

COMPARISON OF THE EVOLUTION AND RECONCEPTION OF THE ROMANTIC BAGATELLE GENRE IN THE PIANO WORKS OF B. SMETANA AND C. SAINT-SAËNS

YULIA FURDUY¹, IHOR HUTNIK²

SUMMARY. The genre of piano bagatelle, which is part of miniatures, continues to maintain its relevance in modern musical art and has its own history of evolution and development, which dates more than three centuries. In our opinion, the bagatelle in the works of romantic composers is especially interesting, which in many cases become the foundation for modern composers working in this genre. In some cases, in the 21st century, there is a phenomenon of the disappearance of the boundary between genre and style in the bagatelle, for example, in the work of the Ukrainian composer V. Silvestrov. In our study, special attention is paid to the search for the main features of the evolution and rethinking of the baguette genre in the piano work of B. Smetana and C. Saint-Saëns. Through a comprehensive music-theoretical analysis, the genre-stylistic features of the selected works were revealed. Meter, rhythm, tempo, sound dynamics and articulation was highlighted at the syntactic level. At the compositional and dramaturgical level, the following features was shown: texture, key-tonal plan, form, dramaturgy, and programmaticity. The proposed approach makes it possible to identify the general genre and style characteristics of the romantic piano bagatelle.

Keywords: bagatelle, piano bagatelle, romanticism, genre, style piano miniature, B. Smetana, C. Saint-Saëns.

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- ¹ *PhD. in Art, Acting Associate Professor at The Department of History and Theory of Music, Dnipro Music Academy, Lyvarna str. 10, Dnipro, Ukraine. E-mail: audiojoysmile@gmail.com*
² *Master degree in Art, Instructor Professor at The Department of Interdisciplinary Research, Dnipro Music Academy, Lyvarna str. 10, Dnipro, Ukraine. E-mail: igorhutnikmd@gmail.com*



Introduction

Starting from the 19th century, piano miniature, in particular bagatelle, begins to be perceived as an integral part of the concert and pedagogical repertoire³. “Bagatelles clearly distinguished themselves in terms of functions and affective qualities from sonatas and other concert items like concertos, variations and rondos which prevailed at the turn of the century. Bagatelles found a place in music published for amateurs and keyboard tutors”⁴ The basis for the formation of this genre, of course, we can find in the works of French harpsichordists of the Baroque era: J.F. Rameau, C. Daquin, etc. In translation from French bagatelle – (French bagatelle – a trifle, a small elegant thing) – a toilet item; the name of the game. Most often, this definition is used for jewelry, ladies’ jewelry, snuff boxes, medallions, caskets, sometimes with an image of a frivolous character. In a broad sense, bagatelle means light, chamber art. In music, a bagatelle is a small instrumental piece, mainly for piano, relatively easy to perform, of a lyrical-melancholic and contemplative nature⁵. However, despite its obvious chamber affiliation, the bagatelle does not avoid artistic rethinking and evolution in the context of the general creative paradigm of the Romantic era⁶. The tonal plan and form of the works become more complicated, the texture is saturated, and the figurative sphere is deepened and filled with a realistic plot. Due to the peculiarities of the construction of the bagatelle genre, in the work of romantic composers, not only the depiction of everyday scenes is traced, but also complex social and philosophical issues. It is known that the main figure in the transformation of the piano bagatelle genre from classicism to the paradigm of romantic music is L. Beethoven (Op. 33, Op. 119, Op. 126.)⁷. After him, this genre was addressed by: S. Moniuszko (1843), B. Smetana (1844), F. Schubert (1856-1862), D. Rossini (1855-1868), Z. Fiebig (1872), F. Liszt (1885), C. Saint-Saens (1885-1886), A. Foote (1893)⁸. In the context of our

³ Hepburn, Allan. *Piano miniatures: An essay on brevity*, in: The Gettysburg Review, No. 1, Gettysburg, 2006 (p. 89–105).

⁴ Yip Ching Lee, Jenny. *Beethoven, Bagatelle and Genre*. The Chinese University, Hong Kong, 2003, p. 35.

⁵ Basmacioglu, Kandemir. *Bagatelle form throughout music history and analysis of Beethoven’s op. 119 bagatelles*. International Journal of New Trends in Arts, Sports & Science Education, No. 3(9), Ismiri, 2020 (p. 99–111).

⁶ Furdui, Yuliia. Historical and theoretical prerequisites for the study of the bagatelle genre in music, in: Current problems of history, theory and practice of artistic culture, No. 40, Kyiv, 2018 (p. 434–440).

⁷ Furdui, Yuliia. *The genre paradigm of piano bagatelle in the works of L. Beethoven*, in: International Bulletin: Culturology. Philology. Musicology, No. 1, Kyiv, 2018 (p. 238–242).

⁸ Gajdošíková, Jana. *European and Czech Salon Piano Music in the Second Half of the 19th Century*, in: Musicologica Olomucensia, No. 2, Olomouc, 2010 (p. 95–108).

study, the most interesting are the rich in the creative heritage of B. Smetana and C. Saint-Saëns, since they demonstrate the characteristic features of different European schools (Western and Eastern European), individual styles, and cover the creative process of the first and second half of the 19th century⁹. In addition, many aspects of the issues discussed, as before, remain unexplored to this day. In particular, in the 21st century, the process of rethinking and transforming the bagateli genre into an individual style continues in the work of the Ukrainian composer V. Silvestrov, who combines the characteristic features of classical, romantic and postmodern bagateli¹⁰.

The purpose of the study was to compare the specific features of the evolution and rethinking of the romantic baguette genre in the piano works of B. Smetana and C. Saint-Saëns.

Tasks of the research:

- define the concept of the genre of piano baguette;
- identify the characteristic features of romantic baguette;
- analyze the piano cycles of miniatures by B. Smetana and C. Saint-Saëns, which include baguettes.

- compare the main musical and stylistic features of the above works.

Autores of the article uses the following **research methods**:

- Systematic-comparative method of music-theoretical analysis – to assess the evolution of the piano bagatelle genre.

- Genre-stylistic analysis – highlighting the inherent features of the bagatelle genre in the context of the individual composer's style.

- Compositional-dramatic analysis – to reveal the harmony, modal plan, program concept and form of the analyzed works.

- Musical-syntactic analysis – demonstrates the features of musical language, namely rhythm, meter, tempo, sound dynamics, articulation.

Results and Discussions

In the period from 1840 to 1847, **B. Smetana** wrote mainly for the piano. During this time, "Bagatelles and Impromptus" (1844), Eight Preludes (1845), "Six Characteristic Pieces" (1847 - 1848) were published. It is in the works written during these years that the features of Smetana's bright composer's individuality are manifested¹¹.

⁹ Kayali, Francis. *The eclecticism of Camille Saint-Saëns: defining a "French sound" in music 1866–1896*, in: Francis Kayali Papers, No. 1, 2008 (p. 1–22).

¹⁰ Furdui, Yuliia. *Bagatelle im Schaffen von W. Silvestrov*, in: Europäische Fachhochschule. European Applied Sciences, No. 5, Stuttgart, 2017 (p. 48–51).

¹¹ Murphy, Sarah. *Czech piano music from Smetana to Janacek: style, development, significance*. Cardiff University, Cardiff, 2009.

The cycle of Eight Bagatelles and Impromptus (1844) demonstrates the bright and direct influence of R. Schumann in the figurative and emotional palette, as well as F. Chopin¹².

Considering that the author himself does not divide piano miniatures into bagatelles and impromptu pieces in the title of the work, on the basis of the conducted music-theoretical analysis, four pieces of the cycle were attributed to bagatelles by us, namely Nos. 1, 2, 4, 7.

The musical and psychological sketch – bagatelle No. 1 **“Innocence”** – is written at a restrained pace, on the dynamics of the piano, and the mood of the piece is colored in light tones, one feels the “breath” of youth, lightness, freshness, the smell of green leaves and it seems to be contemplating different shades of spring sky blue. The choice of the “light”, “pure” tonality of *C major* is not accidental in this case. Two-part in form, small in volume, “Innocence” is simple in its textural presentation, in which two rhythmic patterns prevail: “rocking pattern” – quarter note and eighth note and triplets¹³.

Bagatelle No. 2 **“Depression”** is generally characterized by restraint of emotional expression. Throughout the entire piece, as we have already observed in other works of this cycle, one rhythmic pattern is repeated, a rhythmic ostinato. The key of the work is A-minor, the theme uses a descending “mournful” movement along the sounds of the scale, the texture is chordal. The Bagatelle is written in two-part form, at a fast pace, but the dynamics are sustained on the *p*.

The first section of “Depression” recreates a mood of anxiety and sadness, depression refers to the experiences, presumably, of a child and with which he has difficulty coping, while the second section is perceived as a comforting, calming answer of a father to a small child’s question. The second section (*con dolore*) is lyrical, broad in sound, thematic material is built on the same rhythmic figure, with the same intonations as the first section, but in a completely different, calmer key.

Throughout the entire musical development in **“Desire”** (No. 4), a rhythmic “rocking pattern” (quarter note and eighth note) is repeated all half-measure. The piece is lyrical. This is already “mature” lyrics, with its sad-melancholic range. The tonality of the piece, E-minor, determines the general mood. In this case, perhaps, the image of tender, languid love is reproduced. The initial descending intonations of the minor second, emphasized alternately by either a *Forschlag* or syncope, enhance the mood of longing. The Bagatelle is written in two-part form, at a calm pace, the dynamics are sustained on the *p*.

¹² Ahn, Florence. *A Survey of Czech Piano Cycles: From Romanticism to Modernism (1877-1930)*. University of Maryland, Maryland, 2018.

¹³ Furdui, Yuliia. *Problems of the typology of musical rhythm*, in: Scientific collections. Musicological studies, No. 36, Lviv, 2015 (p. 297–309).

“**Love**” (No. 7) is light and lyrical in nature, carefree, full of vital energy, awe and a dream of happiness. The key of the piece is A major. The melody is wide-ranging, and the specific accompaniment with an emphasis on the first part increases the importance of the waltz element in the overall sound. A one-bar rhythmic pattern is also repeated throughout the piece: half note and quarter note. The Bagatelle is written in two-part form, at a moderate tempo, at the dynamics of *p*. It is worth noting that almost all the bagatelles of Smetana’s cycle are characterized by a three-bar meter, all of them are lyrical, from the lightest “dreamy” options to deep melancholy. The dynamic environment is represented by various gradations of *r*. All bagatelle pieces are characterized by a fast, mobile tempo, a two-part form, and the persistence of rhythmic repeating figures (one-bar, half-bar), throughout the entire piece. They are much smaller in size than improvisations, non-technical (not virtuoso), simple in texture presentation. And all of them can be considered musically psychological in terms of plot and content to a certain extent.

B. Smetana had the gift of creating vivid characteristic images, knew how to be diverse in his lyrical expressions. The composer’s Bagatelles demonstrate the diverse palette of lyrical experiences and expressions inherent in the composer’s poetics.

B. Smetana showed in “Bagatelles and Impromptus” a “subtle” harmonic sense, free command of piano texture, which is interesting, diverse and invariably expressive in each piece. Much says here about the proximity to the images of the piano music of the romantics (especially Schumann). However, already in the early period of his creative life, Smetana strove for national identity. So, in the bagatelle “Love” we can recognize intonations of Czech lyrical songs.

The comparative description of all Bagatelles is given in Table 1.

The creative legacy of **C. Saint-Saëns** is diverse in terms of genre, including opera and a fairly wide and diverse genre of symphonic and chamber music. The composer turned to piano music throughout his life, and his creative legacy includes such works as piano concertos, variations on a theme by Beethoven (1874), a collection of etudes, and the picture-piece “Evening Bells” (1889). However, the composer showed interest in the genre of bagatelles only once, when he was only 20 years old (It is interesting that B. Smetana was also 20 years old when he wrote his bagatelles and impromptu pieces), in 1855, he created a collection of **Six Bagatelles, Op. 3**. These pieces can be attributed to the composer’s early works. All of Saint-

Saëns's bagatelles are much larger in volume than B. Smetana's bagatelles¹⁴. The cycle of six bagatelles by C. Saint-Saëns is divided into two parts - two suites of three pieces each.

Table 1

№	Meter	Tonality	Dynamics, Articulation	Tempo	Image Content Title
1	3/8	C	<i>p</i>	Allegretto	Innocence
2	3/4	a	<i>p sf</i>	Allegro	Depression
4	6/8	e	<i>mf</i>	Appassionato	Desire
7	3/4	A	<i>p</i>	Tranquillo, Tempo di valse	Love

Comparative characteristics of the tonality plan, means of expression and programmaticity in B. Smetana's bagatelles

The first suite opens with the First bagatelle, representing a dramatic and profound image. This bagatelle is dedicated to Albert Libon, the composer's friend. The piece is written in a complex three-part form (table 2).

Table 2

A	B	A ₁	k
<i>aba₁</i>	<i>cc₁</i>	<i>a₂</i>	

Musical form of the bagatelle № 1 from first suite of Six Bagatelles, Op. 3 by C. Saint-Saëns

The first section **A** contains two themes. The first, main theme **a** (1–8 bars) is written in the key of *g-minor*, in the form of questions and answers. Theme **a** begins in subdominant harmony (II6 with a hold), on *pp*, which gives the sound some surprise and excitement. The diminished harmony emphasizes tension, sharpness, and tragedy. The main intonation of the theme is a descending minor second, which alternates with a uniform movement in eighths (answer) in staccato, ending in a dominant harmony, which “softens” the emotional surge that has arisen.

The imitative second theme **b** (9–21 bars) is distinguished by restraint and concentration. The voices move from bottom to top, from bass to soprano (D – t – D), in equal eighths. The texture gains momentum due to the alternating introduction of voices, which leads to the climax of the first section and further development.

¹⁴ Burleson, Geoffrey. *Proto-Impressionism in Piano Works of Camille Saint-Saëns*, in: 9th European Music Analysis Conference – Euromac 2017, Strasbourg, 2017 (p. 1–12).

The reprise of the exposition **a**₁ (22–30 bars) combines both themes; theme **a** remains the main musical idea, which continues its development against the background of the uniform accompaniment of theme **b**.

The middle section **B** is saturated with musical events. The music of the middle section is calm, measured, concentrated, but at the same time with emotional impulses, sounds at a restrained pace and consists of two movements **c** and **c**₁ (31–38, 39–48 bars).

The first movement **c** (31–38 bars) is filled with melodic jumps in the right-hand part (on the fifth, sixth, octave), which are emphasized by the dynamics of *f*. The cadences sound in equal eighths, which creates concentration and tension. The climax of the development is quiet on *pp*: it is a descending melody, to which a diminished harmony is connected.

The recapitulation is shortened, with a coda (**k**), sounds on *pp*, restrained and muffled.

The **second bagatelle** contrasts with the first. Dance-like in nature, at a fast pace (*Allegro animato quasi presto*), it is much larger in size than the first baguette. The piece is written in a complex three-part form (table 3).

Table 3

A	B	A ₁	k
ab (a ₁)	b b ₁ b ₂ c c ₁ d	a ₂ a ₃	

Musical form of the bagatelle № 2 from first suite of Six Bagatelles,
Op. 3 by C. Saint-Saëns

Exposition includes two versions of the same theme. The melody of theme **a** is bright, rapid, “technical”, major (*E flat major*), written in a homophonic-harmonic texture. It consists of two movements (1–19 bars; 20–35 bars.). The melodic line of theme **a** is built on an ascending chromatic movement within the fifth, followed by a descending response, already in the opposite movement and with chromaticism within the fifth. The second movement is filled with sequential development.

Theme **b** (**a**₁) (36–75 bars) is built on the material of the first theme (**a**), while the theme changes rhythmically (it was equal to fourths, and now it sounds in a dotted rhythm), gradually accelerating towards the end of the section and reaching the tempo of *Presto*. Theme **b** (**a**₁) has an extended cadence and a clear completion of the form.

The middle section is represented by two themes. Here the mood of restrained lyrics is maintained. The music is singsong, refined. The new material **b** (76–91 bars), completely contrasting to the exposition, changes: the tonality – from *E flat major* to *B flat major*, the rhythmic organization from

the movement in eighth durations – to the movement in fourths with the interspersing of legatized sounds, the texture – from homophonic-harmonic to chordal, with the remark *legatissimo*. The long, plastic, singing melodic line is a movement along the sounds of the descending scale in the left-hand part. In the second movement, the theme in the updated version – **b**₁ (92–107 bars.) passes into the right-hand part, and the sound of the scale-like construction is enhanced due to octave doubling and its chordal-harmonic fullness. The third movement **b**₂ (bars 108–123) forms an alternation of elements of the “scale” in the right- and left-hand parts with sighing intonations.

Theme **c** is built on a sequential development (bars 124–139): descending seconds in the middle register, sounding in equal quarter durations, are then transferred in the variant **c**₁, at the dynamic's *pp* to the high register (bars 140–147).

Theme **d** (bars 148–170) most likely plays the role of a connection, gradually strengthening its sound, with the remark *leggiero*, a triplet appears in the accompaniment, which will later become the rhythmometric basis of the reprise. The climax sounds on *f* (bar 149), where the tonic harmony is emphasized by accents. The middle section ends with a rehearsal of the note *h* in triplets, and then its replacement with *b*, which continues to sound in triplets and will be the beginning of the reprise.

The reprise is marked by the tempo of *Presto*, conveying the mood of joy, triumph, and unbridled fun. In bars 171–173, one note of *B-flat* sounds in triplets, on *ff*, from bars 174–205, and the next is the main theme (**a**₂), the sound of which is emphasized by *pp*, polyrhythmic (3:2), against the background of staccato accompaniment in equal eighths in the size of 2/4, the theme sounds polyrhythmically. The theme that sounds then **a**₃ (206–257) retains its dotted rhythm from the exposition. The bagatelle ends with a coda (**k**), where the mood of joy and fun is emphasized, on the dynamics of *ff*.

The first suite ends with the **Third Bagatelle**, which is presented in two images. The first, thoughtfully focused and restrained in nature, paints pictures of nature and light, realized through various means of musical expressiveness: *B flat major*, *poco adagio*, *pp*, etc. The second is very exciting, expressive, dramatic (*molto espressivo*, tenuto, *rf*). The form of the piece is two-part (Table 4).

The introduction to the piece (only one bar) obviously imitates birdsong. Against its background, theme **A** (2–11 bars) sounds, the melody of which is built on descending fifths, *legato*, in the middle register, sounds at *pp* dynamics, with a *cantabile* remark and modulates from B-flat major to D-flat minor.

Table 4

Introduction	A	B	k
	<i>ab</i>	<i>a1b1</i>	

**Musical form of the bagatelle № 3 from first suite of Six Bagatelles,
Op. 3 by C. Saint-Saëns**

Theme **B** (12–19 bars) contrasts with the first, it is a completely different figurative sphere – dramatic, even tragic, as evidenced by the minor tonality and the constant repetition of the tonic sound in the middle register, against which dissonant chords sound on *rf* (*rinforzando*), followed by a descending tetrachord with a *non legato* stroke, with the remarks *molto espressivo*, *tenuto*.

After this deeply emotional statement “from the first person”, theme **A₁** (20–28 bars) in D major returns. The sharp change in mood that has occurred here demonstrates the transition from the inner, personal-subjective, conflicting world to the objective-removed, calm-balanced world of nature. The melody of the theme sounds on *pp*, gently, colorfully and expressively.

The appearance on *f* of theme **B₁** (29–37 bars) again turns out to be sudden. Unlike the first development, in this case the theme is decorated with undertones, which sound alternately in the left- and right-hand parts; the chords are highlighted by arpeggios (on *f*).

The coda (**k**) (38–42 bars.) is built on two themes. On *pp*, in a high register, it ends on the tonic of *B flat major*, with a hold emphasized by *sf*.

The **second suite** opens with the noble-majestic **Fourth Bagatelle**, combining lyrical and dance modes. The Bagatelle is sustained in a calm, restrained tempo (*moderato assai*), the structure is simple, three-part: **A B(A1) A2 k**. The first theme **A** (1–18 bars) is written in the form of a period with an extended cadence. The melody of the theme is song-noble, written in the key of *F major*, at the dynamics of *p*, with a *sotto voce* remark (the first passage in the middle register, in the second passage – even more elevated – in the high register).

Both cadences of each proposal are dance-like, simultaneously referring to both the waltz and the minuet; here the three-part meter (3/4) and “rounded” intonations dominate.

Theme **B** (19–38 bars) is written in the key of the dominant (*C major*). It sounds in the left-hand part against the background of chordal accompaniment of equal eighth durations in the middle register, gradually strengthening the sound. The melody of the theme **B** sounds in different registers, creating an echo of the tonic and dominant harmonies (question-answer). From the 27th bar, the theme sounds in *A flat major* on *pp*. The roll calls are placed in register

positions far from each other (major and second octaves). Due to this gap, the theme acquires more and more massiveness, which gradually, with increasing dynamics, leads to a climax on *f* (37–38 bars).

In the final section (39–56 bars), the theme **A** sounds in the main key of *F major*, against the background of the triplet accompaniment. Gradually, the melody moves from the lower register to the higher one. The onset of catharsis is emphasized by the transition to the dynamics of *pp* and the performance of the dance motif in a quiet cadence and a virtuoso passage, which leads to the coda, where the melody dissolves completely in *pp*.

Then there are transformations in the figurative content. The images, as it were, move in the opposite direction: the **Fifth bagatelle** is similar to the second. Both bagatelles are similar in their fast tempo, this is, of course, no longer joy, as in the second bagatelle, but some extreme of this excessive joy - drama, which is transformed in the fifth bagatelle. The **Sixth bagatelle** is a complete transformation of the first bagatelle, the intonation of the introduction makes them related, but at the same time shows an absolute rethinking of the first image. In the first bagatelle it is dramatic and static. In the sixth - it is already an image of balanced harmony, maturity, wisdom.

The **Fifth bagatelle** is performed at a fast tempo. It is extremely emotional, dramatic, virtuoso, distinguished by a large number of descending passages. In form - a complex three-part. The first section is dramatic (*D minor*), the second section is conciliatory-lyrical, the theme is lyrical-dramatic in nature, agitated, mobile, written in *G minor*, with development it reaches even greater drama and gradually passes into the third section - an inaccurate reprise (*D minor*).

The **Sixth Bagatelle** is a modified repetition of the First Bagatelle. The first section acquires a very agitated, dramatic character. The second section is lyrical but restrained. Intonationally close to the Second Bagatelle, this can be evidenced by the ascending movement along the scale (within the fifth).

All the composer's Bagatelles (Table 5) are generally lyrical. The lyrics acquire different shades. But at the same time, they are all quite restrained: the lyrics are restrained, noble, if the drama is static and restrained. In terms of intonation, they are clear, concise and contrasting. The first three (1 – 3/4, 2 – 2/4, 3 – 4/4) are richly written in the same time signature as 4-5-6 (4=1 – 3/4, 5=2 – 2/4, 6=3 – 4/4).

In general, Saint-Saëns's Bagatelles fit into the mainstream of his work, which is characterized by lyrical images and high romantic pathos. The analyzed cycle also presents such significant features in the composer's musical language as "mobile rhythms" and "sophisticated and diverse texture".

Table 5

№	Meter	Tonality	Dynamics, Articulation	Tempo	Image Content
1	3/4	g	<i>pp</i>	<i>Poco sostenuto</i>	Very tense, dramatic
2	2/4	Es H	<i>f</i>	<i>Allegro animato quasi presto</i>	Joyful, alive
3	4/4	B	<i>pp</i>	<i>Poco adagio</i>	Pastoral, melancholic
4	3/4	F		<i>Moderato assai</i>	Majestic, gallant
5	2/4	d	<i>fp</i>	<i>Allegro molto</i>	Impulsive, dramatic, rapid
6	4/4	g-G	<i>pp</i>	<i>Poco sostenuto</i>	Variant of the first bagatelle, restrained, majestic.

**Comparative characteristics of the tonality plan, means of expression and
programmaticity of Six Bagatelles, Op. 3 by C. Saint-Saëns**

Conclusions

The analysis made it possible to identify the main differences in the processes of evolution and rethinking of the romantic baguette genre in the piano works of B. Smetana and C. Saint-Saëns. We demonstrated that the piano baguettes of C. Saint-Saens are larger in volume, are parts of cycles, which indicate their developed dramaturgy and a certain artistic and plot line. For his baguettes, the composer uses a complex three-part form, which conveys a wide palette of experiences of the lyrical hero. These baguettes are characterized by a deep lyrical and philosophical-contemplative character.

In the works of B. Smetana, the piano baguettes are mainly written in a simple two-part form, reflect characteristic plots and experiences and have a specific psychological program.

In our opinion, the romantic bagatelle became fundamental for the further development not only of the genre, but also of a kind of “bagatelle style”, which found its embodiment in the work of composers of the 21st century. In particular, the tendency to combine bagatelles into cycles persists, simple forms, lyrical-melancholic character, meditateness, triadic meter, triplet rhythmic patterns, moderate tempos and quiet dynamics prevail.

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