‘Best Since Barber’:

Contextualising the Piano Sonatas of Robert Muczynski

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(Music Performance)

ELECTRONIC COPY

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The University of Adelaide

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Addendum:

Robert Muczynski died on May 25, 2010 from complications arising from leukaemia. At the time of his death he had not spoken publicly or at length about his music to anyone in over a decade, and he made it very clear from the outset of this investigation that I was to be no exception. Nevertheless, he was a true gentleman, always responding to my queries promptly and with great kindness (even if it was to simply say he had ‘nothing to say’), and he gave the project his full support and blessing.

One of the reasons he gave for declining to talk was that, in his words, “I always thought that anything I had to SAY could be said by way of the music itself” and, indeed, through close study of his highly personal music over many years, I feel I probably understand him much better than I would have through hours of probing interviews. The emotional piquancy felt from having to adjust the tenses and syntaxes in this paper as a result of his passing was just one of many strong feelings that made me realise the fondness I had developed for this man.

It is my hope that the recordings of his music that have been produced as a result of this PhD are a fitting tribute to his memory and herald the beginning of serious study and appraisal of the output of this wonderful composer, whose oeuvre is now complete.

LH
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Abstract

The American composer Robert Muczynski (1929-2010) is a somewhat under-represented figure in twentieth-century art music. Despite the fact that he has left a substantial body of engaging and well-crafted music for which scores are readily available, there is still a lack of serious scholarship regarding his compositional output, and a paucity of recordings of his works. If one cannot blame the quality of the music itself for its lack of dissemination, it is likely that the cause lies with Muczynski’s own reticence towards self-promotion. The range and number of works available to pianists to perform can often be overwhelming, and the most aggressively marketed works will reach the public consciousness first – not always correlating with the works that are perhaps most artistically worthy of attention. Muczynski’s three piano sonatas, between them, capture every facet of his art. From the eccentric, Soviet-influenced violence of the first, to the masterful and supervirtuosic second, through to the enigmatic and utterly individualistic third sonata, the three works lie on a continuum that shows Muczynski’s journey towards an increasingly unique and original voice. In an internet age where anyone can publicise an opinion without qualification or substantiation, viewing a composer’s output objectively becomes increasingly difficult. So if we cannot rely on currently available information to enhance our understanding of the performance practices of these sonatas, we should actually use other music as our guide.

Firstly, the gaps in the continuum of Muczynski’s sonatas can be filled by his own intervening sets of piano works: pieces like Diversions, Fables, the Suite, the Toccata, A Summer Journal and Seven show Muczynski’s experiments with pianistic texture and technique, workshopping ideas that would come to fruition in the sonatas themselves. Secondly, we can see what Muczynski absorbed, consciously and subconsciously, from the great American composers that came before him: Ives, Copland and Barber all provided masterful piano sonatas that serve as a model in some way for Muczynski’s own. Finally, we can place this continuum of ‘Americana’ in the much greater context of twentieth-century piano sonatas in general and find works from other nations that influence Muczynski’s style and that have been influenced by him. From the mosaic-like structure of Tippett’s Second Sonata through to the driving Argentinian rhythms of Ginastera’s Second Sonata, Muczynski’s sonatas share characteristics with many other masterworks in varying proportions. As we continue to compare and contrast Muczynski’s sonatas with the other great sonatas of the twentieth-century, we can gradually build up a Muczynski ‘galaxy’ – a worldview that has Muczynski’s sonatas at the centre and other sonatas in ‘orbits’ around them at a distance that roughly correlates with the affinities they share. What this ultimately shows us is that while sonatas by Charles Ives and Carl Vine may lie in closer orbits than sonatas by, say, Rachmaninov or Boulez, no composer lives in a vacuum and Muczynski’s sonatas are ‘post-modern’ in the truest sense – showing influences from, and providing links between even the most stylistically disparate composers.

Learning and recording the Muczynski sonatas with all this in mind helps us understand them better – certain piano figurations and motifs become more recognisable, the hand-shapes one needs to adopt become more familiar, the textures one strives for can be pictured in the mind’s eye before even being played on the keyboard. In this way, Muczynski’s sonatas are given credence and meaning against an established historical background. They are contextualised.
Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by other persons, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

I also give permission for the digital version of my exegesis (excluding the accompanying CDs) to be made available on the web, via the University’s digital research repository, the Library catalogue, the Australasian Digital Theses Program (ADTP) and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

Signed ……………………………………
Leigh Harrold

Date ………………………………………
1/12/2012
Acknowledgements

I am utterly indebted to Kevin Roper at the ABC, Adelaide, for his indefatigable support, enthusiasm and expertise throughout the five-year recording process encompassed by this project. It is not an exaggeration to say that this all would have been quite impossible without him.

Thank you to Rosie for the words and Daf for the pictures.

Thanks also to my supervisors, Emeritus Professor David Lockett and Professor Charles Bodman Rae, for their prudent advice, pragmatic approaches and academic insights.

Heartfelt thanks to my partner, family and friends, many of whom must feel as though they have practically recorded all these works and written all these words with me. I am grateful to them for putting up with my various rants and worries with patience and understanding.

To Coady.
About the recordings

The works included on the four compact discs were all recorded by the author expressly for the purpose of this investigation.

The works were recorded in Studio 520 at the ABC Centre in Adelaide on a Hamburg Steinway ‘D’ using two Schoeps microphones, and mixed and edited using Protools HD.

The recording sessions took place between January 2006 and January 2010. In all sessions the set-up was identical.

The works have all been recorded and edited to current commercial industry standards.
Citations and Nomenclature

Due to the large number of score citations in this exegesis, any portion of a work referred to that has been recorded for the project does not have the relevant excerpt of the manuscript included in the body of the text. In all cases, clarification can be sought by listening to the cited portion on the enclosed CDs. A complete track listing of all four CDs included with this submission can be found in the Appendix. For the purposes of examination, full scores of all the works recorded have been provided in a separate volume on the understanding that they will be destroyed once examination is complete. Should the casual reader which to consult a score, they are directed to the bibliography where all details of the works recorded are given, including relevant publishing houses.

For the sake of space conservation and unnecessary duplication, a shorthand notation has been adopted when citing a portion of a work that has been recorded for this project.

The work itself is referred to by an abbreviation, as follows:

Barber: Sonata, Op.26  Ba
Berg: Sonata, Op.1  Be
Copland: Sonata  C
Ginastera: Second Sonata, Op.53  G
Ives: First Sonata  I
Muczynski: A Summer Journal, Op.19  MASJ
Muczynski: Diversions, Op.23  MDi
Muczynski: Fables, Op.21  MFa
Muczynski: Seven, Op.30  MSe
Muczynski: First Sonata, Op.19  M1
Muczynski: Second Sonata, Op.22  M2
Muczynski: Third Sonata, Op.35  M3
Muczynski: Sonatina, Op.1  MSo
Muczynski: Suite, Op.13  MSu
Muczynski: Toccata, Op.15  MTo
Tippett: Second Sonata  T
Vine: First Sonata  V

Then the movement number will be given followed by the relevant bar numbers. After this, the number of the CD will be given followed by the track number and the relevant timing points. So, for example, a citation that reads [M1 2b1-10; CD1 Tr2 (0:00-0:12)] refers to ‘Muczynski’s First Sonata, second movement, bars 1-10, which can be found on track 2 of CD 1 from the beginning of the track up to the twelve-second mark.

Where a piece of music that has not been recorded for this project is referred to, any relevant score excerpts appear in the body of the text and the citation appears as a footnote in the usual way.
1. Chopin: *Berceuse*, Op.57, bars 1-5. 32
2. Chopin: *Berceuse*, Op.57, bars 50-2. 32
3. Chopin: *Berceuse*, Op.57, bar 41. 32
4. Janácek: Piano Sonata ‘1.X.1905’ (ii), bars 40-1. 73
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Chapter 1. Contextualising Muczynski

... I have taken 1951, when Cage wrote *Music of Changes* as an ending point for modernism... After it is over comes Post-modernism. The main tendencies of Postmodernism can be summarised roughly as follows:

1. **Bricolage**: The assembling of the art object from the odds and ends of older art, in a denatured and desecrated fashion... In this sense the modality of Postmodernist art is a collage of ironic quotations.

2. **Polystylism**: The polystylist may combine Gregorian chant, tuneful tonalism and obnoxious dissonances into a single composition, in order to create incongruities that deny the propriety or the tenability of any single style.

3. **Randomness**: A technique for depersonalising the artist, for demonstrating the transcendental anonymity of the work of art. ¹

... With Muczynski writing music in the same period that produced Pierre Boulez’s Third Piano Sonata of 1957 and Richard Rogers’ *The Sound of Music* in 1959, and his own musical aesthetic fitting somewhere in between these two extremes, his voice certainly needs defining.²

Dear Mr Harrold,

... I write to you in haste to tell you I do not wish to be involved in your project... Most of these works were written over 30 years ago and I have no wish to discuss [them with someone] arriving at them for the first time... However I DO wish you all the best for your project and am delighted to have been your choice!³


² Leigh Harrold. “‘Best Since Barber’: Contextualising the Piano Sonatas of Robert Muczynski.” Lecture-recital presented at University of Adelaide, 1 September 2005.

Figure 1 (see attached file). The Muczynski Galaxy: A core in need of a context.

NOTE:
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SONATA NO. 1 OP. 9

SONATA NO. 2 OP. 22

SONATA NO. 3 OP. 35
1.1 Why ‘contextualise’?

At every level, this investigation into the piano sonatas of Robert Muczynski has been about exposure. The simple act of having produced recordings of these three major works is exposure in itself – especially as no artist apart from Muczynski himself has recorded the works as a cycle, and no commercially available recordings exist whatsoever of the first or third piano sonatas outside Muczynski’s own.⁴

But while recording these works ‘exposes’ them by making them accessible to listeners, this alone tells us little about the works’ place in the pantheon of great twentieth-century piano sonatas, or even about their place in Muczynski’s own output. ‘Exposure’ can also mean ‘the treating of sensitised material to controlled amounts of radiant energy’,⁵ which suggests that if we shine ‘light’ on Muczynski’s sonatas from differing angles then various facets of their make-up will come to the fore. The other works in this investigation have each shone light onto a particular aspect of Muczynski’s craft (whether that be rhythmic, tonal, pianistic or structural – or something altogether less tangible) and, in the process, revealed the sonatas as complex masterworks, fully able to withstand critical scrutiny and deserving of a permanent place in the piano repertoire.

At the outset of this project, I suggested that the reason for the neglect of Muczynski’s piano music was not to do with any perceived inferiority of the music itself, but was rather a combination of no pianist having yet championed it, combined with Muczynski’s own lack of desire for any sort of self-promotion⁶. As this investigation has proceeded, this hypothesis has been reinforced at every step. As with every great composer, opinions from those that have had close associations with his music vary greatly. There is the unqualified praises of Valerie Cisler from the University of Nebraska at Kearney who, to date, has written the only thorough musicological analysis of Muczynski’s piano sonatas:

His music will [remain in] the literature for hundreds of years. It is part of history now... The First Sonata grows as a reflection of one’s internal life... the Second is more comfortable

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⁴ Muczynski. Letter to Author.
⁶ Harrold. Lecture-recital at University of Adelaide.
[and] first attracted me to his works... the Third is the most effective in performance. [These are] my favourite works for piano. 

Then there is also the more reserved reflections of concert pianist Keith Kirchoff who undertook to learn and record Muczynski’s entire oeuvre but was ultimately deterred by Muczynski’s lack of desire to collaborate:

[Muczynski's music] never seems to catch on because it is not tremendously daring or innovative. The composers that stretched the boundaries (except Mendelssohn) are the ones that stay. [Composers like] Carter – people will learn to understand it... Audiences understand Muczynski’s music but still don't take it up! Pianists have so much [repertoire] that it’s hard to champion it. This is unfortunate, as it deserves to be heard. Maybe market it differently? Muczynski doesn’t do self-promotion. And if Schirmer [one of Muczynski’s publishers] won’t, who will?

These views seem to occupy the polar positions of opinions on Muczynski’s music. Other plaudits include: ‘a master crafter – always serious about form’; ‘[there is] nothing random in his music and nothing [is a] compromise - all of it has a point’; and of course the much touted critique from Paul Snook that ‘this is the most impressive piano music by any American since [Samuel] Barber’.

So while Muczynski’s music has not found itself exempt from criticism, neither is it ever dismissed out of hand. Even those who find fault with his music on some level respect his achievements enough as a composer to analyse his music seriously and offer their opinions in the context of the great achievements of twentieth-century Western music.

This exegesis, then, will not take a propagandistic stance, nor does it need to become an apologist’s platform for a second-rate composer. Instead, we can start with the assumption that these three sonatas are ‘20th-century masterworks’ and then see how our understanding of their structure, how they impact us emotionally, and ultimately how we should approach preparing them for performance is influenced by the more established works in the canon.

7 Valerie Cisler. 2007. Interview with author. 7 February.
8 Keith Kirchoff. 2007. Interview with author. 20 February.
9 Dr Rex Woods. 2007. Interview with author. 31 January.
10 Dr Paula Fan. 2007. Interview with author. 1 February.
12 Fan. Interview with author.
Indeed, we will see that they are shot through with nearly every characteristic innovation and trend the twentieth century had to offer. We will see that these sonatas show the influence of the sonatas that came before them, that as a trilogy they show their own inner traces of growth and development from one sonata to the next, and that they (consciously or subconsciously) continue to influence the piano writing of those composers who have followed Muczynski. The Muczynski sonatas will thus assume their modest but vital place in the continuum of all other twentieth-century sonatas. They will be contextualised.

1.2 Contextualised against what?

This ongoing quest to accurately and objectively contextualise Muczynski’s piano sonatas has involved the constant need to reconcile three factors:

1. **Their date of composition:** Muczynski’s three sonatas were composed between 1957 and 1974. This places them squarely in the post-modernist period as defined by Daniel Albright13, where style has completely splintered, where no single compositional method reigns supreme, and where most Western music makes reference to a myriad of styles and schools that precede it.

2. **The amount of available information versus ‘mis’-information:** There has been an explosion in recent years of on-line self-promotion, of internet blogging and of many types of ‘information’ being available in an instant.

3. **Muczynski’s reclusiveness:** Muczynski did not speak publicly about his music for the last twelve years of his life, and was unwilling to validate (or otherwise) performances and recordings of his works, or factual information about himself and his life.

When this project was begun in September 2005, there was just a single hit for ‘Robert Muczynski’ on the video mega-site YouTube. In light of the fact that tens of thousands of new videos are added to YouTube daily14, it is perhaps not surprising that as of January 1, 2010, there were 85 hits for ‘Robert Muczynski’, mostly of the *Sonata for Flute and Piano, Op.14* and the *Time Pieces for Clarinet and Piano, Op.43*, with a small smattering of the solo piano music

13 Albright. 12.

featured. Not one hit, however, currently\(^\text{15}\) features any of the solo piano sonatas. In summary, there is an uneven and random cross-section of Muczynski’s works represented, along with equally random comments regarding them. A sampling of these follow:

Regarding a performance of the last movement of Muczynski’s *Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Orchestra, Op.41*:

it's a concerto [sic]-- play from memory!! Jut [sic] because a piece is "pulitzer prize nominated" doesn’t make it a good piece!! This piece, and muczynski’s music in general, will not likely last the test of time.\(^\text{16}\)

Regarding a young boy playing the first movement of Muczynski’s *Sonata for Flute and Piano, Op.14*:

Just a small advice [sic]: the tempo written is MUCH too fast, believe me, i really put my mind into this piece and listened to many recordings of professional flutist [sic] and they all play it slower.\(^\text{17}\)

Regarding the composer’s ‘*Gallery*’ Suite for Solo Cello:

That’s some sexual music. I like it!\(^\text{18}\)

Now none of these musings is particularly enlightening, well informed, or even grammatically sound! If there are more perceptive comments on YouTube they will only be found by accident, and exactly which statements are more perceptive than others is entirely at the whim of the reader - no blogger needs to state any sort of credentials. This ongoing proliferation of writings combined with Muczynski’s withdrawal from the public eye has resulted in a total lack of quality control regarding his life and work in the public arena.

The machinations of big business do not help either. In 2003 it was possible to find a complete list of Muczynski’s works on the Theodore Presser website. However Theodore Presser is only one of Muczynski’s publishers, and the site has since been adjusted to include only those works published by them. No mention is made of any other works, and a visitor to the site would be forgiven for thinking that Muczynski’s output is only about one-third as large as it

\(^{15}\) As of 1 November 2011.


really is. While his American contemporaries such as Lowell Liebermann and Sheila Silver have slick, constantly updated websites publicising upcoming performances and promoting new works, Muczynski as a public figure risks being swamped completely – his voice getting drowned and distorted in a sea of adverts and half-truths.

The challenge, then, in a world of ever-increasing propaganda and misinformation is to accept that Muczynski himself cannot be used as a primary source, while still constructing an accurate picture of what his body of work represents and how it may be performed (exposed) to best fulfill his intentions.

If we cannot rely on secondary sources either, then we must turn to the music itself. In order to determine precisely what place Muczynski’s piano sonatas occupy in the musical canon, they must be listened to. And, since recordings of the sonatas are not readily available, they must be played. The notion that music itself can get closer to some sort of fundamental ‘truth’ in a way that words cannot is a controversial one, but one that has been much explored. Elina Packalén, in writing for the Philosophy of Education Review, concluded that music ‘yields some kind of ineffable knowledge about the experience of emotions.’ In an interview with Rebecca Chan, a violinist with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, in 2007, she stated:

In my teenage years, the more I studied literature and philosophy and music, the more saddened and disillusioned I became with language, and the more I gravitated towards the conclusion that music was the only medium capable of expressing ultimate truth. Words can be twisted and turned by their writers to express any polemic of their choosing. A piece of music may say something different to everyone who hears it, but it’s incapable of lying.

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20 “Sheila Silver.” Hummingbird Films.  

21 LOWELL LIEBERMANN :: COMPOSER.  


Stravinsky’s famous assertion that ‘music is incapable of expressing anything but itself’ may seem to contradict Chan’s notion but, actually, their statements have similar ramifications. There is an implied sense that a piece of music is like an aural Rorschach Test, able to act as a projector for a listener’s feelings and experiences, but remaining passive and neutral in itself all the while.

If we are going to use external sources to help us understand Muczynski’s music then, it seems that using other music is a way of by-passing the welter of misinformation that exists and thereby attempting to contextualise his sonatas in a serious and objective way. This attempt gains validity when we apply Albright’s definition of ‘post-modernism’ (see page 1) and realise that all three of Muczynski’s piano sonatas meet Albright’s post-modern criteria of ‘bricolage, polystylism and randomness’.

In the initial proposal for this investigation, eight characteristic features governing Muczynski’s piano music were identified:

1. A tonal harmonic language with musical interest generated ‘classically’ through competing key centres
2. Key centres which are generally not major or minor but modal, or a combination of super-imposed modes
3. Triads in different keys and of different qualities sounded against each other
4. Melodies in one mode harmonized by chords from another
5. Multi-part counterpoint with each voice in a different mode
6. Tone-clusters at dynamic and/or structural climaxes
7. Incessant rhythmic pulsing
8. Much use of metrical displacement

None of these things in themselves is necessarily innovative – all have been used by

25Igor Stravinsky biography.” 8 Notes.
26Hermann Rorscharch (1884-1922) was a Swiss psychologist who developed a now famous (almost clichéd) ‘inkblot’ test, where the subject is shown an amorphous blob on a white background and asked to interpret it.
27Harrold. Lecture-recital at University of Adelaide.
composers before Muczynski and continue to be used by those who come after him. However, not all these features are necessarily found in every composer who influenced Muczynski and, certainly, they are not to be found in the same proportions or exploited to the same musical ends in any other composer. Muczynski then, satisfies Albright’s requirements for ‘bricolage’ and ‘polystylistm’\textsuperscript{28} by creating an entirely new music using existing methods and techniques but reassembling them in ever more original ways, gradually arriving at a voice that is uniquely his.

1.3 Contextualising through performing and recording

At the outset of this project, two research questions were asked:

1. Where do Muczynski’s sonatas position themselves within the total body of twentieth century piano music?
2. How can this position be consolidated through performing and recording these works and related works?

The most obvious answer to the second research question is that a professionally produced studio recording of Muczynski’s sonatas now exists where none did before.\textsuperscript{29} But the arguments so far put forward for using related works to contextualise Muczynski’s music – to give it a context amidst Albright’s chaotic depiction of a post-modern, stylistically fractured musical universe – lays the foundation for being able to answer this second question more comprehensively.

There are many ways to imagine this contextualization process, and they all involve the idea of a system of concentric layers with the Muczynski sonatas as the nucleus of the system – an onion is a straightforward analogy; planets orbiting a Muczynski ‘sun’ is another.

\textsuperscript{28} We will see that he also satisfies Albright’s third criteria of ‘randomness’ by constantly moving towards a more depersonalised and abstract voice, but this is not relevant to the discussion at hand.

\textsuperscript{29} There is the 2-volume CD set ‘Muczynski plays Muczynski’ on the Laurel lable, which does contain all three sonatas. However, most professional musicians I have encountered agree that the bad quality of the piano, the clunky editing and a certain unevenness in the playing does not make it a competitive recording. Perhaps it is more interesting for historical and musicological reasons than for the actual quality of the performances themselves.
However one looks at it, it is possible to group related works in various ‘layers’ around the sonatas at a distance in accordance with the tenuousness of the relationship – more obviously related works are in shells closer to the centre, while more remotely-related ones lie in shells further away. We will gradually build up a graphic of this, piece by piece, as we proceed through this exegesis, eventually constructing a ‘galaxy’ of major twentieth-century piano sonatas.

At the core of this galaxy are the three Muczynski piano sonatas themselves. Even within this core there is much to explore, as there is a sense of a linear evolution of Muczynski’s style from sonata to sonata. The works are clearly related, but show an increasing compositional sophistication.

The next ‘orbit’ out contains the intermediate piano works written by Muczynski in between the first and third piano sonatas – Suite, Op.13; Toccata, Op.15; A Summer Journal, Op.19; Fables, Op.21; Diversions, Op.23; and Seven, Op.30 – as well as the work that contains his earliest compositional thoughts, the Sonatina, Op.1. These works – mostly collections of miniatures – act as laboratories. They are tiny canvases on which Muczynski workshops ideas that come to fruition in a more fully developed way in the sonatas.

The next layer out consists of other American piano sonatas written before Muczynski’s that exerted a profound influence on his compositional development. Ives’ First Piano Sonata, Copland’s Piano Sonata and Barber’s Piano Sonata, Op.26 all clearly show Muczynski’s heritage.

A further widening of the lens encompasses a shell containing sonatas by composers from other nations that chronologically flank Muczynski’s sonatas and have a stylistic affinity with one or more of them. Muczynski’s Third Sonata relies on the same sort of obsessive motivic repetition as Berg’s Piano Sonata, Op.1 while employing nationalistic dance rhythms in the manner of Ginastera’s Second Piano Sonata, Op.83. Muczynski’s First Sonata and Tippet’s Second Piano Sonata both employ an unusual mosaic-type structure, while the scampering semiquavers of Muczynski’s Second Sonata are taken to obsessive heights in Vine’s First Piano Sonata. The recordings that form the basis of this project do not extend beyond this orbit.
We can draw our telescope out further to find an orbit of many sonatas that very lightly touch on an aspect of Muczynski’s language while all being very different from each other: Maxwell Davies’ dementedly difficult sonata has something of the dissonant contrapuntal interplay of the first movement of Muczynski’s Second Sonata with both works clearly owing a debt to the virtuosically intertwining strands of Ives’ First Sonata. Helen Gifford’s concise, solitary sonata of 1960 has a slightly ‘tribal’ nationalistic bent which foreshadows the more sophisticated use of dance rhythms found in Muczynski’s Third Sonata. These are just two examples out of many.

Finally, there is a diffuse outer layer of sonatas that can really only define themselves in relation to Muczynski by not fitting into any of the above categories. The astringent dissonances of Boulez’s three sonatas, the colourful mysticism of Scriabin’s large cycle, and the crystalline miniatures of Chapman Smith are just three examples of wildly diverse sonata outputs that cannot really be related to any aspect of Muczynski’s style except by the longest and most tenuous of threads. This fully bears out Albright’s definition of a postmodern musical world while showing that Muczynski’s style is quite sharply defined by a small set of parameters synthesized in a very specific (and increasingly unique) way.

Of course this notion of layers is quite a subjective one. Others undertaking this investigation may have chosen different works to illustrate their points and thereby build up differently configured ‘Muczynski galaxies’. The bias in my own choice of works has been influenced by the following factors:

1. Choosing works that share the eight characteristic features of Muczynski’s music as listed in 1.2 – not just in an analytical sense but from a performance perspective too, so that recognizable harmonic and rhythmic devices do not just sound similar between pieces but feel familiar, utilizing similar fingerings and muscle movements.

2. Choosing works that best frame these features in an historical continuum – again, not just musicologically but from a very practical view of the development of performance possibilities on the piano.

3. Choosing works that, where possible, relate to aspects of Muczynski’s sonatas across their whole stylistic development and not just to one or two very early or very late
quirks.

To illustrate these points with two examples:

1. The Maxwell Davies Sonata and the Ives First Sonata have very similar contrapuntal complexities, but the Ives has been placed in a more central layer because it shares more of a tactile sense with Muczynski’s Second Sonata than does the Maxwell Davies work – the Ives and the Muczynski utilize diatonic (albeit often highly complex) patterns that fit under the hands and involve pianistically logical shifts and jumps; the Maxwell Davies makes no concession to pianistic ease, often concentrating an entire voice into a single finger.

2. It would be feasible in some ways to include an ‘inner layer’ of influential Russian piano sonatas instead of American sonatas. This has been avoided for two reasons: firstly, the influence of Russian pedagogues on Muczynski is one of the few aspects of his compositional development that has already been given academic treatment – briefly by Cisler and then more thoroughly by Cho. Secondly, the Russian influence of style and technique – essentially due to Muczynski’s most formative composition teacher, Alexander Tcherepnin - can really only be traced up to the First Sonata through works like Variations on a Theme of Tcherepnin, Op.3 and the Preludes, Op.6, whereas the influence of the American masters is present, through varying degrees, throughout Muczynski’s entire output.

This ‘Muczynski Galaxy’, therefore, frames his sonatas largely according to the practicalities associated with learning and recording them: deciding suitable fingerings and pedallings, successfully articulating the structure, understanding the style and sonorities, and so forth. In short, this project has a performer’s bias. It must be stressed, therefore, that while this framework attempts to provide a solution to giving Muczynski’s sonatas dignity in the musical

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32 Cisler. 60
canon, it is by no means the only one.

Before we begin to build our Muczynski Galaxy, one final point must be clarified. So far, we have avoided addressing the first research question: **Where do Muczynski's sonatas position themselves within the total body of twentieth-century piano sonatas?** The truth is that, as this project has unfolded, this question has revealed itself as simple and straightforward. The Muczynski sonatas occupy a modest yet important position in the sonata repertoire in exactly the same way that hundreds of other masterworks do. If there is any difference, it is to do with our perception.

In much the same way as maps of the world produced in Australia position our country in the middle and down the bottom, we can simply choose to make the Muczynski sonatas the centerpiece, or the core, of our contextualization and watch as we build up a picture of our resultant world – literally, piece by piece.

We begin with the first seed – a work that Muczynski fervently rejected and wished was no longer in the public domain. And yet the germs for his future compositional mastery can all be traced back to this piece one way or the other. It is his Sonatina, Op.1.
Chapter 2. The First Piano Sonata, Op.9

1. Moderato – Allegro
2. Allegro giocoso

... Muczynski’s First Sonata is all about detail and nuance. There are many differences in character and colour, and dozens of shades between ‘soft’ and ‘very soft’. One must always think of Shostakovich – less ‘jazz’ and more ‘agitato’.33

... [This sonata displays] an amazingly precocious and well-calculated feel for harmonic pacing; its lucid, driving, very succinct [sic] deployment of several well-marked and flexible motifs is based on relatively simple semitonal and/or triadic major-minor oppositions which imbue the music with a limber and transparent purposefulness. 34

Muczynski’s First Piano Sonata was completed in 1957 and premiered at Carnegie Hall by the composer in 1958. It is dedicated to Alexander Tcherepnin, renowned Russian composer and pedagogue, and Muczynski’s composition teacher at the time.

33 Tannis Gibson. 2007. Interview with author. 1 February.
34 Snook. 119.
NOTE:
This figure has been inserted in to the electronic copy on the following page.

Figure 2 (see attached file). The Muczynski Galaxy: The First Sonata with associated satellites.
Sonatina Op. 1
- too smart and self-conscious
- stylistically \\
- polytonal and spiky
- out to make a statement
- full of novel ideas
- exploits the piano well, but not always pianistic
- unnecessarily awkward
- many ideas
- texturally similar
- uncompromising
- texturally innovative
- builds by sectionisation
- extreme in register
- "collage"-type structures
- overtly programmatic and evocative

Sonata No. 1 Op. 9
- Tippett

Sonata No. 2 Op. 22
- Suite, Op. 13
- Toccata, Op. 15
- A Summer Journal, Op. 19
- Russian/Ivesian influence
- polytonal and spiky
- out to make a statement
- full of novel ideas
- exploits the piano well, but not always pianistic
- very variegated ideas
- overtly programmatic and evocative
- texturally innovative
- builds by sectionisation
- uncompromising
- texturally similar

Sonata No. 3 Op. 35
- Tippett 2
2.1 Sonatina, Op.1 (1950)

The first thing that strikes one about Muczynski's first opus when examining the score is the naivety of its harmonic language. Indeed, it is the only one of Muczynski's works that does not employ bitonality or polytonality at any point, despite its chromatic wanderings. The second thing, which becomes apparent once one tries to play it, is the awkwardness involved in the execution of apparently simple material, particularly the left hand chords, which are generally voiced to span a tenth but only occasionally marked to be arpeggiated [MSo 1b3;CD2 Tr1 (0:02)]. Non-arpeggiated chords at the speed required by Muczynski are an impossibility for any but the most large-handed pianists and the recording shows several instances [MSo 1b9;CD2 Tr1 (0:09)] [MSo 1b12;CD2 Tr1 (0:12)] where splitting the chord becomes a necessity.35

This awkwardness is something that is easily forgiven – one encounters the same thing in the very earliest works of others that went on to become giants of keyboard composition: Prokofiev's First Sonata, Op.1 and Beethoven's First Sonata, Op.2 No.1 also have their share of 'borderline unplayable'36 moments, despite the modesty of their musical message. Sullivan explains that

… as their confidence for writing for the keyboard increased, these composers gradually made their works more difficult yet more idiomatic so that, despite the horrendous demands of, say, Prokofiev's Sixth Sonata, you will not find a single chord voiced more awkwardly or a single run requiring more hand changes than is absolutely necessary.37

Muczynski perfected this too, but he is a long way from it in the Sonatina, and the unwieldy textures he is experimenting with also crop up in the First Sonata. It is a shame to arpeggiate certain chords as it detracts from their rhythmic vitality. In the First Sonata however, an effort to play all the notes exactly as specified can actually weaken the structural foundations of the work. Two prime examples appear in consecutive bars of the first movement [M1 1b136;CD1 Tr1 (5:10)] [M1 1b137-41;CD1 Tr1 (5:12-5:20)]. In the first example, even Muczynski acknowledges that the five-note chord in the right-hand is impossible for most pianists to grab

35 So could Muczynski play this work non-arpeggiando? Quite possibly, but he wouldn't talk about it. In a letter to the author dated 28 December 2005, he angrily remarks, "I am MOST disappointed to hear about the [potential] recording of my Sonatina... as I was very specific when notifying publishers, etc".

36 Gil Sullivan. 2001. Interview with author. 5 August.

37 Sullivan. Interview with author.
cleanly and so asks for it arpeggiated. However this chord appears at what is, arguably, the dynamic climax of the movement. The pedal must be cleared on the bar-line to get rid of the previous harmony in M1 1b135;CD1 Tr1 (5:08), which results in only the top and bottom As of the piano sounding together at this ‘climax’ point – and it sounds disappointingly anti-climactic! Keith Kirchhoff suggests resounding the Gb, Eb and Bb under the top A on the bar-line after arpeggiating the whole chord before the bar-line38, and this is what has been done on the recording – it is a deviation from the notation, but it is harmonically sound and it maintains the sonorous texture that Muczynski has been carefully building up to this point.

A slightly different textural problem is posed at M1 1b137-9;CD1 Tr1 (5:12-5:15). Muczynski asks for ‘con ped’ throughout these bars and there is a lot of left-hand noise. If the octave Bs in the right-hand stay depressed as Muczynski asks, it prevents the second, third and fourth fingers from sinking into the melody notes (Eb-F-Gb etc.) with enough weight, and they become practically inaudible against the left-hand activity. A practical solution seems to be to hit and release the octave Bs on the downbeat of M1 1b137;CD1 Tr1 (5:12) while keeping the damper pedal depressed so they continue to sound. This allows the whole weight of the arm to get behind the melody from M1 1b136-9;CD1 Tr1 (5:10-5:15). Then, in the last semiquaver beat of M1 1b139;CD1 Tr1 (5:14) the bottom B can be silently depressed with the thumb so that when the pedal change that Muczynski calls for on the downbeat of M1 1b140;CD1 Tr1 (5:15) is executed, the B still rings through as required – seemingly unbroken.

Problems of awkwardness in the Sonatina are combined with an almost obsessive need to avoid repeating the same material twice. Absolutely nothing in any of the three movements is allowed to work out ‘predictably’ according to prescribed classical structures. The first movement sounds like it will be in sonata form, but the upwardly-mobile first theme does not reappear at the end, and the movement rushes headlong from development [MSo 1b45;CD2 Tr1 (0:49)] to coda [MSo 1b79;CD2 Tr1 (1:19)]. The second movement is in rough ternary form, but cadences willfully on D-major in its closing bars despite the final ‘A’ section being in E-minor – the modulation is affected so the E in the diad of the third-to-last bar acts as both tonic resolution from the bar before and supertonic of the chord that is to follow [MSo 2b33-6;CD2 Tr2 (0:00-0:00)]. The third movement alternates between two moods – jaunty F-major

38 Kirchoff. Interview with author.
and lyrical D-major – but even this distinction is blurred after a while and the music becomes complex beyond its modest length.

The variation in repeated material can be sophisticated – Rex Woods particularly likes the 5-octave peal (C-C-C-F-F) down the entire piano that cheekily runs through the repeat of the theme of the first movement, at once disguising it and punctuating it [MSo 1b33-4;CD2 Tr2 (0:00-0:00)]. The variation can also be unnecessarily pedantic – only highly sensitive ears would pick up the difference in phrasing and articulation between MSo 1b9-10;CD2 Tr1 (0:00-0:00) and MSo 1b42-3;CD2 Tr1 (2:20-2:47). In short, the music is rather too much focused on being clever than being original - the overall feel of the piece caught somewhere between the Russian athleticism of Prokofiev’s Third Sonata and the American swagger of Barber’s Souvenirs without being as convincing as either.

In fact, the most captivating part of the Sonatina is one that eschews all this technical pedantry. The opening of the second movement is arguably the most original moment of the work and provides an insight into the composer Muczynski would become [MSo 2b1-12;CD2 Tr2 (0:00-0:58)]. In technical terms it illustrates a device Muczynski would use often – floating a curvaceous melody moving mostly stepwise above quartic harmonies so that the insertion of the major-seventh, either as a harmony in its own right [MSo 2b3;CD2 Tr2 (0:10)] or as an added note to an existing triadic harmony [MSo 2b7;CD2 Tr2 (0:27)], has a particularly piquant effect against an otherwise stark harmonic landscape.

Many have noticed the emotional potency of this: Rex Woods believes that Muczynski is ‘always at his most expressive and most sincere’ in this mood, while London pianist Coady Green notes a ‘real lyricism and honesty’ in the writing. It is a feature of Muczynski’s music well into his late period [M3 3b1-20;CD1 Tr9 (0:00-0:56)], but it is also used to great structural effect in the development section of the first movement of the First Sonata [M1 1b147-60;CD1 Tr1 (5:43-6:22)], providing a sophisticated solution to a potential architectural problem. The first subject [M1 1b1-33;CD1 Tr1 (0:00-2:13)] of this movement is marked moderato – it is

39 Woods. Interview with author.
40 Woods. Interview with author.
41 Coady Green. 2009. Interview with author. 2 September.
mysterious, expressive and full of rhetoric. The second subject [M1 1b34-75;CD1 Tr1 (2:13-3:01)] is jarringly different – an allegro that is sharply etched and pungently rhythmic. The development [M1 1b76-159;CD1 Tr1 (3:01-6:20)] – traditionally a place where these two contrasting tempo indications in the development alone, Muczynski thins the texture down to a single pianissimo ‘D’ [M1 1b146;CD1 Tr1 (5:38)]. Here, at the point of lowest energy in the movement, he introduces an andante tranquillo section that derives from the second movement of the Sonatina – harmonic ‘filler’ in the tenor-line at a fourth or a fifth from the soprano melody gives a feeling of openness, while melody notes forming sevenths and seconds with the bass-line ensure expressive potency. Throughout these thirteen bars the music thickens texturally, increases in dissonance, and gradually accelerates until it quite naturally culminates in three sonorous chords identical to those found in M1 1b5;CD1 Tr1 (0:12) and the recapitulation has begun, Muczynski very cleverly finding a way to ‘accelerate’ back into the slow music of the opening.

Clever. We find ourselves using that word again. Like the Sonatina, the First Sonata is peppered with exacting detail indicative of an intellect out to impress. Alexander Tcherepnin, Muczynski’s composition teacher at the time, would tell him that his early works ‘had enough ideas in them for eight pieces’42, and with so many musical events jostling for space in this work, the priority for a performer is to absorb all the detail on the page in an effort to effectively demarcate every change of mood while still conveying a sense of its unifying architecture. With seventeen tempo changes in the first movement alone, this is challenging. In later works, Muczynski would use metrical modulation to relate sections of differing tempi, but here the tempo shifts are abrupt and non-relational. This makes it all the more difficult when a section returns that is required to be at the same tempo it was when it first appeared – the recapitulation mentioned earlier at M1 1b160;CD1 Tr1 (6:20) is a prime example. From a section that must be started ‘cold’ and with no reference point at ‘quaver = 108’ [M1 1b147;CD1 Tr1 (5:43)], an accelerando must be judged precisely that arrives at ‘dotted crotchet = 46’ (‘quaver = 138’) at M1 1b160;CD1 Tr1 (6:20) – and this tempo must match that of the movement’s opening. The delicate structure of the piece demands it; the intricate detail makes it difficult to achieve.

This places very strict interpretational parameters on the piece and, in fact, this is the only piece of this project that required a complete re-record. One resigns oneself to an interpretation of a piece changing over time, and this certainly happened over the course of this investigation. However, the second and third sonatas are robust, and while the author may well play them differently now to how he recorded them, the recordings still faithfully convey the structure of the work. The first recording of the first sonata certainly did not: tiny discrepancies in tempi between similar sections; minutely misjudged accelerandos and ritardandos; pedaling inconsistencies – all these small variances caused the entire structure of the sonata to fail, making it sound simply like a series of disconnected episodes when it is actually so much more. It is, therefore, the least malleable of the three - the interlocking sections fitting together precariously like a mosaic.

2.2 Muczynski’s Mosaic: Sonata No.2 by Michael Tippett (1962)

Examples of this so-called ‘mosaic’ form are rare in music, but clues to coming to grips with the structure of the first movement of Muczynski’s First Sonata can be found within Michael Tippett’s Second Sonata, completed just five years later. Here we encounter a more ‘neo-classical’ version, if you like, of Muczynski’s work and, subsequently, the structural ‘bones’ of the work are made more clear\(^{43}\). The two works share superficial similarities such as brevity\(^{44}\) and a fondness for using the extreme registers of the piano in strident octaves (compare M1 1b15-9;CD1 Tr1 (0:44-1:05) with T b5-7;CD2 Tr4 (0:19-0:27)), but it is their structures that gives the best insight into interpreting them.

There is no transitional material in the Tippett whatsoever. In the first 29 bars, five musical ideas are presented, each with their own tempo and mood indication, and labeled ‘Tempo 1’, ‘Tempo 2’ etc. through to ‘Tempo 5’. Thereafter, when those ideas resurface in the piece they are simply identified by ‘tempo number’. Other tempi crop up in the piece in due course – there are eight altogether – and the work simply presents the ideas represented by these tempi in an

\(^{43}\) As we’ll see later, this is a common theme when analysing the sonatas. Carl Vine’s First Sonata provides a more skeletal template for how Muczynski’s Second Sonata functions, while Ginastera’s wild Second Sonata sticks doggedly to a mood that pervades Muczynski’s Third Sonata. It is as though each of Muczynski’s neo-romantic works has a neo-classical counterpart that elucidates and explains it.

\(^{44}\)The Muczynski sonata’s two movements total approximately 13 minutes; Tippett’s single-movement work is less than 12.
ever jostled-around order until the piece ends. It is a true mosaic: just as it is impossible to blend the colours of two adjacent tiles in a mosaic’s make-up, so here are the divisions between tempo changes absolute. In fact, the initial impression is that the slabs of music comprising the sonata could be re-ordered quite arbitrarily with no change to the quality of the piece. However, just as each autonomous tile coalesces into a unified picture or pattern when one views a mosaic from a certain distance, the sonata gains in aural comprehensibility as it proceeds, with each new ‘tempo block’ gradually filling in a pre-determined picture that has been inevitable from the piece’s outset.

It takes diligence on the part of the performer to realise this. There are 37 tempo changes in the Tippett but only eight different tempi. That is, 37 tiles but only eight colours. As with the Muczynski sonata, there are no implied tempo relationships between different tempi blocks – the performer’s memory is the only tool for ensuring consistency at the reappearance of each identical tempo. And it is the power of memory that provides the key to the piece’s emotional impact. The success in performance of both the Muczynski first movement and the Tippett depends in large part on the ability of the performer to perfectly recapture an early mood when it resurfaces. The structural climax of each work provides a perfect example of this – it occurs in each piece at the recapitulation point, that is, where the opening theme is brought back.

[M1 1b160;CD1 Tr1 (6:20)] [T b301;CD2 Tr4 (12:29)]. In both cases, each composer reserves this tempo exclusively for just these moments and at no other point in the piece. As a result, these musical events are primary structural pillars, and once a performer is satisfied they are in place, they can then grade the many secondary episodes between and after them accordingly. In the recording of both of these sonatas, it is this structural element that has attempted to be brought to the fore by way of emphasizing this unusual architectural similarity. A successful reading should result in a ‘lightbulb’ moment – a return that makes the preceding isolated ‘tiles’ meld into a meaningful whole.

Having declaimed these recapitulations triumphantly, both movements disintegrate fragmentally and merge gradually with silence. This lends them an air of tragedy which the Tippett is content to sign-off with. However it is at this point that the works diverge, as the

45 We can, of course, only call this point a true ‘recapitulation’ if we believe these movements are in sonata form. Because the ‘development’ sections of each work consists of these mosaic-like episodes rather than a true development of the opening themes, this is a somewhat contentious point. Nonetheless, it is hoped the reader understands the term ‘recapitulation’ as referring to the return of the theme(s) which opened the works.
Muczynski actually has a second movement. This movement provides a sharpened point of emotional release: shorter, faster and ‘happier’ than the first, it gives the entire sonata a ‘tadpole’ shape – a large and unwieldy head followed by a short, wiggly tail. This concept of gradually wound-up tension preceding fast, uninhibited release is nothing new, and has been used in sonatas by composers from Haydn (HobVI:48) to Beethoven (Op.54) through to Lowell Liebermann (Op.14). The most successful performances of all these works emphasise the extreme differences in the meta-character of each movement. Much has been mentioned of the mercurial, fragmented and tragic nature of Muczynski’s first movement. Therefore, the second movement should be direct, forward-driving and hopeful – and certainly, on paper, this appears to be the essence of the movement. Marked Allegro giocoso, it is a rhythmically asymmetric moto perpetuo that mostly maintains an unwavering quaver-pulse. The driving motion is interrupted just once [M1 2b154-82;CD1 Tr2 (2:28-3:18)] by an interpolation that begins with a maestoso version of the movement’s second subject and climaxes in a peroration of the first movement’s opening theme [M1 2b173-4;CD1 Tr2 (2:59-3:04)] before revving back up to the Allegro giocoso tempo for a bring-the-house-down finale.

One can see and feel the debt Muczynski owes to modern Russian pianism in this movement. The stark texture of unison melodies three-octaves apart [M1 2b24-5;CD1 Tr2 (0:23-0:24)] recalls Shostakovich, while some of the daredevil hand-crossings [M1 2b150-3;CD1 Tr2 (2:24-2:28)] rival those found in the opening of Prokofiev’s Sixth Sonata. But, again, there is the problem of pedantry winning out over pianistic ease. This is something that Muczynski consciously sought to eliminate as his style matured and it is plainly evident in M2 1b108-127;CD1 Tr3 (3:56-4:24) where barely-noticeable octave transpositions prevent the hands from colliding, or in M3 3b87-88;CD1 Tr9 (2:49-2:51) where very short rests either side of a large leap allow time for it to be executed confidently. The First Sonata makes no such concessions – while it is texturally inventive, there is no octave passage or ostinato figure not carried through to its logical end-point, even if it means it is next-to-impossible to get to the next bar in time. An example is the consecutive octaves in both hands in M1 2b179-80:CD1 Tr2 (3:10-3:13). It is very difficult to get all octaves cleanly in M1 2b179;CD1 Tr2 (3:10), contract the hands for the passage work that begins M1 2b180;CD1 Tr2 (3:12) then widen them again for the octaves on the third beat, navigate the leap of a tenth on the fourth beat, then execute

46 Woods. Interview with author.
the even trickier passage-work in M1 2b181;CD1 Tr2 (3:13). In light of the Second and Third Sonata, one suspects that a more mature Muczynski would have left out the bottom note of each octave G in these bars – with no detriment to the musical message.

In short, the movement is an exciting virtuoso vehicle, but if the marking giocoso implies a certain fleetness, it is something that is very difficult to achieve with the textures Muczynski has written combined with the tempo he indicates. Like the Second Sonata of Ginastera – to be examined later – this movement may be a dance, but it is a dance that remains earthy and grounded: closer to the choreography of The Rite of Spring than The Nutcracker.

2.3 Suite, Op.13 (1960)

Suite of 1960 represents the beginning of a much more facile virtuosity. Muczynski stated that the reasons for composing this work were ‘technical rather than emotional’ and this group of six miniatures can be considered his first set of piano études. Each movement presents a unique pianistic and compositional challenge – a study for performer and composer alike.

The ‘giants dancing’ idea from the First Sonata’s second movement is in plain evidence in the opening piece, ‘Festival’, which is also a leaden-footed celebration and contains the same sort of pianistic challenges – large leaps which must not distort the meter [MSu 1b44;CD2 Tr5 (0:48)], quick contractions and expansions of the hand [MSu 1b27-30;CD2 Tr5 (0:29-0:32)] and awkward hand-crossings [MSu 1b22-6;CD2 Tr5 (0:23-0:28)]. However, there is a sense here that the technical obstacles have been consciously set down as challenges to be met and, certainly, every note in ‘Festival’ contributes something vital to the texture, indicative of Muczynski’s move towards stripping his music down to the bare essentials.

If ‘Festival’ has parallels with the First Sonata’s second movement, the third piece, ‘Vision’, recalls the rhetorical power of the first movement, with its expressive melodies in octaves above sonorous chords [M1 1b5-6;CD1 Tr1 (0:11-0:18)] [MSu 3b5-6;CD2 Tr7 (0:17-0:27)] and moments of spectral stillness [M1 1b178-82;CD1 Tr1 (7:28-7:58) [MSu 3b17-9;CD2 Tr7 (1:25-1:43)]. ‘Vision’ also looks back in another way – for all the homage Muczynski pays to

47 Muczynski. Collected Piano Works. 3.

48 The second set being Seven Op.30, discussed later.
the great Russian pianist-composers in these early works, this little piece is the only one of Muczynski’s that seems to specifically recall Rachmaninov. The grandioso middle section [MSu 3b10-5;CD2 Tr7 (0:42-1:13)] has unmistakeable similarities to Rachmaninov’s (in)famous Prelude in C♯-minor, Op.3 No.2, with textures so dense that both hands simultaneously are required to play the melody and the accompanying harmony – a single system splitting into three staves for visual clarity.\(^{49}\)

The final piece in the set, ‘Scherzo’, illustrates marvellously the transitional phase Muczynski was in as he was moving towards the Second Piano Sonata. Harmonically, rhythmically and stylistically, this scherzo is like the second movement of the First Sonata – it contains chords of the 7th used for expressive purposes and at structural climaxes, it has a moto perpetuo drive punctuated by unexpected accents and rhythmic dislocations, and it has a sense of the gladiatorial about it with the entire range of the piano exploited. But when one listens to the recordings side by side [CD1 Tr2] [CD2 Tr10] the sense of flight that perhaps eluded Muczynski in the First Sonata is captured in ‘Scherzo’. Remarkably, one hears no real textural difference, just more ease in the musical unfolding. Some closer inspection reveals why: rather than encase groups of slurred notes within held chords which causes the fingers doing the holding to pull in and the muscles in the palm to tighten [M1 2b150-3;CD1 Tr2 (2:24-2:28)], in ‘Scherzo’ Muczynski ensures the moving parts weaving through held chords are always staccato [MSu 6b24-7;CD2 Tr10 (0:24-0:28)]. This prevents unnecessary gripping, allowing the wrist to stay relaxed. Also, in contrast to the pedantry mentioned in 2.2, ‘Scherzo’ shows him being less militaristic about octave doublings, often omitting the occasional one for the sake of increased facility [MSu 6b63-6;CD2 Tr10 (1:03-1:06)]. The piece is still difficult but it is not ‘anti-performer’. In Cuddeford’s words, it contains ‘a virtuosity worth striving for’.\(^{50}\)

While ‘Scherzo’ stands as something of a transitional piece between the First and Second Sonata, the remaining three pieces in the Suite are the most novel in terms of stylistic direction, bearing out the notion that the Suite ‘represents a departure in [my] writing.\(^{51}\) The fourth piece,

\(^{49}\) Actually, Rachmaninov feels the need to resort to four staves in the climax of his prelude.

\(^{50}\) James Cuddeford. 2005. Interview with author. 28 August.

‘Labyrinth’, far from being ‘arbitrary’ is actually a highly organised study in one texture – fast semiquavers in rhythmic and pitch unison, the hands separated by two octaves throughout, ‘to be played without accentuation’. This machine-like motion anticipates the opening of the second movement of Carl Vine’s First Sonata by some thirty years and, like Vine’s work, is conscious of exploiting intervals that work well under the fingers – there is a tactile sense to the piece that can be ‘programmed’ into the body’s muscle memory, and which comes up again in the sonatas that follow – notably in M2 4b114-23;CD1 Tr6 (2:16-2:25) and M3 1b99-102;CD1 Tr7 (2:57-3:02). The fifth piece, ‘Phantom’ is Muczynski’s most explicitly bitonal piece up to this point, with the right and left hands being rooted to tonal centres of Db and D respectively. This device owes a debt to Charles Ives (for example, I 5b27-35;CD3 Tr5 (2:05-2:42)) but – as with ‘Labyrinth’ – one feels that Muczynski is using the piece as a ‘laboratory’ to try out a compositional technique that he would later embed into a larger work [M2 1b24-6;CD1 Tr3 0:56-1:04].

The last piece to be discussed, ‘Flight’, remains unique in Muczynski’s output in that it is notated entirely on one stave and is, apart from the last chord, monophonic with only the directions of note-stems to suggest which hand should be used at any point. For the most part, it is composed of broken chords – the interest lies in the juxtaposition of chords of different qualities and harmonic tension, the unpredictable changes of direction of the chords (that is, whether they are broken ‘top to bottom’ or ‘bottom to top’) and the hemiolas arising from harmonic changes that do not line up with the 6/8 meter. Most originally though, Muczynski asks for the first 50 of the piece’s 66 bars to be played twice: Allegro moderato (sempre legato) firstly, then Presto (sempre staccato) – there cannot be too many pieces in the repertoire where one gets a slow ‘warm-up’ of something they then have to play quicker! The effect is quite uplifting, hence the title ‘Flight’: firstly the performer feels it in their fingers and arms – a transcendent sweep that is exhilarating, providing the correct practice has been done; secondly, there is something of the sound of the piece that anticipates the Ligeti piano études of 1985, particularly No.1 (Désordre) and No.6 (Automne à Varsovie), where Ligeti speaks of

52 On hearing this 40-second whirlwind, one listener remarked to Muczynski that it was the most arbitrary thing they had ever heard.

53 Muczynski. Collected Piano Works. 64.

54 Muczynski. Collected Piano Works. 59.
the music ‘taking off’ at a suitably fast tempo with the correct accentuation\textsuperscript{65}. This is precisely what happens on the repeat of ‘Flight’ [\textit{CD2 Tr6 (0:30-1:06)}], the extreme speed causing the perception of individual notes to be replaced by a ‘meta-melody’ outlined by accents, syncopation and harmonic change.

\textbf{2.4 Toccata, Op.15 (1962)}

It is as if ‘Flight’ is a test-run for Muczynski’s most virtuosic work – the Toccata, Op.15. The idea of a rapidly-moving, monophonic line divided between the hands provides the germ for the piece. The more important similarity to ‘Flight’ though, is this concept of a ‘meta-melody’ – a line with a shape of its own arising out of the whirl of \textit{presto} quavers.

The work owes a debt to the First Sonata in two vital aspects. The first is in its reliance on quartic intervals, which find their origins in the ostinato figures of the First Sonata’s second movement [\textit{M1 2b79-96;CD1 Tr2 (1:11-1:32)}]. Here, in line with Muczynski’s ever-growing sense of economy, he ‘avoid[s] the usual repeated-note idea found in most toccatas’\textsuperscript{56} and bases the entire work around the interval of a fourth. Janice Wenger of the University of Columbia in Missouri humorously talks about the ‘Lauren Hutton’ factor of the work:

\begin{quote}
When I was learning this work I found it extremely difficult to memorise, even though the first page consists entirely of broken fourths. A colleague then pointed out to me that it’s because the semitone-gap between each fourth is differently expressed – sometimes the next consecutive interval is a semitone higher but displaced by an octave and inverted [b1]; sometimes it stays in the same octave and inversion [b3]; sometimes it changes inversion but stays in the same octave [b4]; sometimes it changes octaves but retains the inversion [b11]. In any case, it rigorously adheres to a pattern of constant broken fourths with an arbitrarily changing semitone-gap between them. This ‘gap’ gives the piece an uncommon beauty and elusiveness just like the gap in Lauren Hutton’s front teeth!
\end{quote}

She admits the analogy is less than perfect (!), but it is worth noting that this arbitrary selection of register is the \textit{only} willful decision Muczynski allows himself to make up to the first climax at MTo b19;CD2 Tr11 (0:19), even allowing for two passages of \textit{stretti} where the intervals overlap each other by a note and the texture become briefly polyphonic. Other than this, his raw material really is just broken fourths moving upwards and downwards by semitone steps.


\textsuperscript{56} Muczynski. \textit{Collected Piano Works}. 3.

\textsuperscript{57} Janice Wenger. 2007. Interview with author. February 7.
Its second debt to the First Sonata is in its use of silence. Muczynski uses measured periods of silence in the second movement of the sonata just before and just after periods of great activity and volume and, in fact, there are two quite effective crescendos to nothing at M1 2b138-9;CD1 Tr2 (2:13-2:16) and M1 2b153-4;CD1 Tr2 (2:27-2:30), the latter being particularly powerful at ushering in the maestoso episode previously discussed. However Muczynski has learnt a great deal between that sonata and this Toccata. There are two silent bars in the Toccata, and as a performer it is important to understand the difference between them. The first occurs at MTo b57;CD2 Tr11 (0:51), used to punctuate the end of the ‘A’ and beginning of the ‘B’ section (the piece is essentially in ternary form with a coda), however it is the second that is the most inspired. It would be predictable and logical to place it at the end of the restatement of the ‘A’ section for the sake of symmetry. Instead, after 30 or so bars of unrelenting quavers, Muczynski launches into the coda [MTo b197;CD2 Tr11 (2:48)] without any pause whatsoever. Marking it agitato, the texture gradually thickens and the distance between the hands widens. At what seems to be the climax up to this point, Muczynski reiterates the same set of two cluster chords six times, marking the last two sforzando and poco allargando [MTo b213-19;CD2 Tr11 (3:03-3:09)], all of it a grand preparation to... nothing. The suspense is unbearable. And then, in one of those ‘surely-it-can’t-get-any-louder-but-then-it-does’ moments, the piece’s opening fourths come crashing back a fourth lower and punctuated by a Gb pedal point. After three bars of this, Muczynski marks the music piu mosso and actually gives us a coda-after-the-coda – the hands at maximum separation and the music at its most wild and impetuso [MTo b220-35;CD2 Tr11 (3:09-3:36)]. The most effective way to realize this in performance is through judicious pedaling. Listening to the recording will reveal a gradually more generous use of the right pedal as the piece progresses, with a sudden ‘flooding’ at MTo b220;CD2 Tr11 (3:09) being particularly effective in contrasting with the absolute silence of MTo b219;CD2 Tr11 (3:08).

This is one of the last pieces of Muczynski’s to betray any explicit influences from the First Sonata. Like the sonata, it is texturally innovative and certainly out to make a virtuosic statement. But it is more texturally controlled – it thickens up ‘naturally’ at climax points and marks the first appearance in Muczynski’s output of chords that can legitimately be called tone clusters [MTo b213-19;CD2 Tr11 (3:03-3:09)]. Tone clusters – chords with notes in them so
densely packed that any diatonic function they may have is partially obscured – were identified early on in this project as one of eight defining features of Muczynski’s music58, and they go on to regularly appear in his output after the Toccata. It is, however, rare for Muczynski to use every available semitone in a cluster. For example, the clusters in the Toccata’s coda at $\text{MT}_0 \text{b}232;\text{CD}_2 \text{Tr}11 (3:19)$ all consist of two intervals of a semitone separated by a tone. Less strident variants used for the sake of colouring but still very much harmonically functional consist of two semitone intervals separated by a minor third, underpinned by a note a further minor third lower [$\text{MT}_0 \text{b}106-9;\text{CD}_2 \text{Tr}11 (1:31-1:35)$]. Such changes in the ‘gap’ of a cluster encourage the performer to think harmonically when learning and memorizing the piece, despite the tantalizing frustrations such minute changes entail – Lauren Hutton again!

2.5 A Summer Journal, Op.19 (1964)

The strong reliance of Muczynski on a two-part texture throughout the Toccata - either literally [$\text{MT}_0 \text{b}37-43;\text{CD}_2 \text{Tr}11 (0:34-0:39)$], implied through a monophonic line that passes between the hands [$\text{MT}_0 \text{b}122-33;\text{CD}_2 \text{Tr}11 (1:44-1:56)$], or implied because the harmonic thickening in one part is no more than an organum-type doubling [$\text{MT}_0 \text{b}28-36;\text{CD}_2 \text{Tr}11 (0:27-0:34)$] [$\text{MT}_0 \text{b}77-88;\text{CD}_2 \text{Tr}11 (1:08-1:18)$] - is something that is further developed in his next work for solo piano.

A Summer Journal, Op.17, like the First Sonata, is a very personal utterance, and despite its modest dimensions it has moments that could certainly be considered profound. The first piece of the set, ‘Morning Promenade’, is a less virtuosic cousin to ‘Festival’ from the Suite. Like the latter, it is a rousing bitonal wake-up call with, in this case, a right-hand in B-minor against a left-hand in G-major. Structurally however, the piece is quite unusual in that after the energetic opening there follows a chorale-like section of great stillness and peace [$\text{MASJ 1b28-39;CD2 Tr}12 (0:29-1:16)$] after which the piece ends, the opening material never being reprised.

Presumably there are programmatic reasons for this and, presumably, they are linked to the concept of the ‘Morning Promenade’ and its personal significance for Muczynski, but as he never provided more programmatic information than this we can not conclude anything more certain.

58 Harrold. Lecture-recital at University of Kearney, Nebraska.
The piece in microcosm, though, summarises precisely where Muczynski was in his compositional development, and the aesthetic transformation he was undergoing from the First to the Second Sonata: its binary structure is willful in the way the mosaic structure of the First Sonata's first movement is willful. And yet, despite the contrasts between ideas, the discipline within each idea has become rigorous in a way that was to become vital in controlling the large, complex structures of the Second Sonata. With A Summer Journal, we see this discipline incorporated into a set of miniatures that are a veritable 'hothouse' of experimentation with form and structure. The result is arguably Muczynski's most sharply characterized piano music up to this point.

‘Morning Promenade’ allows for almost no rubato, with interest being generated in the first section from the regular pulse Muczynski sets up and the syncopations, cross accents and ornaments with which he sprinkles the music to then disrupt this regularity. The second section gains effect from the inexorable movement of the chorale-like figure. The recording [MASJ 1b28-39;CD2 Tr12 (0:29-1:16)] aims to voice this chorale in as transparent a way as possible so as to bring the piquant bitonality of the passage to the fore. In this respect, the passage shows a more in situ use of the bitonal chorale technique first experimented with in ‘Phantom’ [MSu 5b6-21;CD2 Tr9 (0:21-1:22)] – another example of Muczynski trying out a compositional technique by using it as the basis for an entire work and then at a later date ‘embedding’ it into a small part of a larger piece.59.

By contrast, ‘Midday’ is the piece out of all Muczynski’s music recorded in this project that can withstand (and, indeed, benefit from) the most amount of subjective rubato. This in itself seems hardly revelatory – there are indications all over the piece telling us to be flexible.60 But even if there were no written instructions for us, we can see from the first six bars that this music, with its wealth of intervallic tension, two-part interaction and call-response type phrasing cries out for the performer to gently highlight the topography in the music. The first bar alone shows

59 The debt this bitonality owes to Charles Ives has already been mentioned. Apart from Ives’ piano music, there is a splendid and haunting example of a setting of Psalm 67 (‘God, be merciful unto us’) by Ives for a capella choir where the men sing in G minor and the women in C major throughout. Ives’ influence on Muczynski, however, extends far beyond bitonal chorales and his part in Muczynski’s development will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

60 The tempo marking is ‘Andante con espressione (rather freely), there is the direction con rubato at ASJ 3b1 and rubato at ASJ 3b18, and a more specific directive of poco allargando at ASJ 3b14, 16, 20.
what ambiguity is in store for us: an Eb in the bass is the first sound we hear. The first two notes of the treble melody are G and Bb. These three notes spell out an unambiguous Eb-major triad. However, the very next melody note is a Gb which forms a minor-3rd with the bass and throws the tonality into Eb-minor when heard after the preceding Bb. But the allusions are more complex. Apart from a desire to point out the G of the second beat of the bar becoming a Gb on the third beat, there is an added pull to become expressive as the melody climbs: the ascending melody notes form a minor-third (G-Bb) and then a minor-sixth (Bb-Gb). Not only is the second interval wider and therefore perhaps worthy of a slight stretching of tempo, but such a short amount of time has passed from the G to the Gb in a higher octave that we feel the expressive tension of this major-seventh very keenly as well as the major-minor ambiguity. The second bar is devoid of all passing notes, but no less ambiguous as the right-hand traces out the notes of an Eb-major triad and the left-hand the notes of an Eb-minor triad, with the ‘tell-tale’ note (the third – G/Gb) occurring at just a quaver’s separation between the hands. Not even Schubert, with his ingenious use of parallel keys to heighten emotional bittersweetness, would juxtapose tonic major and minor modes so closely, swapping with such frequency.

This is quite a detailed analysis for two bars’ worth of music. But one point is becoming overwhelmingly clear: a wonderful paradox is emerging that as Muczynski is becoming ‘leaner’ with his music, the interaction between the parts is becoming more complex and the music is becoming more robust – able to withstand a much wider set of interpretative parameters from the performer.

A passage of equivalent emotional depth from the First Sonata – say M1 1b147-55;CD1 Tr1 (5:43-6:10) or M1 2b155-8;Tr2 (2:29-2:38) – as previously discussed, is not ‘built’ to withstand performer rubato as its place in the mosaic of the sonata is too tenuous. With ‘Midday’, Muczynski is experimenting with techniques that will allow him to realize structures such as the monumental slow movement of the Second Sonata which, despite its vastness, certainly thrives on the subjective personal touches of an experienced, emotion-fuelled performer.

This is not to denigrate the First Sonata – not all music can, or should, be able to withstand willful intrusions by the performer. The comparison between ‘Midday’ and the First Sonata can be likened to examining a Chopin Mazurka alongside a Chopin Ballade. Aquilles Delle-Vigne,
world-renowned Chopin interpreter, is insistent that ‘a mazurka can withstand more rubato than
a ballade due to its fantasia-like nature, its homogeneity of style and its brevity.’ The Ballades
rely for much of their emotional power on the sharp contrasts between each section, therefore
fluctuations within sections of similar style should be kept to a minimum in order to maximize
these contrasts and reinforce the piece’s meta-structure.

Most of the pieces in A Summer Journal conform to Delle-Vigne’s three criteria of ‘fantasy,
homogeneity and brevity.’ In fact, the most original piece of the set shares something else in
common with one of Chopin’s masterpieces. The sixth piece, ‘Night Rain’ is stylistically unique
in Muczynski’s output and very difficult pianistically [MASJ 6; CD2 Tr17], requiring a
combination of Mozart-like clarity with the ever-more-elaborate-yet-effortless note-spinning of
Chopin’s most virtuosic works. Muczynski was justifiably proud of the fact that he ‘cut [him]self
to the bone, allowing only three different pitches in the left hand.’ Indeed, the left-hand plays
D-E-B-D-E-B throughout – one note on the beat, every beat – while the right hand arabesques
freely around it. The obvious comparison here is the Berceuse, Op.57 by Chopin. While
superficially very different in sound, the deep structural similarities are undeniable: both works
rely on the use of an ostinato that doesn’t drive the piece but rather functions as an unobtrusive
backdrop in front of which the melodic material can ‘dance’; both use an ostinato that is
harmonically static; both have a structural arc that sees the most activity in the middle of the
piece with the beginning and the end moments of much greater stasis; and both pieces have
associations with childhood and with the nocturnal. With Chopin being one of Muczynski’s
explicitly acknowledged influences, it seems likely that these similarities are not coincidental.
Particularly telling is the daring nature of the right-hand interaction with the implied harmony of
the left-hand ostinato – it sometimes conforms to it [MASJ 6b5-6; CD2 Tr17 (0:10-0:16)],
sometimes opposes it [MASJ 6b4; CD2 Tr17 (0:08)] and sometimes obliterates it completely
[MASJ 6b11-3; CD2 Tr17 (0:24-0:30)]. Equivalent passages can be found in Chopin’s
Berceuse and are given below (ex.1, 2 & 3).

62 Muczynski. Collected Piano Works. 3
63 Cisler. 59.
Chopin’s influence on Muczynski’s style and its implications for the performer could be the topic of an entire other investigation. For our purposes, it is enough to note that just as the ‘fantasia-like, homogenous and brief’ nature of Chopin’s mazurkas meant they were often the ‘testing lab’ for ideas that found full flourish in his larger works, so too does A Summer Journal mark a turning point in Muczynski’s output where he discovers a discipline and originality that will sow the seeds for his mature masterworks: without the broodiness of ‘Midday’ there would not be a Second Sonata slow movement of such breadth and profundity; without the obsessive patter of ‘Park Scene’ there would be no quirky Second Sonata scherzo; without the fierce joy of ‘Jubilee’ Muczynski may never have discovered the dense, syncopated chords that conclude
the middle movement of the Third Sonata to such great effect.

And, with a slight sadness that marks all losses of innocence, it must be noted that *A Summer Journal* is the final work of Muczynski’s where the individual movements/pieces are assigned programmatic titles. These evocative, sometimes poetic, labels never return. With the new economy comes a new objectivity and perhaps a new universality - the interpretative clues are disappearing.
Chapter 3. The Second Piano Sonata, Op.22

1. Allegro
2. Con moto, ma non tanto
3. Molto andante
4. Allegro molto

“Muczynski was always editing, always revising. With the second sonata... I got the sense that I was working with a ‘cut-above’ composer. He was ‘real’... and I always wondered why he was not [as famous as] Barber...”

“Some of Muczynski’s works will survive. Some won’t. Of the sonatas... the second will be discovered. It deserves to be.”

“The second sonata first attracted me [to Muczynski’s music]. The structure of it and the contrast in it is masterful. The second is also more comfortable under the hands [than the first].”

“... the New York Times wrote [that this was] ‘The most impressive piano music by any American since Barber’”

Muczynski’s Second Piano Sonata was completed in 1966 and was premiered in 1967 at Crowder Hall, University of Arizona by Richard Faith, Muczynski’s friend and colleague. Faith is also the work’s dedicatee.

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65 Woods. Interview with author.
66 Dr Peter Miyamoto. 2007. Interview with author. 16 February.
67 Cisler. Interview with author.
Figure 3 (see attached file). The Muczynski Galaxy: The First and Second Sonatas with associated satellites.
3.1 Fables, Op.21 (1965)

The first thing to notice about *Fables* is its dedication: ‘To Mark Wanza (age 8).’ Wanza was the grandson of HD Atwood who was in turn the father of Muczynski’s best friend Harry Atwood. The explicit mention of his age draws attention to the pedagogical nature of this set of nine miniatures. Superficially simple, the pieces – most of them written in a straight-forward two-part style with only the occasional chordal thickening – are wonderfully educational in terms of teaching young players independence of shaping and articulation between the hands.

For Muczynski, too, these pieces proved to be educational. Schoenberg explicitly acknowledged the difficulty in writing miniatures when praising the works of the young Webern:

“…consider what extreme self-possession is required to express oneself so succinctly. Every glance can be expanded into a poem, every sigh into a novel. But to express a whole novel in a single gesture, a state of joy in a single happy sigh – such concentration will be found only where there is a corresponding lack of self-pity.”

Muczynski himself wholeheartedly agreed:

“Few people realize how difficult it is to compose a piece that stays within the restrictions of [an easy] level. You have to restrain yourself when it comes to key choice, rhythmic complexity and range. In *Fables* I tried to use strong patterns with the idea of liberating one hand by assigning it a repeating rhythmic or melodic figure.”

Despite their simplicity, *Fables* is a logical advancement of Muczynski’s style after *A Summer Journal*. Firstly, there is an increased level of abstraction – despite the allusions to fairy tales suggested by the title, the individual pieces bear only traditional Italian markings. Secondly, the level of musical concentration – of ‘mileage’ from a single idea as discussed in 2.5 - has increased yet again. Both of these qualities are features of the Second Sonata, and it seems no accident that this sonata – Muczynski’s most complex utterance for solo piano – is flanked on either side by his simplest essays. On one level it springs from the day-to-day practice of being a composer – Muczynski, a self-acknowledged slow worker needed to write short

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70 Cisler. 144.


73 Cisler. 219.
works while chipping away at larger ones to keep himself motivated and to keep his publishers happy! On a creative level however, *Fables* is yet another ‘lab’ – a repository for Muczynski to deftly workshop motifs and figurations as they occurred to him. And *many* ideas occurred to him: the work immediately succeeding the Second Sonata is *Diversions*, Op.23 – a further set of nine miniatures. These three consecutive opus numbers form a fascinating continuum, with the miniatures comprising the outer works being at once the ‘raw materials’ and the ‘leftovers’ from the central sonata – *Fables* looks forward to the major work, and *Diversions* cleans up afterwards. Both sets give Muczynski a chance to try out ideas and discard them, but also to ‘frame’ them. By now he has well and truly escaped Tcherepnin’s accusation of every piece containing ‘enough ideas for eight pieces’ and, rather than cramming all his thoughts into one large sonata, he takes just the material he needs and gives the unused material dignity and a world of its own by assigning it a place in one of these sets.\(^{74}\)

Piece number seven in the set is a good example [*MFa 7;CD2 Tr25*]. There are shades here of the major/minor ambiguities that permeate ‘Midday’ from *A Summer Journal* but this time it does not result in a Thelonious Monk-like blues-tinged reflection – it is much more contained and ‘classical’. The rocking ostinato in the left-hand of the first four bars [*MFa 7b1-4;CD2 Tr25 (0:00-0:09)*] is a fixed pattern which causes gentle harmonic elisions when set against the right-hand melody, sometimes creating abrupt shifts from major to minor in the manner of Schubert [*MFa 7b3-4;CD2 Tr25 (0:05-0:09)*], sometimes forming parallel fifths in the manner of Hindemith [*MFa 7b5;CD2 Tr25 (0:09)*], while the gently rocking ostinato itself is reminiscent in mood of the opening of Copland’s Clarinet Concerto\(^{75}\). Muczynski himself would have been wryly amused by these references to other composers:

> ‘The most damning condemnation [is] ‘sounds like...’ If you employed too many consecutive fourths it was Hindemith. If you were percussive it was Bartok or Stravinsky. A bluesy phrase evoked Gershwin and a tender, lyrical statement was Barber... It is an agonizing situation, but lately I have come to the conclusion that the originality we all thirst for is really something inherent in the personality behind the manipulation of what is available’.\(^{76}\)

\(^{74}\) In this regard, the critic Soblovsky’s remark that Muczynski’s little pieces are like ‘deft sketches such as a gifted artist might make at the zoo’ is apt, but perhaps a little condescending – not giving enough credit for the compositional sophistry taking place, or the depth of emotion each piece plumbs.

\(^{75}\) The rhythm Muczynski employs is ‘long-short-long-short’ while Copland’s, played on harp and strings, is ‘short-long-short-long’ but the mood of peaceful naivety is the same.

And this is where *Fables* proves itself because, despite the amalgam of compositional techniques found here, *Fables* does not ‘sound like’ any other composer. It does, however, sound like the Second Sonata.

The *tierce-de-Picardie* ending of piece seven of *Fables* comes as something of a surprise. In some ways it shouldn’t – the last four bars all stay rooted to a G harmony and that B-natural in MFa 7b17;CD2 Tr25 (0:37) suggests that this should quite firmly be G major. But then the second-to-last note of the right-hand is a Bb-quaver. In the scheme of the piece it registers for about one-third of a second, but it is enough to briefly upset the predictability of this piece’s little codetta and add a tinge of grey to the otherwise hopeful ending. With a deft but well-placed stroke, Muczynski places a mental ‘crunch’ in our minds.

Such a ‘crunch’ opens the Second Sonata. There is a resonant dotted-crotchet Eb in the right-hand which begins the piece. Against it, there are octave E’s on the second quaver of the bar which very quickly resolve to Ebs on the third quaver [M2 1b1;CD1 Tr3 (0:00)]. We reach stability on the second beat of the bar therefore, but not before a shadow has flickered across our view. For the first six bars of the first movement of the Second Sonata, Muczynski confines himself exclusively to the Eb Aeolian (natural minor) mode as befits the sombre gravity of the opening. This mode contains many semitones (and their inversion – the major-seventh) and tritones and, unlike the First Sonata where the seventh was used for emotive purposes, here it is embedded firmly into the harmonic framework of the piece, most often expressing itself in the opening page as the first and third notes of a falling three-note motif. In fact, such a motif occurs nine times in the first three lines of the piece [M2 1b1-8;CD1 Tr3 (0:00-0:18)]. The entire opening paragraph, however, up to the *tempo primo* in M2 1b10;CD1 Tr3 (0:22) has subtly embedded colour and mood changes throughout: towards the end of M2 1b7;CD1 Tr3 (0:14) Muczynski leaves the Aeolian mode for the first time with a D-natural in the left-hand followed by the appearance of a G-natural at the end of the bar and an A-natural in M2 1b8;CD1 Tr3 (0:16). This sharpening of pitches of the scale, coupled with the *poco a poco accel e cresc* indicated at M2 1b6;CD1 Tr3 (0:12) creates a sense of growing optimism, further heightened by the first appearance at M2 1b9;CD1 Tr3 (0:18) of the ‘three-note major-seventh’ motif in inversion – leaping *upwards* sonorously into the top register of the piano.

With this statement of the first subject then, we are far removed from the mosaic structure of
the First Sonata. We have a harmonic and motivic framework that immediately sets up an identifiable world which can then be subtly tweaked and altered to allow for many gradations of character within it. To return to our mosaic analogy in 2.2, Muczynski is no longer placing tiles of two distinct colours next to each other. Rather, he is taking a large daub of paint of one colour and constantly adding and subtracting quantities of black and white to it, giving us many tints and hues without making us constantly aware of how we arrive at one shade from another. This would not be possible to such a refined degree without the similar experiments played out on a smaller scale in Fables.

What are the implications of this, then, for the performer?


Ultimately, this is good news for someone tackling the demands of the Second Sonata. With a more robust structure comes greater interpretative freedom. In contrast to the First Sonata, where almost every pedal mark is indicated, here Muczynski simply writes con ped [M2 1b1;CD1 Tr2 (0:00)] or senza ped [M2 2b1;CD1 Tr2 (0:00)] implying a ‘wet’ or ‘dry’ sound, with pedal brackets indicated only where it seems counter-intuitive, such as pedaling through the left-hand rest in M1 1b4;CD1 Tr1 (0:08). The increased concession to pianistic ease has already been mentioned, but by the Second Sonata it is so artfully concealed as to arise as a natural function of the motivic material – the opening quaver rest on the downbeat of the left-hand proves to have as much rhetorical and functional power as any actual sound, appearing at key points to facilitate wide leaps and allow relaxation of the entire arm. Examples are numerous, but three key ones include [M2 1b63;CD1 Tr3 (1:55)], [M2 3b39;CD1 Tr5 (3:14)], and [M2 4b71;CD1 Tr6 (1:25)]. Similarly, the giocoso that proves so hard to realize in the finale of the First Sonata is able to be captured fully in the last movement of the Second Sonata – again, Fables has taught Muczynski the power of a two-part texture, the sparseness providing a fleetness that allows markings such as leggero [M2 4b35;CD1 Tr6 (0:39)] and brillante [M2 4b115;CD1 Tr6 (2:17)] to be properly realized.

The real resilience, however, is in the realm of tempo. Just because Muczynski eschews mosaic form in this sonata does not mean there is a lack of tempo changes to negotiate. The second, third and fourth movements are mostly homogenous in tempo, however the first contains 16 changes of speed. The difference is that the shapes are so clear and the use of
material so concise, that the sound-world Muczynski has created is consistently recognizable throughout the course of the movement. Transitions are gradual and seamless when necessary [M2 1b147-49;CD1 Tr3 (5:25-5:31)] and when they are abrupt [M2 1b94-5;CD1 Tr3 (3:37-3:41)] the effect is of light being shone on a different facet of the same object rather than a new object being brought into play. As a result we do not need the long-term memory retention required in the First Sonata or the Tippett Sonata as mentioned in 2.2 since there is a degree of this retention as we proceed from section to section. In fact, Muczynski goes so far as to exploit these retentions, occasionally restating passages of similar texture or shape at different tempi, thus transforming their character [M2 1b24-6;CD1 Tr3 (0:56-1:04)][M2 1b109-10;CD1 Tr3 (3:58-4:01)] – something that would have been impossible with the profligate material of the First Sonata. Of course, this is simply an extension of the leitmotif techniques employed in the 19th century by Berioz, Liszt and Wagner, amongst others, however it is testament to the strength of Muczynski’s ideas – and, in particular, the ‘three-note major-seventh’ motif – that he simultaneously achieves structural unity and internal variety using these methods.

In this, Muczynski had a laudable model. Samuel Barber’s Sonata had a strong influence on Muczynski’s Second Sonata and the similarities between the works have not gone unnoticed. Cisler talks of how the sonatas both have ‘four movements, arranged in a similar order… and even similar intervallic content’77, while Walter Simmons notes that ‘[while] a comparison between the Barber sonata and the Muczynski second is inevitable… Muczynski’s own stylistic consistency is clearly established. In fact, this sonata does not suffer by comparison to Barber’s…’78. Movement for movement, the two sonatas are analogous in form, basic structure and character, although the Barber is consistently a more difficult piece to learn and execute, primarily because it is texturally more complex.

The opening of Barber’s sonata shares the characteristics of Muczynski’s – the weight of the first bar shifted to the second beat [Ba 1b1;CD2 Tr28 (0:00)], the use of semitones and major 7ths to destabilise the sense of the tonic [Ba 1b5;CD2 Tr28 (0:09)], the introduction of chromatic notes to heighten tension [Ba 1b4;CD2 Tr28 (0:06)], the constant repetition of a

77 Cisler. 220.
78 Cisler. 220.
'short-long' rhythmic motif [Ba 1b1-8;CD2 Tr28 (0:00-0:17)] and even the idea of the first few bars forming a sort of 'opening fanfare' [Ba 1b1-8;CD2 Tr28 (0:00-0:17)][M2 1b1-10;CD1 Tr3 (0:00-0:23)] before a second, more legato idea is introduced. The broad structural outlines of each sonata's first movements line up – particularly telling is the way both movements have slow, ruminative codas that are choked-off at the last moment with a savage gesture [Ba 1b150-70;CD2 Tr28 (6:32-8:14)][M2 1b174-96;CD1 Tr3 (6:40-7:56)]. Likewise, the third movements of each sonata share a propensity for quartic harmonies [Ba 3b1-2;CD2 Tr30 (0:00-0:17)][M2 3b1-2;CD1 Tr5 (0:00-0:14)] and a coda where the music seems to peter out from sheer exhaustion. Remarkably, both movements even share a type of 'double-climax', similarly spaced. Barber’s sonata sees a gradual build up through Ba 3b11-23;CD2 Tr30 (1:23-3:02) to a sff arrival at the tonic at Ba 3b24;CD2 Tr30 (3:02) which seems like the peak of the movement, until a series of falling harmonies through Ba 3b25;CD2 Tr28 (3:13) leads us to an equally persuasive climax two bars later, this second peak made to sound all-the-more foreboding because it is over a leading-note pedal-point. Only from this point [Ba 3b26;CD2 Tr28 (3:19)] does the music gradually release its energy to arrive back at an understated recapitulation. Muczynski, similarly, climaxes on the tonic with the marking ff con bravura at M2 3b39;CD1 Tr5 (3:14) only to then further crescendo to a shattering arrival point at M2 3b41;CD1 Tr5 (3:25) with an inverted leading-note pedal-point. This is a further development in Muczynski’s use of silence – unlike Barber, Muczynski ‘deflates’ the music not just by asking us to play quieter, but by punching great holes in the texture so that we lose firstly the inner-voice flourishes, then the resonant bass-notes, then the supporting chords, and finally the inverted pedal. The recapitulation is thus preceded by two beats of silence at an exceedingly slow tempo, heightening the suspense at what is to follow [M2 3b39-47;CD1 Tr5 (3:14-4:11)].

Thus, the expressive elements that bring each piece to life – rhythmic elasticity, contrapuntal clarity, sharply characterized motifs and, above all, an acceptance of both of these sonatas as being in what William Cerny calls ‘the grand manner’ – are similar, requiring (and able to withstand) a certain Romantic willfulness on behalf of the performer. Close study of each sonata helps inform the other, and it is these similarities of character that the enclosed recordings strive to highlight.

It is in their final movements, though, that the two sonatas show the greatest divergence. At first there are superficial similarities – both begin with the right-hand alone in the manner of a fugue; both begin with a three-note anacrusis; and both emphasise the major seventh as a long-note on the downbeat of the first complete bar [Ba 4b1;CD2 Tr31 (0:00)][M2 4b1;CD1 Tr6 (0:00)]. However, the differences become apparent almost immediately. The fourth movement of the Barber Sonata actually *is* a fugue – strictly so for the first 33 bars – and learning it requires a considerable investment of time and thought.80

There is nothing in the Muczynski Sonata, for example, to rival the tricky considerations of pedalling and fingering to adequately realise the four-part texture of Ba 4b27-9;CD2 Tr31 (1:08-1:16) or to navigate the quick register leaps of Ba 4b66-9;CD2 Tr31 (2:56-3:07). The pianistic returns, however, are greater, and the great climax at Ba 4b88;CD2 Tr31 (3:58) culminating in the stretto at Ba 4b90;CD2 Tr31 (4:04) must count as one of the most tactfully and intellectually satisfying moments to be committed to compact disc in this project, resulting in a performance ‘buzz’ that has surely contributed to the justifiable popularity of this sonata.

But Walter Simmons’ view that Muczynski’s Second Sonata is ‘fully equal’81 in stature to the Barber Sonata deserves strong support. Rodney Smith in reviewing this author’s performance of the Second Sonata noted both Muczynski’s ‘strong constructional grip’ and ‘remarkable facility’.82 And it is these two factors precisely that make the work strong in concert – the reliance on just a few well-chosen motifs pulls the structure of the work in and unifies it, while the decision (and, indeed, ability – arrived at through experimentation in *A Summer Journal* and *Fables*) to frame the work largely in a two-part texture allows a good pianist the chance to show dazzling facility. As a result, it feels like a ‘Big Sonata’ despite being less dense than the first. William Cerny believes that ‘only the best technically equipped pianist should attempt it in concert but for him it promises to be a rewarding experience’83 while Macgrath feels simply that

80 The last movement of Muczynski’s Second Sonata is not fugal – it is not even a two-part invention, although the two-part writing that pervades the sonata is here incorporated into the nature of the opening motif itself.


83 Cerny. 613.
it 'rates among the finest American sonatas of the twentieth century.'  

By here, all of Muczynski’s harmonic and melodic ideals, including the eight characteristic features as outlined in 1.2 have reached full flower. He is, in this sonata, functioning at the height of his powers and the works of his that follow simply show a further refinement of this now fully developed language. Now we touch briefly on the question of the possible origin of this language – a ‘blue-print’ from the beginning of the twentieth century to which Muczynski and his contemporaries are all in some way indebted.

### 3.3 Muczynski’s Mandelbrot Set: Sonata No.1 by Charles Ives (1910)

Up until this point in the discussion, the First Sonata of Charles Ives has been the ‘elephant in the room’. It dwarfs every other sonata in this project by being twice as long as most of them and significantly more difficult than all of them. Although Ives revised the sonata most of his life, it was completed in a recognizable and playable form in 1910, making it the earliest American sonata tackled in this project by some thirty years. Despite preceding such twentieth-century ground-breakers as Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* (1913), Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912) and Ligeti’s first book of *Études* (1986) it contains musical elements which anticipate all these works and has required, from this author at least, an unprecedented ingenuity in terms of technical, stylistic and colouristic approaches to the keyboard.

Of course Ives was a pianist, and wrote with the capabilities of the piano itself in mind. As for the capabilities of the *pianist*, he was somewhat less sympathetic:

> Why can’t music go out in the same way it comes in to a man, without having to crawl over a fence of sounds, thoraxes, catguts, wire, wood, and brass?... The instrument! – there is the perennial difficulty – there is music’s limitation... Is it the composer’s fault that man only has ten fingers?

So in this sonata we find virtuoso passages that lie well under the hands and are beautifully playable [I 3b27-33;CD3 Tr3 (3:26-3:47)], passages that are perversely difficult [I 4b8-21;CD3 Tr4 (0:12-0:38)], and others that are literally impossible for a ‘man with only ten fingers’ [I

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1b64-6;CD3 Tr1 (4:52-4:59)]. It is a sonata poised on the edge of possibility. Despite its innovations, it is above all else a Romantic work. In fact, Lou Harrison somewhat controversially comments on this sonata as looking backwards rather than looking forwards:

In the tradition of the Hammerklavier and the Liszt B minor, this is probably the penultimate romantic sonata, the same composer’s Concord probably the last, for it is almost unthinkable that a work of this kind may be written now or in the near future.86

Certainly, the work requires all the ‘capital-R Romantic’ sensibilities a performer can bring to bear. The inclusion of several ossia passages (for example, [I 2b109-13;CD3 Tr2 (3:15-3:21)]) bears out Ives’ notion that the performer should have a very immediate and drastic impact on the work’s interpretation. This is a very ‘nineteenth-century’ ideal in stark contrast to Ravel’s ‘swiss-watchmaker’ approach to composition, or to Stravinsky’s assertion that he didn’t want his works interpreted, just played87 – views that are more modernistic in outlook. There is Romanticism too in the philosophy behind the work – this sonata is a celebration of the individual and there can scarcely be a more Romantic gesture than an artist encapsulating a day in the life of his own childhood in a sprawling, forty-minute long work. The recording of the work for this project, then, attempts to capture this personal willfulness: places of high technical demand translate into moments of powerful rhetoric [I 1b64-7;CD3 Tr1 (4:52-5:03)]; areas where there are an impossible number of notes to reconcile88 take on an improvisatory, ‘free-fantasia’ feel [I 1b21-7;CD3 Tr1 (1:50-3:38)]; and the full use of the weighted sound of the modern keyboard is needed for climaxes which often seem to outgrow the confines of the instrument [I 5b215-20;CD3 Tr5 (10:49-11:15)]. In these instances, one gets a palpable sense of Ives’ frustration of the medium not being able to contain his musical thoughts. “What [music] sounds like may not be what it is”89 he remarked in his Essays Before a Sonata90 and often we feel his disappointment that the ideal in his head cannot be realized by fallible humans – a Romantic notion indeed!

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88 Quite literally, in parts. I 1b22 sees 13 beats in the right-hand and 11-and-3-eighths beats in the left-hand, with no definitive vertical sync-up.

89 Ives. 84.

90 A set of extended programme notes actually written to accompany Ives’ Second Sonata (the so-called ‘Concord’) but nevertheless relevant here to our discussion of the First Sonata.
So what does this generous, (self-indulgent?) work have to do with Muczynski’s tersely constructed sonata? Well, actually, the reach of Ives’ work is so large and its vision so vast that – despite seeming to be stylistically opposed to Muczynski on a macro-level – it actually contains several examples of every one of the eight characteristic features of Muczynski’s work.

1. There is functional tonal harmony: I 3b70-1;CD3 Tr3 (6:52-7:18) outlines a beautifully voiced V-I-IV-iii-V-IV-I progression (albeit spiced with some auxiliary notes and chords)

2. There are tonal centres that are neither major nor minor: the third system of I 3b2;CD3 Tr3 1:21 is centred around Eb but relies on a combination of the Lydian mode and whole-tone scales for its sound world

3. There are triads of differing qualities sounded against each other, organum-style [I 5b27-34;CD3 Tr5 (2:04-2:38)]

4. There are melodies in one mode harmonized by chords in another: at I 2b16;CD3 Tr2 (0:22) we hear a snatch of ‘Bringing in the Sheaves’ in G major against a cluster-chord rooted in C#

5. There is two-part counterpoint: a very simple example occurs at I 5b60-6;CD3 Tr5 (3:31-3:49) with the right-hand in A minor and the left loosely rooted in F minor

6. There are tone clusters: they are used in both the left and right hands to convey the raucousness of the local inn at I 4b1-4;CD3 Tr4 (0:00-0:07)

7. There is regular, incessant rhythmic pulsing: two repeating rhythms in the left and right hands at I 4b36-47;CD3 Tr4 (1:00-1:12) interlock to form a complex polyrhythm

8. There is metrical displacement: the notes G, A, B and Bb are subject to constant variation, syncopation and off-beat accentuation throughout I 2b66-89;CD3 Tr4 (2:05-2:43)

The Muczynski Sonata is certainly not unique in this regard. Ives’ First Sonata is so polystylistic that almost any twentieth-century piano sonata of note appearing after 1910 could be said to owe a conscious or sub-conscious debt to it in some way. But the connection is worth pursuing, and an analogy can be drawn from a slightly unusual field.

There is a branch of mathematics that rose to prominence in the 1970s known as Chaos Theory which gives new insight into seemingly erratic behaviour occurring in nature – able to
describe such unpredictable phenomena as turbulent seas and fibrillating hearts with simple equations. When scientists began modeling this chaotic behaviour graphically, each phenomenon produced an image known as a Julia set. Examples of what Julia sets typically look like are given below in fig.3a, 3b and 3c:

![Julia Sets](image-url)

Figure 4. Three different types of Julia sets – the graphical representation of nature’s chaotic behaviour.

These shapes are not the rigid forms of Euclidian geometry – they are endlessly variegated and elegant, bearing a not uncoincidental resemblance to natural objects such as fern fronds and sea horses. Additionally, there is a meta-resemblance they share, as well as an internal self-similarity they contain across all scales, that suggested to scientists that they were linked together in some way.

In 1979 it was discovered how. Benoit Mandelbrot stumbled upon the ‘grandaddy of all these shapes’. The *Mandelbrot Set* as it is now known (fig.4) is a literally infinitely complex object

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91 “Julia Set.” *Wikipedia – the free encyclopedia.*

92 “Julia Sets.” *Fractal taxonomy root.*

93 “Complex Julia Set Fractals.” *Egregium.*

that contains all the information required to derive every possible Julia set, acting as a ‘catalogue’ for all of them, even though at first glance it doesn’t resemble the shape of any of them.

Figure 5. The Mandelbrot Set – the most complex object in mathematics.

In this way, Ives’ First Sonata is a sort of stylistic Mandelbrot Set – one can take a small part of it, flesh it out, and derive a work that may share some ‘genetic material’ with it, even if the resulting piece is far removed in character and philosophy. In this sense, Muczynski’s Sonata is only one possible ‘Julia set’ out of an infinite number of possibilities. But why cite Ives’ First Sonata specifically? After all, Ives wrote a second, more famous sonata – the so-called Concord Sonata – which is even longer than the first and has, arguably, a deeper philosophical reach. Well, the Concord uses as its unifying motif the first four notes from Beethoven’s Fifth

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96 Kevin Wayne. “Mandelbrot Set Applet.”

Symphony. As an aural reference point it is ideal due to its very lack of malleability – it can be inverted, reversed and compressed without ever really losing its sense of identity – rather like the way in which raisins remain recognizable as raisins even once they have been baked into a cake.

But recall the organic nature of the Julia sets and their quality of being similar – both to each other, and at larger and smaller scales within each other – without ever literally repeating. Ives realized the beautiful inexactitude of the natural world and often sought to recreate it musically, realizing that ‘nature loves analogy and hates repetition’. The binding motif of the First Sonata is simply a falling minor second followed by a falling minor third. This is presented baldly at the piece’s conclusion \([I\ 5b229;CD3\ Tr5\ (11:47)]\). Elsewhere, it is subtly altered to fit the mood of the piece at any given moment, and is generic-sounding enough to be absorbed into the work’s fabric seamlessly. To return to our cake analogy, it is how eggs bind a cake together on baking while no longer being recognizable as eggs. Whatever the other similarities and differences between Ives’ First Sonata and Muczynski’s Second Sonata, it is this reliance on constant iteration and transformation that links the two works. If the Concord Sonata represents a logical endpoint of Ives’ mature style, the First Sonata presents a series of potentials of which Muczynski’s Second is but one, as are sonatas as diverse as those by Boulez, Persichetti and Ireland. The debt Muczynski owes Ives is in the ability to elevate the banal to the epic, and to cover his tracks in the process.

3.4 Muczynski’s Motor: Sonata No.1 by Carl Vine (1990)

Apart from motivic development and Romantic gesture, the Ives and Muczynski sonatas also share a fondness for passages of dry, motoric writing – quasi-minimalistic stretches devoid of rubato and with little melodic content. But the motoric elements of Ives’ Sonata are more revolutionary, and are certainly more aurally striking than in Muczynski’s work. In Ives’ First Sonata they tend to represent chaos (not in the mathematical sense!) – a sort of ‘breakdown of the machine’. We can hear it most obviously in the ‘drunken inn noise’ of \([I\ 4b22-35;CD3\ Tr4\ (0:38-1:00)]\) and in the marching band that gets stuck at \([I\ 1b93-5;CD3\ Tr1\ (5:58-6:05)]\). In both

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97 This continual recharacterising of a small motif is – as mentioned before – in the line of the leitmotifs used by Liszt and Wagner, but even these composers did not saturate their works the way Ives has with this seemingly trivial cell.
cases they are points of harmonic and structural stasis – it is as though the ‘plot’ of the music is somehow temporarily suspended. Additionally, they are texturally dense and highly dissonant.

If we are to find some stylistic empathy with the way Muczynski employs motoric motion, it is worth exploring the First Sonata of Carl Vine. In both sonatas we find driving rhythms used in textures far simpler than Ives would care for but, at the same time, used for far more sophisticated architectural purposes.

Much of Muczynski’s Second Sonata relies on constant quaver motion. The brief second movement has continuous quavers throughout its upper or lower part for the first 119 of its 121 bars. Additionally, there is no note-value shorter than a quaver until M2 2b66;CD1 Tr4 (0:54) so that when some semiquavers are finally introduced it feels like a ‘Big Event’. The inexorable motion, constantly reiterated as a series of ostinati of different lengths, gives the movement the naïve chattering of a wind-up toy. It is more surprising to find a similar reliance on quavers in the fourth movement, if only because the movement sounds anything but naïve. Compared to the second movement, the fourth builds in waves of sound with much forward motion and contrapuntal interplay. And yet for the first thirty bars of the movement the rhythm is entirely even quavers apart from three non-consecutive quaver rests.

This in itself is not so unusual. The development section of the first movement of Prokofiev’s Sixth Sonata has similarly relentless quaver motion for over half its length, and the development of the first movement of Shostakovich’s Seventh Symphony has the same snare drum rhythm repeated for around ten minutes. The difference is that these textures are chosen at key points in the music’s unfolding for reasons that are almost programmatic – they serve to dramatically alter the character of the music so that these passages in question stand in stark contrast to what comes before and after. In the case of the two examples above, the extreme reliance on a repeating rhythm introduces an element of menace – even dread – into the piece. Also, they are generally accompanied by limited harmonic movement: the Prokofiev builds very steadily over a series of slow moving pedal points, while the Shostakovich repeats the same melody over the rapping snare drum some thirteen times.

With Muczynski’s Second Sonata though, motoric rhythm is used to very different ends. Muczynski is able to construct a passage that is actually very thin texturally and make it the climax of the last movement’s development [M2 4b114-23;CD1 Tr6 (2:16-2:26)]. Here, there is
nothing more than constant quavers in each hand exactly one octave apart, but it does sound appropriately climactic for several reasons. Firstly, it occurs before a passage that is texturally even thinner: M2 4b109-13;CD1 Tr6 (2:08-2:16) is a simple two-part texture with both hands in the upper-half of the keyboard and with the lower-part punctuated by frequent rests. Secondly — and this is what sets it apart from Prokofiev, Shostakovich et al. — it is harmonically much more active and complex than the passage which precedes it. M2 4b109-13;CD1 Tr6 (2:08-2:16) changes harmony just once across its five bars. When Muczynski then fires up his ‘motor’ of constant quavers in M2 4b114;CD1 Tr 6 (2:16) it is with a highly chromatic and harmonically ambiguous string of notes which could see the harmony changing as much as three times per bar depending on how one chooses to group the stark octave unisons. This chromaticism, combined with every quaver now ‘filled-in’, a sweep that takes us across the entire range of the keyboard, and a stringendo at M2 4b119;CD1 Tr6 (2:20) gives this passage structural power — the right ‘kick’ at the right time. Additionally, Muczynski is clever to not give everything away too soon — as exciting as this passage is, he saves his most virtuosic writing for the sonata’s coda, beginning at M2 4b139;CD1 Tr6 (2:45).

We find similar textures used to similar ends in Carl Vine’s First Sonata. The sonata is mostly written in a rapidly-moving two-part texture (with octave or quartic thickenings where extra resonance is required) with passages of harmonic and rhythmic stasis which do not necessarily correlate. The opening of the second movement of the Vine [V 2b194-201;CD3 Tr7 (0:00-0:17)] is in this sense analogous to M2 4b114-23;CD1 Tr6 (2:16-2:26) discussed above. Despite the more rapid tempo of the Vine, we find in both instances absolutely uniform rhythmic motion coupled with very fast — almost kaleidoscopic — harmonic movement, with the hands in octave doublings.

Aurally, this passage from the Vine has obvious similarities to the ‘Labyrinth’ movement from the Suite [MSu 4;CD2 Tr8] which itself finds a precedent in the last movement of Chopin’s Sonata in Bb minor, Op.35. Pianistically these octave unisons require very careful and thorough technical preparation. This author found that the biggest challenge was evenness between the hands. While the passages move in similar motion, the two hands at the keyboard are mirror images of each other so often a note that would naturally fall under, say, the thumb in one hand will be played by the fifth finger in the other. The challenge is to minimize the potential for an unwanted accent from the thumb, while maximizing the volume from the weaker fifth finger so they sound equal in dynamic and tone, despite their different qualities.
One solution to this was found to be to keep very straight fingers and to keep the fingertips extremely close to the keys, playing mostly with the full, fleshy pad of the fingertip’s underside. If one is then vigilant about keeping the wrist and thumbs relaxed, then this position allows for facility as well as the control required to keep the touch even. The big advantage of this set-up is that it works well for both loud [V 2b310-13;CD3 Tr7 (5:22-5:30)] and soft [V 2b194-201;CD3 Tr7 (0:00-0:17)] passages, the only difference being the position of the wrist – high for a soft dynamic, and lower for increased volume and power. A gradual lowering or raising of the wrist while the hand is in this position creates a natural crescendo or diminuendo as required. In passages such as M2 4b114-23;CD1 Tr6 (2:16-2:26) where the occasional accented note is required to stick out of the texture, this can be achieved with a momentary thrusting forward of the whole arm from the elbow without altering any of the finger/wrist set-up whatsoever.

Such a relaxed approach allows great flexibility and velocity, and this is certainly required in both the Muczynski and the Vine. Approaching the required tempo step-by-step during practice – discovering this facility within oneself – can be an exhilarating experience. But the pursuit of this technique for its own sake needs to be avoided and there is a danger of passages like this turning purely into virtuoso vehicles for performers to dazzle listeners with their speed of execution.

Vine is very specific in the frontispiece of the First Sonata. He writes that ‘metronome marks are not suggestions, but indications of absolute speed’.98 However, this is not something that has been adhered to as performance practice of the sonata has developed. The opening of the second movement is marked at [crotchet = 120], but a search of performances by professional and semi-professional pianists on YouTube reveal a range of tempi for this movement, none of which are as slow as the marked tempo and at least one which is in excess of [crotchet = 200]99. So ubiquitous has this practice become that it is now even sanctioned in some academic circles. Eun-Kyoung Yang in her doctoral thesis writes somewhat contradictorily:


99 The speed-demon here is Joyce Yang in a performance from the 2005 Van Cliburn Piano Competition, which can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61GhuPrAy0x. The performance is technically astonishing, but not at all what Vine wrote. Other hot-headed performances include Spencer Meyer (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZGGnLJ8Lk), Joel Hastings (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxRiSG7PTB&feature=related) and Naomi Kudo (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWBV62A517M&feature=related)
Carl Vine gives very detailed and specific of [sic] tempo directions. Petree suggests the performer should follow the metronome markings by the composer for proper interpretation. Vine’s first piano sonata was recorded by Harvey in 1992 and by Sergei Babayan in 1998. Babayan played much faster than Harvey; personally, I prefer Babayan’s playing. Even though Harvey gave more attention to Vine’s indication for tempo than did Babayan, Babayan’s style fits the first sonata better.\(^{100}\)

Apart from the contentious claim that a piece can be somehow more stylistically correct the more it diverges from the composer’s intentions, ignoring Vine’s tempo indications undermines the piece’s structure. As with the pacing of Muczynski’s final movement, the second movement of Vine’s Sonata is a carefully engineered web of tempo inter-relationships. When the passagework that opens the movement returns at V 2b310;CD3 Tr7 (5:22) it is marked at [crotchet = 130], and then when it opens the coda in broken octaves at V 2b344;CD3 Tr7 (6:34) Vine asks for [crotchet = 160]. If one begins the movement as fast as possible then it means tempo is no longer a parameter by which the music can grow and excitement can escalate. The recording that forms part of this project aims to adhere as closely as possible to Vine’s own metronome markings, and in doing so strives to demonstrate a sense of potential energy in the second movement’s opening, a certain tension in the deliberate restraint of not allowing the passagework to fall forward, and a sense of steady build under strictly controlled parameters.

In Vine’s first movement, strict adherence to the written tempi is equally, if not more, important because of the frequent employment of metric modulation. This term, initially coined by Elliott Carter\(^{101}\) describes the process of changing tempo within a piece by strictly substituting one rhythmic duration for another. So at the Vine Sonata’s opening we are given a tempo of [minim = 48] [V 1b1;CD3 Tr6 (0:00)]. At bar 20, Vine marks [minim = dotted minim (crotchet = 144)], effecting a quicker tempo by giving the crotchet triplets in V 1b19;CD3 Tr6 (1:23) the same duration as the regular crotchets of V 1b20;CD3 Tr6 (1:28), then at bar fifty he slows us down to [crotchet = 108] by making the crotchets of V 1b49;CD3 Tr6 (2:19) equal to the dotted quavers of V 1b50;CD3 Tr6 (2:21). Adherence to Vine’s initial marking is crucial, so that any initial deviations are not magnified down the line as the piece unfolds.

This is yet another way of overcoming the problem of tempo ‘memory’ as discussed in 2.2 with regard to Muczynski’s First Sonata. With most tempo changes related mathematically, one

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\(^{101}\) Aaron Cassidy. “Basic Repertoire List – Carter.” *Classical Net*.

needs to only have a strong aural memory of the opening tempo and the rest more-or-less take
care of themselves. This does have stylistic and interpretative ramifications though – with the
choice of tempo essentially out of the performer’s hands and with minimum employment of
rubato (as per Vine’s wishes)\textsuperscript{102} one must look to other ways to make the music ‘speak’ without
imposing Romantic notions of performer-driven subjectivism. Indeed, a performance of this
sonata seems to succeed the more the performer is ‘invisible’.

In this sense, the sonata represents a divergence from Muczynski’s Second Sonata which, as
previously discussed, benefits from a certain Romantic approach. In fact, we are now seeing
shades of Muczynski’s Third Sonata – where Muczynski’s techniques grow ever-more refined
and his compositional tracks ever more invisible.

3.5 Diversions, Op.23 (1967)

As we gradually draw away from the world of Muczynski’s Second Sonata to alight on the
Third, we dwell briefly on Diversions. This companion piece to Fables is also a set of nine
miniatures intended primarily for pedagogical use, but it is how it differs from Fables that is the
real point of interest here. The first thing to note is the work’s title. We noted that Muczynski
abandoned programmatic movement titles for good after A Summer Journal. Now, however, he
has totally forsaken extramusical allusions. ‘Fables’ at least suggests something fantastical or
sentimental, no matter how non-specific. Diversions betrays no interpretational hints
whatoever.

Analysis on a structural level reveals more subtle differences. Kevin Roper, the producer of the
recordings for this project, noted the ‘more inward, less sentimental’\textsuperscript{103} character of Diversions
compared to Fables, despite the latter work being slightly more technically demanding, and this
less sentimental mood is due to the work’s construction. Many of the Fables display a
Schubert-like fondness for spinning out a melody. By contrast, eight of the nine pieces in
Diversions are constructed from motivic cells of a bar’s duration or less. The most extreme

\textsuperscript{102} Vine. Inside front cover.

\textsuperscript{103} Kevin Roper. 2007. Conversation with author. 8 January.
example is piece number two [MDi 2;CD3 Tr9] where the germinal cell is just half-a-bar long. These pieces are less about long lines and more about building something beautiful and convincing through the accretion of tiny units.

And yet by no means does *Diversion* lack character or depth of emotion. The rising octaves and falling seconds of the third piece [MDi 3;CD3 Tr10] – occurring in both hands but with much shorter note values in the right – sets up a texture of considerable poignancy; while the syncopated accents in the right-hand of MDi 9;CD3 Tr16 against the grumbly left-hand riff is as good a pastiche of late 70s rock in so-called ‘art’ music as one is likely to encounter.

Muczynski’s works are showing an increasing display of personality and intimacy while actually increasing in objectivity and ‘facelessness’. They are becoming like the Rorshach tests mentioned in 1.2 – they may be loaded with meaning, but that meaning will be different for every listener. Muczynski has by now fully abandoned any notion about telling his performers or listeners what to think or feel, despite the music being more emotionally charged than ever.

It is with this knowledge that we enter the refined world of Muczynski’s Third Sonata.

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104 Only piece number six [Di 6;CD2 ] contains a more expansive, two-bar motif – but even this motif is subdivided into three mini ‘phraselets’.
Chapter 4. The Third Piano Sonata, Op.35

1. Allegro moderato
2. Allegro grazioso
3. Andante sostenuto – Subito allegro

“This [third sonata] requires sensitivity, imagination, and a technique that can handle the emotions and colours. It takes a person who has [had] a roller-coaster of an emotional life – who can relate to [Muczynski]... who has experienced passion and loss. They have to have lived! But they also need an inner life. Muczynski could not have written this music if he was not, well, him!”

“This music doesn’t compare to anyone else. By now, Muczynski is more stylistically consistent than even a composer like Schumann. The Third Sonata has close associations with the chamber music written around this period as well, like the Fantasy Trio [Op.26] and the Cello Sonata [Op.25]. All works rely on thematic transformation and show a more lyric style.”

Muczynski’s Third and final Sonata was completed in 1974, although there is no documentation regarding its first performance. It is dedicated to Kitt, the composer’s dog, who died just before this sonata was completed.

105 Dr Valerie Cisler. Interview with author.

106 Dr Beverly Simms. 2011. Interview with author. 8 February.
Figure 6 (see attached file). The Muczynski Galaxy: The complete inner orbit.
4.1 Seven, Op.30 (1971)

The increasingly objective nature of Muczynski’s piano miniatures reaches its peak with Seven, Op.30 – a group of seven miniatures where the title either tells you everything you need to know about the work, or absolutely nothing. The name of the work is at once a tongue-in-cheek and slightly serious statement in line with Muczynski’s ‘anti-programmatic’ agenda.\(^{107}\)

Seven is the only piano piece apart from Diversions that Muczynski composed between the Second and Third Sonatas, and it dwarfs the latter work in terms of scale and difficulty. Of all his sets of miniatures, it sits at the highest level of sophistication and refinement. Like the much earlier Suite, it presents as a set of études – however, Seven builds on the abstractions and clean-cut lines of Diversions, combining it with the virtuosic two-part writing found in the Second Sonata. Muczynski called it his ‘dry-champagne’\(^{108}\) piece, and it is easy to see what he meant – Seven crackles and bubbles effortlessly because of the facile piano-writing, but it is ‘dry’ in as much as it communicates in a very direct way, free of self-indulgence.

Technically it is a difficult work and its ‘dryness’ demands a fastidious level of preparation. More than any other work by Muczynski, Seven has a Scarlatti-like transparency which shows up the slightest unevenness in tone, discrepancy in articulation or lack of synchronicity between the hands. Up until now, the concept of Muczynski’s smaller pieces as pedagogical tools has not been discussed, but it is worth noting that every collection of pieces is pitched at a certain level. One never finds pieces of wildly varying difficulty within the same set, and Muczynski remarked that he often set himself specific technical parameters when composing a piece – easy in the case of Fables, deliberately challenging in the case of the Suite.\(^{109}\) It would seem, then, that regardless of a student’s skill level, there should be a work by Muczynski they can learn that can act as a ‘way in’ to his musical language.

In fact, Dr Beverly Simms of the University of Terre Haute in Indiana believes that posterity will

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\(^{107}\) Muczynski never wavered from this in future works either. Of the four works for solo piano that come after the Third Sonata, the one that is a set of miniatures – Maverick Pieces, Op.37 – also bears a title that gives no clue as to the nature of the work. Muczynski insisted that the word ‘maverick’ was used simply because the pieces comprising the set are oddments or fragments ejected from other sets and gathered together, making the work a sort of grab-bag.

\(^{108}\) Cisler. 147.

\(^{109}\) Muczynski. Collected Piano Works. 2
show that Muczynski’s lasting contribution to music will be in the area of pedagogy:

In 2001, on the way to finishing my doctorate, I undertook a series of three lecture-recitals on the music of Muczynski. The first encompassed his chamber music, the second focused on his concert repertoire (I performed *Masks* Op. 40, *Desperate Measures* Op.48, *Seven*, The Third Piano Sonata and the *Suite*). The third was on works that I considered pedagogical – *Fables*, *Diversions*, *Seven*, the Preludes, and *A Summer Journal*. The first two lecture-recitals served the purposes of the doctorate fine, but it was the third that really took off. I have done it 12 or 13 times since. I did it at a convention in Salt Lake City in 2004 and sold tapes of myself playing the repertoire. After the lecture, people positively raced to the booths to buy the scores and the tapes. [The convention] sold out!! Muczynski’s music will survive by being disseminated from teacher to student and because it is strong, honest music, those who come to know it won't abandon it.110

For pedagogical purposes it is possible to order Muczynski’s sets of miniatures from easiest to hardest as follows:

1. **Fables**: mostly two-part writing with each hand confined to a small range
2. **Diversions**: mostly two-part writing but parts cover a wider range and are more syncopated; there are some hand-crossings.
3. **Preludes, Op.6**: (not discussed in this project). Thickening of parts and the introduction of passage-work
4. **A Summer Journal**: introduction of large leaps in each hand; requires more advanced interpretative skills
5. **Seven**: mostly two-part writing but virtuosity and keyboard range taken to extremes
6. **Suite**: As with Seven but with more lavish sonorities and a more diverse range of techniques required

Here we have a spectrum of pieces analogous to Bartók’s *Mikrokosmos* in being a fully representative catalogue of a composer’s style right from pieces that can be played after a few lessons through to concert works that are taxing for even seasoned performers.

What stops *Seven* from being the hardest piece on the list has nothing to do with ambition or lack of vision. Rather, it is the same thing that makes Bartók’s Third Piano Concerto easier than his Second, Prokofiev’s Ninth Piano Sonata easier than his Sixth and – now that we have arrived at this point in his output – Muczynski’s Third Sonata easier than his Second. It is to do with composers finding a heightened level of refinement and concision in their already

110 Simms. Interview with author.
developed musical language.

By way of example, let us take the first piece of Seven [MSe 1;CD4 Tr1]. The left-hand begins in C#-aeolian and the right-hand in C-major. In fact, for the first seven bars (that is, most of the first two phrases), the right-hand consists of only the notes C and E, redistributed in different octaves, syncopated against a more-or-less regular left-hand ostinato. The B section is brief [MSe 1b10-7;CD4 Tr1 (0:07-0:13)] and focuses primarily on the intervals of the minor-third and the major-seventh – of particular structural importance is the counter-melody of minims running through MSe 1b10-6;CD4 Tr1 (0:07-0:12), each spaced a minor-third apart. The restatement of the A section [MSe 1b31;CD4 Tr1 (0:22)] builds this time, by way of a chromatically rising left-hand, to the climax of the piece. This climax consists of a triple-statement of a three-note group: firstly a C-major triad in the right-hand against a Db-F diad in the left-hand, then octave Cs, then octave As. This group captures both vertically and horizontally the three intervallic concerns of the piece – the major-third, the minor-third, and the semitone. This leads to a brief coda in which the broken major-thirds (C and E) that opened the piece are re-stated, but this time the left-hand ostinato is reduced to just C# and G#, pulsing syncopatedly in the ‘gaps’ left by the right-hand [MSe 1b48-55;CD4 Tr1 (0:35-0:48)]. With the exception of three bars of semiquavers and one crotchet, the piece moves in constant quaver motion interrupted by the occasional rest.

The piece is difficult – there are wide leaps to negotiate and fast ornamentation to execute – but the obsessive use of motif means there is actually less musical material to learn, the sparse textures are more immediately readable, and the concise structure makes Muczynski’s interpretive intentions very clear. So an increase in compositional sophistication has resulted in a piece that is actually easier to learn in sheer technical terms, without compromising on musical intent.

It is one thing to experiment with economy of scale in a set of miniatures, but an altogether bigger challenge to incorporate these elements into the formal structures of a sonata. To see how Muczynski achieved this, it is worth examining an earlier American piano sonata – one that shows a surprising depth of emotion achieved with uncharacteristic limitations.

4.2 Muczynski’s mourning: Piano Sonata by Aaron Copland (1941)

Compared to the nebulous First Sonata and the gauntlet thrown down by the Second,
Muczynski’s Third Sonata opens with disarming simplicity. The opening tempo indication (Allegro Moderato) and dynamic (mezzo piano) both imply a sense of ease. From the outset, the sonata is singing [M3 1b1;CD1 Tr7 (0:00)] – there is no introduction, just melody against single-line accompaniment. Despite some glancing dissonances between the hands, there is also an aural purity that results from there being no note outside of the Eb-major scale for the first six bars of the piece [M3 1b1-6;CD1 Tr7 (0:00-0:09)].

Copland’s only piano sonata also has a ‘pure’ opening: the first chord is a Bb-Db diad sounded in each hand. The second chord then, is utterly surprising: the right-hand falls to a Gb-Bb diad and the left-hand to an F-D diad. The resultant chord is thicker in texture, highly dissonant, and contains between its four notes every chromatic interval except the major-second. This falling from consonance to dissonance is a very pessimistic gesture. The fact that the first two slow-moving phrases of the piece consist entirely of forte chords with the hands in rhythmic unison lends it a sense of austerity [C 1b1-9;CD4 Tr8 (0:00-0:36)]. The fact that each of these phrases is choked off by the same dissonant sforzando chord lends it a sense of futility. The fact that after these two phrases, the third begins in a lower register at an even slower tempo and even louder dynamic [C 1b10-4;CD4 Tr8 (0:36-1:02)] makes the piece downright angry.

Anger, futility, austerity and pessimism – these are not qualities one would immediately associate with the composer of such upbeat works as Rodeo and Appalachian Spring. Nestyev remarks that, after the supervirtuosity of Prokofiev’s sixth, seventh and eighth sonatas, the ninth ‘seems on first acquaintance to be somewhat anaemic and emotionally pallid’. Likewise, a first reading of Copland’s sonata can be underwhelming – there is barely anything obviously virtuosic (aside from one rapid scalic run at Co 1b48-9;CD4 Tr8 (2:44-2:49)) in the piece, most of it is slow-moving, there is little contrapuntal interest (the two hands are in rhythmic unison more often than they are not), and the work ends with an almost excruciatingly drawn-out limping rhythm of slow-moving crotchets and minims that lasts for nearly two minutes. And yet, just as Prokofiev’s ninth eventually reveals ‘the modest charm of its lyricism and the inexhaustible vitality of its humour’, so too does repeated study of Copland’s sonata show us a world of depth and intelligent discipline.


112 Nestyev. 397.
One clue is to read the piece as a ‘harrowing prognosis of war.’ Copland was a very vocal pacifist and this work, completed in 1941, makes it contemporaneous with that large body of masterpieces that rally against the atrocities of World War II – amongst them Prokofiev’s Sixth Sonata and Messiaen’s *Quartet for the End of Time*. But unlike Messiaen’s work, which ends in optimistic transcendence, Copland’s ends earthwards. The falling two-chord motif which opens the piece comes to infiltrate the third movement too, reappearing firstly at C 3b89;CD4 Tr8 (6:02) and then intermittently until the third-to-last bar, interrupting like a death-knell and turning the sonata, finally, into a metaphorical tombstone. Muczynski’s Third Sonata is a tombstone in its own way. The dedication at the head of the sonata is ‘To Kitt’ – a deceased pet very dear to the composer. The gulf between a memorial to one animal and a memorial to humanity explains the differences between the two pieces – the Copland has more granite-like austerity, while the Muczynski is more inviting – but the musical and structural similarities employed in conveying the emotions associated with mortality are most interesting.

Firstly, both sonatas have an ‘unconventional’ three-movement structure, with outer movements that are mostly unhurried framing an energetic central movement. The final movement of Muczynski’s Third Sonata is actually in two parts, with an *Andante sostenuto* acting as upbeat to a slightly shorter *Subito Allegro*. In this way, this movement encapsulates in microcosm the overall form of the entire First Sonata – this concept of slowly building tension followed by quick release, like the firing of a catapult. Cisler argues that this bipartite structure essentially makes the piece a four-movement sonata, however Muczynksi is very specific in his movement labeling, and a satisfactory performance must somehow convey that the *Andante sostenuto* and *Subito allegro* form a single unit. The obvious solution is to go *attacca* from the former to the latter, and Muczynksi is very clear in marking the caesura separating the sections as ‘short’ [M3 3b41;CD1 Tr9 (2:01)], but more can be done. The recording seeks to exploit the ‘subito’ of the *Subito allegro* marking – with a very percussive attack on the opening chord of M3 3b42;CD1 Tr9 (2:07) as though this new idea ‘intrudes’ on the train of thought that was evolving through M3 3b1-41;CD1 Tr9 (0:00-2:07). Great care has also been taken to observe Muczynski’s

\[\text{Howard Pollack. } \textit{Aaron Copland.} \quad \text{(London: Faber and Faber, 2000). 384.}\]

\[\text{In the same way, the opening motif of Prokofiev’s Sixth nastily reappears in the final movement.}\]

\[\text{Cisler. 378.}\]
dynamic markings strictly, so that the dynamic high-point of the Andante sostenuto really is only piú f [M3 3b28-9;CD1 Tr9 (1:15-1:21)] as opposed to the ff tempestoso reached at M3 3b133;CD1 Tr9 (3:45) and sustained till the movement’s end. This ensures that the movement has just one structural climax, unifying the two contrasting sections under a single arch.

Secondly, both sonatas have as their central movement a scherzo with sinister undertones, where a naïve-sounding theme becomes the victim of obsessive repetition. For Copland it is a wedge-shaped theme that, despite being subjected to various processes of extension [C 2b10-3;CD4 Tr9 (0:08-0:12)], acceleration [C 2b15-9;CD4 Tr9 (0:13-0:18)] and octave displacement [C 2b20-2;CD4 Tr9 (0:18-0:21)] continually comes to rest on a long G# – the submediant of the prevailing B-dorian tonality. In the context of the melodic shapes and the stark harmonisations (hear C 2b1-70;CD4 Tr9 (0:00-1:09)) it is a note simultaneously not ‘at home’ as the tonic, yet requiring no real resolution. The aural paradox is unnerving and the constant return of the note does, after a while, lend the movement the same pessimistic air that permeates the first movement. Muczynski’s scherzo theme is also intervallically jagged and, like Copland’s, begins in a 5/8 meter which adds an extra layer of awkwardness by subverting any sense of conventional flow. Despite reiterations of this motif wanting to reach higher [M3 2b2-5;CD1 Tr8 (0:01-0:06)], a series of pedal harmonies in the left-hand [M3 2b14-8;CD1 Tr8 (0:18-0:24)][M3 2b19-22;CD1 Tr8 (0:24-0:30)] keep it frustratingly grounded. Although Copland’s scherzo passes through a number of different characters, the dynamic climaxes are strident [C 2b253-4;CD4 Tr8 (4:09-4:11)] and the virtuosic passages are obsessively stilted [C 2b265-73;CD4 Tr8 (4:20-4:29)]. It ends nihilistically, unable to escape the magnetic pull of the G# that constantly drags it earthward. Muczynski’s scherzo also has trouble wrenching free from the pedal Bb that permeates the movement, resulting in an hysterical coda that can only be described as a loss of temper. The final two bars – fortissimo marcatisimo – are far louder and angrier than anything else in the entire piece.

Finally, both sonatas invoke the funereal imagery of tolling bells. The bells in Copland’s sonata appear a short way into the third movement [C 3b46;CD4 Tr10 (3:10)] with an ingenious device whereby Copland deploys a series of four notes that repeat in a similar-but-never-exactly-the-same way. Each note is preceded by a very short but distinct upbeat116, all suspended over a

\[116\] essentially, a written-out acciacatura
pedal note. The effect is one of a timeless and universal grief. These bell-motifs gradually become intertwined with the falling ‘consonance-to-dissonance’ progression that opened the piece \([C\ 3\ b89;\ CD4\ Tr10\ (6:02)]\) leaving no doubt that these are bells of mourning rather than celebration. The last 36 bars of the piece \([C\ 3\ b136-71;\ CD4\ Tr10\ (8:53-12:48)]\) consist of just the bell-motif interspersed with the falling progression. This presents a particular challenge in grading the continual repetition of the bell-motif over some four minutes as it goes from *forte marcato* \([C\ 3b136;\ CD4\ Tr10\ (8:53)]\) to *piano elegiac* \([C\ 3b155;\ CD4\ Tr10\ (10:22)]\) to finally *pppp*, with the acciaccatura upbeat gradually lengthening from a semiquaver to a quaver to a crotchet. Most difficult is retaining the colour and character of the falling progression at \(C\ 3b148, 153, 165 & 169; CD4\ Tr10\ (9:46), (10:10), (11:37) & (12:07)\) as the dynamic falls. For the recording, this author used a flat-fingered touch with equal weighting to the left and right hands for the bell-motif, with a more incisive fingertip-touch voiced towards the top of each chord for the falling progression. In this way, the progression keeps a pessimistic bite as the bells fade into nothingness.

The bells in Muczynski’s sonata are portrayed more simply – as a series of repeated Ds in the bottom two octaves of the piano sounding throughout the coda of the first movement \([M3\ 1b203-24;\ CD1\ Tr7\ (5:25-6:51)]\). While this lends the close of the movement a gravitas not foreshadowed by the work’s opening, the Third Sonata of Muczynski does actually end optimistically. Flautist Anna Zweck notes that:

... the lop-sided mambo rhythms of the last movement are an invitation to forget the cares of the first two movements, in much the same way that Brahms often ends his large-scale works with a stylized Hungarian Dance. The weightiness of the earlier movements is not forgotten – we’re simply exhorted to look towards a more optimistic future.\(^{117}\)

We know where Copland’s musical language went after the Sonata. He explored a strident, atonal landscape in the *Piano Fantasy* (1957) and *Connotations* for orchestra (1962) before returning to a vastly pared-back version of his earlier tonal style in pieces like the Duo for Flute and Piano (1971). One wonders where Muczynski’s musical sensibilities would have gone had he continued down this road of obsessive use of limited material and contraction of musical form. The Third Sonata seems in some ways to be at the limiting edge of these two priorities, but if we look just south-of-the-border to one of Muczynski’s contemporaries, we will see just how inwardly concentrated a sonata can really be.

\(^{117}\) Anna Zweck 2010. Interview with author. 11 January.

Ginastera, like Muczynski, left a substantial body of piano music comprising many sets of smaller pieces and three technically demanding sonatas. Like Muczynski’s cycle, the three Ginastera sonatas show a gradually increasing compression of form.

In speculating where Muczynski’s writing may have gone had he decided to write a fourth sonata, the Ginastera sonatas are worthy of study. The Second Sonata in particular shares several characteristics with Muczynski’s Third, but whereas these features in Muczynski’s works are reasonably subtle – passing references within a style that, as discussed, shares a melodic and structural affinity with Copland and Barber – in Ginastera’s sonata they are essentially the point. The sonata is in some sense an evolutionary step forward – magnifying all the things that make Muczynski’s sonata so original and stripping away any non-functional padding.

The first of these characteristics is rhythmic drive. The similarity of Muczynski’s rhythmic structures to various South American dance forms has been noted off-the-record by many musicians, although this is not recorded in the literature anywhere nor was it ever acknowledged by Muczynski himself. Zweck’s mention of the mambo rhythms in M3 3b42-105:CD1 Tr9 (2:07-3:09) has already been noted. David Shephard, ex-director of Adelaide’s Elder Conservatorium of Music, has also likened the piano part of the first movement of Muczynski’s Time Pieces, Op.43 for clarinet and piano118 to “the footstomps and castanet-clacks of a flamenco dancer”119, while ex-head of piano at the Victorian College of the Arts, Dr Donna Coleman, finds allusions to Astor Piazolla throughout the third movement of the same work.120 Given Muczynski’s long-term tenure at the University of Arizona – so close to the Central American border – such assertions are reasonable, albeit unconfirmed.

Ginastera, however, explicitly acknowledged the influence of his home country, Argentina, on his output. The third movement of the Second Sonata is titled ‘Ostinato Aymara’, Aymara

118 The Time Pieces are a late work of Muczynski’s, composed after the Third Sonata. They are a significant contribution to his mature output and share many characteristics with the final sonata.


120 Dr Donna Coleman 2008. Postgraduate Seminar Class at Victorian College of the Arts. 11 August.
referring to a particular race of South American Indians who inhabit the high plateau regions of Bolivia and Peru.\textsuperscript{121} A primal rhythmic impulse drives this movement which, while full of cluster chords saturated in colour, is essentially devoid of melody – at least in the ‘singing line’ sense that Muczynski would have classified it. This absence of melody forces the rhythmic interest to the fore: the opening \textit{feroce} consists of three broad phrases \[G 3b1-7;CD4 Tr13 (0:00-0:10)][G 3b8-16;CD4 Tr13 (0:10-0:23)][G 3b17-27;CD4 Tr13 (0:23-0:41)] each of which has the same basic shape – a pair of alternating chords in the bass register followed by various permutations of six pealing chords in the treble, linked by a rapid scamper up the keyboard. Like aspects of Copland’s Sonata as discussed in 4.2, the interest and unpredictability come from the reordering and repetition of the chords each time they appear. The primitivism is also conveyed through an almost completely homophonic texture – apart from two bars \[G 3b44-5;CD4 Tr13 (2:12-2:17)] the hands either play separately or are in rhythmic unison.

The second aspect to be examined is the nature of these chords. Throughout the first and third movements of Ginastera’s sonata, the sonic world inhabited is that of Muczynski’s at its most dissonant.\textsuperscript{122} The opening flourish sees the two hands always a minor-ninth or major-seventh apart \[G 1b;CD4 Tr11 (0:00)] and thereafter, every vertical alignment of the two hands in the movement results in a clash of seconds and sevenths, generally with other notes added.

There is a real pianistic awkwardness to these cluster-chords. Being non-standard and close-written, they are difficult to read and assimilate quickly; the speed and density of the first and third movements require rapid hand-shape changes and lateral arm-movements; and there are concerns of stamina – ensuring that every chord has a full tone to convey the earthy, savage edge the sonata requires. \[G 3b67-8;CD4 Tr13 (2:50-2:54)] is a particularly difficult passage in this respect. Practising this passage involved a lot of internal grouping – that is, deciding exactly which chord changes required lateral movement of the entire arm and which required hand shape changes only. This grouping often went against the notated stemming and was certainly not intuitive, changing from one practice session to the next. In the learning process, it was intriguing to discover that the shifts in hand position actually helped dictate the shape and


\textsuperscript{122} The clusters of Muczynski’s climaxes actually characterize Ginastera’s Second Sonata from beginning to end.
growth of the phrase, informing how it ‘spoke’. While it would have been possible to actively work against this and aim for a less inflected line, this author liked the rhetorical feel of this passage, sandwiched as it was between the more toccata-like sections of G 3b1-44;CD4 Tr13 (0:00-2:12) and G 3b82-124;CD4 Tr13 (3:11-4:20) and so allowed the physicality of the passage to inform the interpretation.

Before leaving Ginastera, there is one final speculation in which to indulge. As extensively discussed, each of the three Muczynski sonatas shows an increasing compression of form. The first, while short, uses a proliferation of material within an unusual two-movement structure. The second is a large four-movement work, virtuosic and colourful, and tightly unified by a small amount of motivic material. In this respect it is similar to Ginastera’s First Sonata (1952) which is the most outwardly brilliant of his cycle. Muczynski’s Third Sonata is in three movements and is drastically stripped back with obsessive rhythmic repetiton often taking the place of traditional melodic development, directly paralleling Ginastera’s Second Sonata. Ginastera’s Third Sonata, however, written just one year after the second, shows an extreme concentration of form. While not as obviously virtuosic as the First Sonata, it is acknowledged as the most technically demanding of the cycle by a fair distance, taking the challenges of quickly-placed cluster-chords to heights way beyond those of the Second Sonata. It is a one-movement, unremittingly loud and dissonant work marked *impetuosamente* throughout, and fascinating in terms of showing just how far compression of form and discipline of expression can go. Being as Muczynski’s large-scale architectural evolution throughout his sonatas seems to mirror Ginastera’s, one wonders whether he would have arrived at a structure similar to Ginastera’s Third Sonata had he written a fourth.


Architecturally, we will never know what form a Fourth Sonata by Muczynksi would have taken. What we do know is that harmonically and texturally, there was very little change in his piano writing after the Third Sonata. There is a thumbprint on all of the piano works which follow – *Maverick Pieces*, Op.37; *Masks*, Op.40; *Dream Cycle*, Op.44; and *Desperate Measures*, Op.48 – which instantly associate them with the composer of the Third Sonata. Despite the different forms of each of these works, Muczynski has arrived at a mature harmonic language which he

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can control fully and manipulate with conviction and facility. There could, perhaps, be a danger of these late works sounding formulaic, but this is avoided by the different meta-architecture of each – *Maverick Pieces* is a set of twelve miniatures; *Masks* is a bipartite through-composed work; *Dream Cycle* is an interconnected set of four pieces\(^{124}\); *Desperate Measures* is a set of variations. Perhaps this is a reason there is no Fourth Sonata: Muczynski, having constructed a unique sound world where he no longer sounds like anyone but *Muczynski*, preferred instead to experiment with form and structure – to find ever more original settings for his well-honed jewels.

Up until now, several examples have been put forward to show Muczynski’s sonatas in sympathy with those of the ‘new world’ – programmatic similarities with Ives; rhythmic similarities with Ginastera. But once we reach Muczynski’s highly-disciplined late style we find, interestingly, many intellectual and ‘micro’-similarities with a seminal work from the so-called Second Viennese School. Alban Berg’s one-movement sonata is the earliest of the ten sonatas to be recorded in this project. Like Muczynski’s Third, it is highly contrapuntal, with the varying tension between voices being one of the primary governors of the emotional intensity of the work. When we compare a passage like, say M3 3b33-4;CD1 Tr9 (1:30-1:35) with Be b124-6;CD4 Tr14 (8:22-8:29), we see that they share traits such as semitonal clashes between the voices, increased register utilization compared to what has come before (Muczynski adds a third, higher voice; Berg gives his lower voice an octave doubling), and a temporary ‘anchoring’ of otherwise very active harmonic movement (a Db pedal for Muczynski; an Ab inverted pedal for Berg). All of these serve to highlight particularly emotive points in the work that also act as structural signposts.

On a more pervasive level, both pieces rely on a germinal motif based on a rising fourth. This in itself is not so unusual, however when coupled with the contrapuntal nature of the pieces a very specific soundworld results – one quite removed from the bulk of eighteenth and nineteenth century repertoire with its avoidance of parallel fourths and fifths, and more aligned with the harmonic processes of composers such as Bartók and Hindemith (of whom we shall hear more shortly). Berg also shares Muczynski’s fondness for concision, both melodically and

\(^{124}\) *Dream Cycle* comes as close as any late piano work by Muczynski to taking the form of a traditional piano sonata, but he chose to not give it this title. The reasons why composers choose to append the title ‘Sonata’ to a particular work but not another would make a fascinating study in its own right, but lies outside the scope of this investigation.
rhythmically, perhaps even outdoing Muczynski in his ability to derive a major work from a tiny idea. His student, Theodore Adorno, remarks:

The main principle [Berg] conveyed was that of variation: everything was supposed to develop out of something else and yet be intrinsically different. The Piano Sonata is an example – the whole composition is derived from the work's opening quartal gesture and its opening phrase.125

This idea of ‘developing out of something while being intrinsically different’ is, albeit unwittingly, an exact description of the nature of fractal geometry and Julia sets as discussed in relation to Charles Ives’ First Sonata in 3.3, and this is where an interesting parallel can be drawn. In a way, Berg's Sonata is to Muczynski’s Third what Ives' First Sonata is to Muczynski’s Second – that is, a more complex structure than the latter, but containing certain features that, when distilled, help to form and define the latter.

This is, now, where this exegesis has to open out. It is convenient for us to say that the Berg Sonata and Muczynski’s Third Sonata share many common traits, but we must acknowledge that they differ in many ways too. Many aesthetic differences could be cited, dealing with character, mood and use of rubato, but the most immediate difference has to do with their harmonic vocabularies, despite the quartal intervals they share. We have already mentioned the ‘aural purity’ of the opening of Muczynski’s Sonata: while the sonata contains some chromaticism, each voice generally stays within the notes of a given mode, with resulting dissonances most easily analysed in terms of polytonality – the ‘collision’ of voices in different modes. The Berg Sonata, however, is not polytonal – Berg even gives it a key signature of two sharps, and the first phrase ends unequivocally in B-minor. However, the chromaticism is extreme. The opening three-note motif of a perfect-fourth followed by a tritone (with a resultant major-seventh between the first and third notes) lays the groundwork for a piece constantly ‘on the way’ to somewhere – where most of the long notes are suspensions aching for resolution and where these resolutions are either interrupted or delayed until Be b176;CD4 Tr14 (10:48) where we finally land on B-minor and stay there for the final five bars of the piece.

In this respect, the Berg Sonata aligns itself more with the Post-Romantic German school of Wagner and Reger rather than being a precursor to the more ‘modal’ Romanticism of

Copland, Barber and, indeed, Muczynski – despite sharing the ‘micro’-similarities already discussed. And, of course, once we move past Berg’s sonata, no other piano writing in his output can really be compared with Muczynski at all – by the last song in Berg’s Op.2 set the piano writing is completely atonal\textsuperscript{126}, and in earlier juvenilia such as the 12 Variations on an Original Theme (1908) the language is more in the grand manner of Liszt or Busoni. But, if the Ives First Sonata is a Mandelbrot set containing many fully-formed ideas, then Berg’s Op.1 is like a ‘stem-cell’ – a work that contains the buds for branches which can potentially grow in any of several as yet unknown directions: if one chooses to follow and build on the intense chromaticism in the work as Berg himself did, a leap into atonality seems to be the only option; if one chooses to develop the potential of the quartic harmonies, the disciplined counterpoint and the obsession with motivic concision, one could very well arrive at a work resembling Muczynski’s Third Sonata.

Chapter 5. The Piano Sonata in the Twentieth Century

“As a pianist, I believe there’s so much piano music that’s never played. [We] claim it’s not played because we don’t like it. The truth is that we don’t like it because we don’t hear it enough”.127

“I still want to give Muczynski more exposure – through writing, through journal articles, through DMA [material] that can be disseminated... We need to find the things that are going to remain. We can ask ‘Who are we to judge?’ But we know intuitively if something’s or someone’s good.”128

“Whether one calls oneself conservative or revolutionary, whether one composes in a conventional or progressive manner, whether one tries to imitate old styles or is destined to express new ideas - one must be convinced of the infallibility of one's own fantasy and one must believe in one's own inspiration.”129

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127 Keith Kirchoff. Interview with author.
128 Valerie Cisler. Interview with author.
Figure 7 (see attached file). The Muczynksi Galaxy: The complete inner orbit and selective outer orbit.
Funnily enough, Muczynski’s and Berg’s philosophical goals were quite similar. This could never have been predicted or contrived – as a disciple of Schoenberg, Berg was manipulating a dodecaphonic language very different from Muczynski’s modalities, and he clearly believed in it. But, as evidenced in large-scale works such as the operas and the Violin Concerto, Berg constantly strove to combine atonality with the more traditionally nineteenth-century ideals of grand gesture and rhetorical declamation. Thus we have, with Berg’s Sonata, the earliest example in this project of a work that looks simultaneously back to a comfortable past and forward to an uncertain future. With Schoenberg’s other famous prodigy, Anton Webern, pouring the atonal language into radical structures that were ultra-concise and sparse, Berg – with his insistence on traditional forms – was seen in his lifetime to be the most conservative of the trio.

But as the twentieth-century came to reveal itself, amalgams of the old and the new turned out to be precisely what characterised it. Jarman notes that:

“As the twentieth century closed, the ‘backward-looking’ Berg, as Perle remarked, suddenly came to look like its most forward-looking composer.”

In fact, Berg’s Sonata, with its polystylistic tendencies, foreshadows in some ways Albright’s criteria for post-modernism some forty years before the term was coined as we now understand it, and the sonata actually sets a precedent for the absolute splintering of styles, ideas and forms that was to follow, and that have been a hallmark of all the sonatas investigated in this project.

As our telescope now draws further out for a longview of our Muczynski galaxy, we need to acknowledge some other twentieth-century sonatas not included on the recordings that still share rich parallels with the Muczynski sonatas. While not as closely related as the sonatas already discussed in terms of performance practices, a passing comparison of these pieces with Muczynski’s works helps contextualise his sonatas in an ever-more comprehensive manner. Again, it must be highlighted that this is merely a cross-section of a much greater pool of works, all of which have some relevance to this project. It is simply hoped that the mention of a few more works will stimulate continued scholarship in this area and inspire readers to further


contextualise the Muczynski sonatas based on their own worldview of the piano sonata in the twentieth century.

Leos Janácek’s sole piano sonata of 1905 shares a two-movement structure with Muczynski’s First Sonata. The similarities continue in that both have a brooding first movement that passes through a myriad of styles and textures, as well as a second movement that maintains one mood throughout, although these movements’ moods could not be more different. The second movement of Janácek’s sonata bears the title ‘Death’ and is a response to a student demonstration in Brno in which a worker was killed by police. As a personal statement of grief, its scale is somewhere between Muczynski’s intimate memorial to Kitt and Copland’s public statement against all war everywhere. There are bells here, too: Janácek’s method of conveying a persistent tolling through the use of a ‘short-long’ rhythm and static harmonies (ex. 4) anticipates similar techniques found in C 3b119-27; CD4 Tr10 (7:25-8:05) and M3 1b203-24; CD1 Tr7 (5:25-6:51) despite all three being embedded in very different textures.


Béla Bartók’s sonata from 1926 is an intelligent and compact work, much like Ginastera’s Second Sonata. Like the latter, it is heavily rhythmically driven, with these rhythms being


132 Janacek. 46-7.
derived from the folk music of their respective countries of origin. As a result, we also see in Bartók’s work the beginnings of tone-cluster use. Mostly the non-harmonic notes do not obscure the underlying diatonicism much, and when there are enough of them to do so it is always at a point of harmonic stasis (ex.5):\textsuperscript{133}

![Musical Example 5. Bartók: Piano Sonata (iii), bars 225-37.](image)

While this is not a particularly sophisticated use of the tone-cluster device, we see here the potential of an idea further developed by Muczynski [M3 2b98-103;CD1 Tr8 (2:29-2:38)] and taken to extremes by Ginastera [G 1b139-49;CD4 Tr11 (3:43-3:58)].

The Soviet influence on Muczynski’s First Sonata can be seen in the opening of Sergei Prokofiev’s Seventh Sonata (1942) – the stark, angry march punctuated by stabbing chords (ex.6)\textsuperscript{134} is identical in mood and texture to the first allegro at M1 1b34-7;CD1 Tr1 (2:13-2:18):


\textsuperscript{134} Serge Prokofiev, ‘Sonata No.7’ in \textit{9 Sonatas for Piano}. (New York: International Music Company, 1971) 159.

Additionally, Prokofiev’s third movement 7/8 moto perpetuo has the same sort of lop-sided inexorability as the last movement of Muczynski’s sonata. The difference is that the (by this stage) masterful Prokofiev is able to give this movement a fleetness that eludes the young Muczynski, while still maintaining a suitably thick, heavy texture. The result is a cataclysmic ending that has made this sonata one of the most justly famous piano works of the twentieth-century.

The sparse counterpoint and quartal harmonies governing much of Muczynski’s Third Sonata find a precedent in Paul Hindemith’s Second Piano Sonata of 1936. Both sonatas also have a third (final) movement in the aforementioned ‘catapult’-style: a slow introduction acting as upbeat to a fast concluding section. Many of Hindemith’s works draw on Baroque forms and styles\(^{135}\), and the compound-time, dotted rhythms and stately tempo of this third movement give it the distinct sound and feel of a sicilienne dance (ex.7):\(^{136}\)


These are all characteristics shared by Muczynski’s third movement, to the point where both movements are even aesthetically similar when simply viewed on the page! This gives pause for thought as to whether one could analyse or perform Muczynski’s works (particularly his late works) through a ‘Neo-baroque lens’ as it were. How might Glenn Gould have performed Muczynski’s Third, for example? The answers are outside the scope of this project but perhaps worthy of investigation.

The generous, dense music of America’s Roger Sessions always rewards repeated listening and analysis. His Second Sonata of 1946 is one of his most recorded works. Despite its relative brevity (the work typically clocks in at less than thirteen minutes) it is an ambitious polyglot of styles that in many ways owes a debt to the crucible of Ives’ First Sonata. The dissonantly exuberant opening, in particular, recalls movements two and four – the ‘Inn’ movements – of the Ives. Elsewhere, the motoric and pointillistic textures of the first movement (ex.8) are identical to textures found in Muczynski’s Second Sonata [M2 1b119-127; CD1 Tr3 (4:11-4:24)] and later on in Vine’s First Sonata [V 2b214-19; CD3 Tr7 (0:37-0:48)].

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137 Gould’s iconic recordings of Hindemith’s three piano sonatas on Sony certainly emphasise the more stately, ‘Baroque-like’ elements of the scores.

138 Although, as previously discussed, most twentieth-century American piano sonatas do.

Musical Example 8. Sessions: Second Piano Sonata (i), bars 140-50

The imposing Piano Sonata of Sir **Peter Maxwell Davies** (1981) could almost have been used in this project as a chronologically opposed ‘bookend’ to the Ives First Sonata. If the compact Muczynski sonatas represent in some ways a backlash against the increasingly sprawling structures of the sonatas of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (of which the Ives is certainly one – recall that Lou Harrison said it was actually ‘the penultimate Romantic sonata’), then Maxwell Davies’ sonata could be said to represent, in turn, a ‘backlash against the backlash’. This is positively maximalist\(^\text{140}\) music in the new-complexity manner of Brian Ferneyhough and Iannis Xenakis: large-scale, difficult, polyrhythmic, and philosophically dense – in other words, a lot like the music of Ives! It is Ives, however, infused with the richness of

\(^{140}\) A pun I noticed only as I typed it!
another century’s worth of experience, experimentation and discovery – the Mandelbrot Set updated by eighty years or so. Most importantly, its complexity does not imply that it is purely cerebral music of total abstraction. We have mentioned that Muczynski gradually refrained from giving his pieces explicit programmatic associations, although he almost certainly held them privately. Indeed, Cisler’s remarks regarding the Third Sonata (see Chapter 4) imply that Muczynski must have felt and experienced life deeply in order to produce such emotionally charged works, although listeners and performers are only ever given riddles via the titles (*Fables; Masks;* etc) and sometimes not even then. Maxwell Davies gives us a quotation from Charles Senior:

The cries of gulls  
Curling in shoalward whirlwinds  
around the surging firth,  
are muted by croak of raven  
and bleat of lamb  
from silence to silence

Muczynski’s slightly grumpy remark regarding his reason for withholding his personal impetus behind composing a particular piece was that “I always thought that anything I had to SAY could be said by way of the music itself”¹⁴² This, paradoxically, implies that there are extramusical stimuli at play, albeit veiled ones, and the Senior poem above implies the same. Like Ives’ and Muczynski’s music, Maxwell Davies’ sonata is more than just about music itself, and the emotional riches are there for anyone willing to invest the time. Unfortunately, the sonata’s almost insurmountable difficulties (a sample of which is given in ex.9¹⁴³) have denied it a permanent foothold in the repertoire.


¹⁴³ Peter Maxwell Davies. 32.
Finally, the popular success in recent years of the works of Lowell Liebermann are illustrative of the universal appeal of certain moods and characters. His Second Piano Sonata subtitled ‘Sonata Notturna’ (1981) follows very much the ‘one movement, one idea, one mood’ model of Berg’s Sonata. It is a marvellous example of where the American Piano Sonata has gone since Muczynski, if only to show that, stylistically, the idea of a distinctly nationalistic sound seems to be disappearing. The concept of nationalism had great relevance throughout the first half of the twentieth-century as ethnomusicological research blossomed and composers looked to their native folk-music for inspiration. Now, however, global communications have become easier and all the world’s musics tend to bleed into each other somewhat, with the music of every culture available to us at the click of a button. Liebermann’s sonata does not sound ‘American’ any more than Maxwell Davies’ sonata sounds particularly ‘English’ or Vine’s sonatas sound ‘Australian’. The aim of Liebermann’s sonata is to evoke a mood, and this mood – the mood of the night – is culturally transcendent. The tintinnabulatory layers of this wonderfully evocative work are easily understood by anyone who has ever slumbered and dreamt (ex.10):144

Final Thoughts

“Consider where your interests lie. I love the beginning of the twentieth-century – within a ten-year period there are so many strands [of music]. It’s a fertile and imaginative time in history. But if you look at the last twenty years [of the twentieth-century] there is something broadly similar happening – a new flourishing of diversity. One ends up finding parallels everywhere – Bartok with Muczynski; Ravel with John Burge – [these composers] form distant mirror images with each other, and a rich well-spring of connections.”\footnote{145}

“Be careful how you interpret the world: it is like that.”\footnote{146}

\footnote{145 Dr Kristina Szutor. 2007. Interview with author. 28 February.}

NOTE:
This figure has been inserted in to the electronic copy on the following page.

Figure 8 (see attached file). The Muczynski Galaxy – Longview.
There is a famous photograph, taken in 1990, by the Voyager I spacecraft just as it was about to leave our Solar System forever. The photo, now known as ‘The Pale Blue Dot’ is of our Earth from a record distance of around six billion kilometres. Mercury and Venus are in the photo too, but cannot be seen because of the sun’s glare. In a photo consisting of 640,000 pixels, the Earth occupies less than one. From an outsider viewing our solar system, it makes our planet look unremarkable and inconsequential. But as Sagan so eloquently remarks:

> From this distant vantage point, the Earth might not seem of any particular interest. But for us it’s different. Look again at that dot. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives – on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.\(^{148}\)

The Earth is important to us because our default vantage point makes it so. Likewise, while Muczynski’s sonatas may be hidden in the glare of gigantic ‘suns’ by Ives, Berg, Boulez and Barber, they have intrinsic value of their own in the twentieth-century sonata galaxy. It is not up to us to say whether posterity will grant them a more prominent or permanent place in this labyrinthine galaxy. It does, however, fall to me at this point to say that they deserve one.

If we view this galaxy of the twentieth-century sonata with Muczynski at the centre we find that certain qualities which make the sonatas of, say, Berg and Barber great are reflected in Muczynski’s music, making it great for the same reasons. Additionally, we can further identify qualities which defy comparisons with other masterworks, making the music great on its own terms. Encapsulated in these modest pieces is a fruit that has come from, or a seed that will lead to, almost any other twentieth-century piano sonata that one can name. Like the Earth, they show the scars of their past and anticipate the innovations of the future while displaying an autonomous dignity unique to themselves.

The three sonatas of Muczynski are impeccably structured, pianistically gratifying and intensely sincere. Repeated performance and analysis of them gives us an ever-rounded perspective of Muczynski himself and of his historical place, so that we can contextualise his oeuvre with the conviction and objectivity it deserves. Armed with this knowledge, we can hear Muczynski’s sonatas as good Western Art Music in its own right; as more fully-worked through realisations of


\(^{148}\) Sagan. 2.
his intervening piano pieces; as a logical progression from the American sonatas which preceded them; and, finally, as yet another facet of the fragmented and eclectic corpus of fine twentieth-century piano music.

So here is where our construction of a Muczynski-centric galaxy must end for now. It is incomplete, and it is at times highly subjective but, hopefully, it lends the works meaning and prominence even as they lie amidst a century of composition through which it is difficult to navigate with any certainty. As the twenty-first-century unfolds and the known universe of piano sonatas continues to expand, Muczynski’s sonatas have enough integrity and originality to maintain their place. We just may need an increasingly more detailed map to find them.
Appendix. Complete Track Listing of all CDs included in this submission

CD 1:

Robert Muczynski: First Piano Sonata, Op.9
[2] Allegro giocoso (5:00)

Robert Muczynski: Second Piano Sonata, Op.22
[4] Con moto, ma non tanto (1:46)

Robert Muczynski: Third Piano Sonata, Op.35
[8] Allegro grazioso (2:51)

Total CD 1: 9 tracks (46:16)

CD 2:

Robert Muczynski: Sonatina, Op.1
[1] Allegro con spirito (1:42)

Michael Tippett: Second Piano Sonata in one movement

[8] Labyrinth: Molto allegro (0:53)
[10] Scherzo: Allegro vivace (1:45)

Robert Muczynski: Toccata, Op.15
[13] Park Scene: Allegro (0:37)
[15] Birds: Vivace (0:45)
[16] Solitude: Andante (1:22)
[17] Night Rain: Tempo giusto (0:56)
[18] Jubilee: Allegro con spirito (1:07)

Robert Muczynski: Fables, Op.21
[19] Allegro (0:35)
[20] Andante moderato (0:58)
[21] Allegro molto (0:32)
[22] Waltz tempo (0:42)
[23] Adagio (0:53)
[24] Presto (0:36)
[25] Moderato (0:52)
[26] Allegretto (0:37)
[27] Allegro (0:58)

Samuel Barber: Piano Sonata, Op.26
[28] Allegro energico (8:14)
[29] Allegro vivace e leggero (2:28)
[30] Adagio mesto (5:30)
[31] Fuga: Allegro con spirito (5:48)

Total CD 2: 31 tracks (71:14)

CD 3:

Charles Ives: First Piano Sonata
[1] Adagio con moto (8:39)
[3] Largo - Allegro - Largo, come prima (7:49)

Carl Vine: First Piano Sonata
[6] (8:54)
[7] Leggiero e legato (9:24)
Robert Muczynski: Diversions, Op.23
[8] Allegro (0:42)
[9] Animato (0:36)
[10] Andante molto e espressivo (1:27)
[12] Allegro risoluto (0:43)
[13] Lento (1:24)
[14] Allegro ma non troppo (0:42)
[15] Andante tranquillo (1:03)
[16] Allegro molto (0:45)

Total CD 3: 16 tracks (66:53)

CD 4:

Robert Muczynski: Seven, Op.30
[1] Allegro giocoso (0:48)
[2] Allegro moderato (0:57)
[5] Allegro vivace (0:47)
[7] Allegro con brio (1:15)

Aaron Copland: Piano Sonata
[9] Vivace (5:34)

Alberto Ginastera: Second Piano Sonata, Op.53
[12] Adagio sereno - Scorrevole - Ripressa dell' Adagio (5:44)

Alban Berg: Piano Sonata, Op.1

Total CD 4: 14 tracks (63:46)
NOTE:
4 CDs containing 'Recorded Performances' are included with the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

The CDs must be listened to in the Music Library.
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