with BACH motif embedded in the left hand. Nr.4 is in three part A-A'-A'' with the original theme getting wider in range and grander each time it develops. Opening is also based on BACH motif, yet is hardly audible as the motif is coated in the series of diatonic chords. Nr. 5 is the most pianistic of all preludes with a brilliant cadenza at the end. The triplets that start from far away and burst into flames resemble the effect of Debussy's *feux d'artifice*. Nr.6 might seem to be in imitation of Bach's two part invention but it is rather straightforward cannon between the two hands in transposition. The impressionistic opening of Nr.7 is followed by left hand passage that is written in dodecaphonic technique. The left hand returns verbatim with right hand octatonic improvisation after the opening statement. The similar idea is seen in the first movement of Charles Ives' piano trio composed during the first decade of 1900s. The last one is a celebratory attempt to imitate Rachmininoff, yet Martin renders in varieties of styles.

The beauty of the preludes lies in clear tonal centers alluded in the end. This allows preludes to be accessible to the listeners, yet provides a further challenge to the performer

¹ Collins, Geraline T. *The Eight Preludes for Piano of Frank Martin a lecture recital, together with three recitals of selected works of J.S. Bach, L.V. Beethoven, J. Brahms, F. Chopin, I. Albeniz, R. Schumann, A. Scriabin, F. Liszt and K. Szymanowski*. Denton, North Texas State University. 1980.

² Meryn Cook. "Late Starter. Frank Martin Found Himself Late in Life." *The musical Times* 134, No.1801 (Mar., 1993). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1193856>

as she/ he is to understand the intricacy of the two pillars synthesized- tonality and beyond.

An analysis of Frank Martin's piece demonstrates consistency of his compositional language based on octatonic scales. By nature, the two kinds of octatonic scales tends to emphasize following features.

- . intervals of major and minor thirds
- . tritone interval, as both octatonic scales embody interval of tritone that equally divide the eight tones within an octave into two.
- . One of the octatonic scale shows absence of perfect fifth interval, which blurs the tonal polarity between the first and the fifth of the scale. The other octatonic scale embodies the perfect fifth.

Martin had successfully achieves tonal ambivalence, as the octatonic allowed him to both stay within the tonality yet simultaneously to stray away.

By observing complex layers of textures and several of his detailed instructions, it is evident that his writing is conceived rather symphonically. On the other hand, pianistic virtuosity is often displayed through frequent exploration of the register. Such registral movement is structured into the overall architecture of each prelude, and Martin often uses sustaining pedals under independent activities of upper register at climaxes.

The performance of preludes demands a high level of emotional and intellectual engagement. It is not only technical aspect that makes this set of prelude challenging to learn and perform. Martin demands his music to be understood with intelligence and discipline, and performed with the heart that communicates beyond humanly knowledge.