A PEDAGOGICAL EXPLORATION OF SELECTED MOVEMENTS FROM PROKOFIEV’S

VISIONS FUGITIVES, OP. 22

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Sergei Sergeyevich Prokofiev (1891-1953) was a famous Russian composer and pianist. His piano talent was perhaps inspired by his accomplished amateur pianist mother, and his exceptional composition skills began to show at a young age (Fiess, 7-8). Prokofiev attended the St. Petersburg Conservatory at age 11. There he studied the compositional techniques of the Baroque period and was very also interested in composing contemporary music (Fiess, 8).

Composers in the twentieth century were constantly seeking ways to be innovative within their works. They experimented with most of the musical elements including harmony, melody, rhythm, texture, and form, and Prokofiev is no exception. In addition to his piano music, he composed concerti, ballets, chamber music, operas, symphonies, and other miscellaneous compositions. Pianists are very familiar with his nine piano sonatas and five piano concerti as well as the *Visions Fugitives*, Op. 22.

Prokofiev’s compositional output can be divided into three different periods: the Russian period (1891-1917), the foreign period (1918-35), and the Soviet period (1936-1953) (Firss, 7). He also provided a list of five characteristics that can be seen in his own music: 1) neo-classical, 2) modern, 3) toccata, 4) lyrical and 5) grotesque (Minturn, 24-25). Throughout his entire career, Prokofiev blended elements of the Western tradition with a sense of Russian nationalism, creating his own style (Fiess, 1). He can be considered a bridge between traditional musical language and the post-tonal world.

picture, or mood (Ashley, 100). Aside from varying in character, each of these pieces also employs its own form and style.

Because *Vision Fugitives* contains multiple movements with different characteristics, the work can easily serve as an excellent composition for students. A commanding and versatile pianistic technique is required to play a convincing performance of this work, which spans from late-intermediate to early-advanced levels. Considering these things, this collection provides excellent material for studying the music of Prokofiev and twentieth-century piano music as a whole.

This study focuses on movements one through ten, exploring how the composer approaches character, harmony, melody, rhythm, texture, and form. This paper also discusses some of the performance difficulties inherent within each of these pieces, and offers suggestions for teachers on how to effectively approach them.

*Analytical Comments*

*Form*

In Prokofiev’s Russian period, he did not experiment with form. He maintained traditional classical forms, which influenced the development of neo-classical music in twentieth-century music (Fiess, 49-50). The forms of the *Visions Fugitives* movements one through ten are simple and quite similar. Prokofiev often uses either variation or ternary forms. The forms of movements one through ten are shown in Figure 1.
Figure 1, Prokofiev *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, Nos. 1-10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>AA’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>ABA+Coda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>ABA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>ABAB’A’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>AB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>ABA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>ABA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>ABABA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>ABABA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>ABA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Movements one and five each have two sections, with the second section of movement one being a variation of the first. Movements two, three, six, seven, and ten are all in ternary form. Movements four, eight and nine are in double variation form.

The first movement, “Lentamente,” is in AA’ form, and it is the only movement in the first half of this collection to have just one theme. The end of this theme has a five-measure extension that sounds like a question and answer. The A’ section presents the same melody as in the first A section, which is enhanced by a chromatic inner voice and accompanied by the same harmonic progression (Mashner, 22).
Melody

Prokofiev creates disjunct melodies that frequently change direction and include leaps and octave displacement (Fiess, 29). The sixth movement presents this feature perfectly, as seen in Figure 2. The melody consists of many leaps throughout this piece. In measures 15-16, the lower voice takes over the melody, requiring hand crossings. An example of octave displacement of the melody is seen in the right hand in measures 7-8.

Figure 2, Prokofiev *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, No. 6, mm. 5-19

Prokofiev likes to use octatonic scales in his melodies. For example, the second movement has two octatonic scales. The opening disjunct melody in the A section uses pitches from an octatonic scale (G- A flat- B flat- B- D flat- D- E- F). The second octatonic scale (F
sharp- G- A- B flat- C- D flat- E flat- E) begins in the B section at measure 9 (Moellering, 28-29). Prokofiev also uses the same octatonic scale, this time beginning on C, in the B section of movement three (C- D flat- E flat- E- F sharp- G- A- B flat). (Moellering, 32).

The lively instrumental melody in movement four is based upon a four-note motive introduced at the beginning of the movement that spans a four-octave range, as seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3, Prokofiev *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, No. 4, mm. 1-4

![Figure 3](image.png)

At measure 9, the four-note motive is presented in a duet of two overlapping voices that change range frequently, as seen in Figure 4. These two voices might imitate alternating instruments in an orchestra. The composer uses little slurs combined with a 6/8 meter, a melody frequently interrupted by rests, and many accidentals to create the elegant but quirky melody.
Another example of a disjunct melody that expresses the instrumental character is movement five. This movement covers a wide range of the keyboard and includes many “wrong notes” that fall into the “grotesque” trait of Prokofiev’s compositional technique (Moellering, 35). This movement also depicts a humorous, scherzo style.

As previously mentioned, Prokofiev also has written lyrical melodies for this collection. One of the most typical is in the eighth movement, as seen in Figure 5. While this melody is vocal in character, it still presents the wide range that can be seen in Prokofiev’s other works.
Another example of a lyrical melody is movement seven. However, in this movement the composer uses a great number of rolled chords similar to those produced by a harp. The melody is written on the top of the rolled chords or on the bottom, as seen in Figure 6.
Prokofiev followed the basic rules of Rameau’s harmonic system until the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Elements of tertian harmony can be seen in Prokofiev’s Russian period, even while he was experimenting with non-traditional harmonies within tonal piano compositions. One harmonic trait that can be seen in Prokofiev’s music is the frequent addition of non-chord tones in triads and seventh chords, as seen in Figure 7 (Fiess, 13).

Another compositional element that can be found in Prokofiev’s music is the use of harmonic parallelism (Fiess, 15), which can be seen in the left-hand accompaniment throughout the first movement. While the right hand plays a lyrical and ethereal E phrygian melody for eight measures, the left-hand accompaniment consists of parallel seventh chords. This phrase is followed by a five-measure phrase consisting of both ascending and descending parallel chords in both hands. Beginning at measure 14, the composer restates the original phrase, this time with a new chromatic descending line added to the texture.
Prokofiev likes to use unexpected key relationships in his Russian-period piano works. A great example is the B’ section, measures 17-24, of movement four. In this section, the composer uses passagework built on arpeggios that descend by half-step, as seen in Figure 9.

Prokofiev likes to use single notes as tonal centers in *Visions Fugitives*. The first movement
exhibits this feature. This movement is mainly centered around E. The entire melody throughout the movement uses the diatonic scale. The opening descending perfect fifth from B to E, along with the repetitive E pitches within the melody, combined with the opening harmony of an Em7 chord strongly implies that this piece is in E minor. Although Prokofiev’s melody is clearly in Ephrygian, he creates a sense of harmonic ambiguity with the left hand’s chordal accompaniment, which uses parallel chromatic seventh chords (Fiess, 13).

*Rhythm*

In Prokofiev’s Russian period, he does not make any remarkable innovations in his rhythmic elements. Prokofiev uses syncopation in movement three. The right hand performs off beats throughout both A sections, and the upper voice of the left hand in the B section continues the syncopation, as seen in Figure 10.

Figure 10, Prokofiev *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, No. 3, mm. 19-24

In movement six, Prokofiev uses short two-note slurs in a 6/8 meter. These short motives
frequently begin with upbeats that propel the lively melody forward. The addition of much chromaticism combined with these rhythmic patterns creates the elegant but quirky melody, as seen in Figure 11.

Figure 11, Prokofiev *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, No. 6, mm. 1-4

Movement four consists of some interesting rhythmic features. The tempo marking of “Animato” in a lively 6/8 meter in the first half of this piece displays the driving “toccata” or “motoric” characteristic of Prokofiev’s music, with fast repeated chords and perpetual motion energy.

Figure 12, Prokofiev *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, No. 4, mm. 5-8

Suddenly there is a dramatic change to “Piu Sostenuto” in a plain triple-meter setting of continuous quarter-note chords. This sudden change in the rhythmic elements creates a drastic change in the character of the composition.
Pianistic Challenges

Movement one

The main difficulties in the first movement involve the dynamic levels and the shaping of the phrase. Marked pianissimo, the movement begins with a lyrical melody in the right hand, while the left hand accompanies with parallel seventh chords. Due to the delicate dynamic marking, performers may try to withhold their arm weight to prevent accents or loud dynamics. This can cause tension, however, and some notes may not sound in the left-hand seventh chords. To prevent this from happening, pianists should use one continuous arm movement for each phrase, keeping the arms fully relaxed. While doing so, the performer should make sure that the weight from the arm is transferred smoothly to each note with a slow attack into the keys to create the soft dynamic level.

Another difficulty found within the movement involves shaping the melody in measures 14-21. Here the composer presents the melody with a descending chromatic line played...
underneath the melody, as seen in Figure 14. This descent begins in the right hand, and eventually passes to the left hand at measure 19. The dynamic level is even quieter in this repetition, marked *ppp*. In order to hear the melody more prominently, the pianist could first play the two right-hand voices separately. A good practice technique is to play the lyrical melody with the right hand while playing the chromatic inner voice with the left hand to allow the ear to understand how the two lines should be balanced when played together. The pianist must listen carefully, as the goal is to be able to play both of these different voices with just the right hand. Once this is done, the student is ready to play both voices together with the right hand alone at a slow tempo. Within this step, the pianist should play the right hand slowly and quietly, repeating the top notes with accents, making sure that the accents come from the finger. The student can turn the fifth finger slightly to the side in order to voice to the top. When the student can put this together at a reasonable tempo, the left hand can be added to the practicing.

Figure 14, Prokofiev *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, No. 1, mm. 14-21
**Movement two**

The second movement demonstrates the influence of the romantic period in Prokofiev’s compositional technique. In this work one can see a similarity to Chopin nocturnes, which imitate the *bel canto* vocal style found within Italian arias. Chopin frequently includes sections of freely-flowing flourishes within melodies. In this movement, Prokofiev uses this same idea, as seen in Figure 15. In measures 7-8, three flourishes go from $C_7$ down to $C_4$, with each new flourish adding one more note within the tuplet than what preceded it. In measure 9, another flourish brings the melody back three octaves higher to the original $C_7$. Finally, in measure 10, the composer combines the three flourishes from measures 7-8 into a longer flowing phrase consisting of eighteen thirty-second notes. This creates a fast passage that the pianist needs to perform over two beats with many directional changes. A quick hand-position switch using a fully relaxed arm will be necessary for a successful execution of this passage. For all of these flourishes, the pianist may practice the right hand individually, utilizing the additive note method, in which successive repetitions of the passage begin with just one note and then add an additional note each time. The wrist should direct the motion while practicing this passage. In addition, using altered rhythmic patterns can help the pianist make the rhythm more precise. Moreover, in order to make sure the left-hand C on the fourth beat lines up with the right-hand B in m. 10, the performer may separate the flourish into two sections.
Within the A’ section, a complicated texture, presented on three staves, leads to another performance difficulty, which is sustaining the extended D throughout measures 14-16. The pianist must use the damper pedal to ensure that the D is held beginning on the second beat of measure 14, however the pedal needs to be changed between each measure because of the harmonic changes. Therefore, after playing each high-G bell tone, the pianist needs to move back to the D immediately but slowly depress the key without making any new sound before changing the pedal.

**Movement three**

There are three main technical challenges within the third movement: 1) playing the left-hand melody smoothly while holding lower notes, 2) connecting the upper voice within the chord progression in the right hand, and 3) sustaining overlapping seconds in the left-hand beginning at measure 13. This movement begins with a legato chromatic melody in the upper voice of the left hand over sustained bass notes. The right hand consists of successions of first-inversion triads, as seen in Figure 16. In addition to the main left-hand melody, the top voice in
the right hand presents a secondary melody. This melody is supposed to be connected, as indicated in the score. Similar to the first movement, one good practice strategy is to play the top note in the right hand while playing the bottom thirds of the chord with the left hand to get the ear accustomed to how the voicing should sound. The pianist should then practice this with the right hand alone, alternating the top note of the chord between fourth and fifth fingers to maintain the legato, without getting tense.

Figure 16, Prokofiev *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, No. 3, mm. 1-3

![Musical notation](image)

In some instances, the distance between the left-hand bass notes and the melody is more than an octave, which inhibits the performer’s ability to play the melody smoothly. For example, as seen in Figure 17, measures 7-9 require the pianist to find a left-hand fingering using primarily the first and second fingers to play the top melody smoothly, while still holding the bass notes using selective pedaling. The overlapping quarter-note rhythmic pattern in the left hand at measure 13 might mistakenly be played as alternating eighth notes, which will create a less-than-desired quality of sound. Performers must be careful to sustain both the lower and upper seconds throughout this section.
Movement four

The fourth movement has many leaps and fast passages played simultaneously in both hands, which is the main technical challenge in this movement. Playing the leaps from measures 8-9 without any pause is a challenge, which can be alleviated if the pianist thinks of the right arm leading the hand moving to the right direction, and the left hand moving to the left. There are many big leaps combined with a fast tempo in measures 9-16, particularly in the right hand, as seen in Figure 18. An effective way to practice this is by separating this section into small groups, playing from one macrobeat to the next and stopping on the first note of the next beat, overlapping the beats with each new restart. The performer can then begin to “chunk” these groups together until the entire passage can be performed smoothly.
The simultaneous passagework in both hands in the B section is another pianistic challenge. In this section, Prokofiev combines arpeggiated major-seventh chords in the left hand with various scalar passages in the right hand, changing the patterns every half measure. Sometimes the distances between the hands are wide, and the pianist may feel that there is not enough time to find the notes. There is a strategy that may help to locate the notes quicker. The pianist can begin by blocking the left-hand chords in succession. For the right hand, the pianist should analyze the pitch content for each group, and then combine this passagework with the blocked chords. After completing these steps, the pianist should be prepared to perform the score as written.

**Movement five**

Fast leaps are also one of the main difficulties in the fifth movement. Remembering to focus on left and right motion is still applicable for the quick hand-position changes within the fast tempo in the first section, measures 1-9. Beginning at measure 12, Prokofiev writes off-beat
accents in the left hand within overlapping hand positions, as seen in Figure 19. Therefore, there is a tendency to feel the pulse based upon the left hand. However, focusing on the left hand will not provide a stable tempo and may cause the two hands to play unevenly. For this reason, the pianist needs to listen carefully to the right hand to maintain a steady pulse.

Figure 19, Prokofiev *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, No. 5, mm. 13-19

*Movement six*

From a technique standpoint, movement six may not be considered difficult. The main challenge is the overlapping and crossing hand positions combined with the two-note slurs throughout the entire movement. Therefore, the pianist needs to make sure to raise the top hand wrist to ensure that both hands are comfortable. Slow, careful practicing is necessary to be able to perform the differing articulations while changing hand positions.

*Movement seven*

The character of this movement is that of a lyrical nocturne (Moellering, 36). The left hand has slow arpeggiations outlining chords in fourths and fifths while the right hand melody is
accompanied by rolled chords. In the first section, the melody is presented on top of the chords, while in the B section, as seen in Figure 20, the melody is moved to the bottom of the chords. Also, many of the rolled chords are more than one octave wide. Therefore, practicing the right hand individually becomes necessary, especially to focus on good voicing. For each rolled chord, the pianist needs to use a free arm motion, while emphasizing the melody notes with the fifth finger or thumb accented as necessary.

Figure 20, Prokofiev *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, No. 7, mm. 7-12

*Movement eight*

The opening melody is presented three times in movement eight. Prokofiev changes the texture and placement of the melody for each of the repetitions. The most challenging settings are the second and third ones, where the melody alternates between the two hands. Therefore, the pianist needs to give special attention to maintaining the continuity of the melody. The first repetition begins in measure 11 with the melody presented within a complicated texture of an ostinato on the top and two voices in the left hand. The second repetition is from measure 21 until the end of this movement with sixteenth-note broken arpeggios in a wider range above the
In both of these repetitions, the composer marks the upper voice pianissimo while the melody must be performed *espressivo*. For this reason, it is necessary to practice all of the voices individually. The pianist needs to practice the melody separately with alternating hands listening carefully so that the line sounds as if it is being played in one hand. The performer also should play both upper voices with a slow speed into the key to create a very soft, ethereal sound. Once each voice has been practiced carefully, they can then be combined, making sure the voices are balanced.

**Movement nine**

Movement nine, marked allegretto, begins with 10\textsuperscript{th} intervals in the right hand, as seen in Figure 21. Some pianists may not able to reach this interval; therefore, rolling these chords may be necessary. Following these opening chords, the right hand consists of running sixteenth notes that express a rapid rhythmic feeling in this piece. Moreover, the rapid repeated notes and motivic patterns in the right hand within a wide range are like an etude. In order to perform with rhythmic precision, the pianist may use altered rhythmic patterns to practice the right hand alone. Meanwhile, the left hand maintains arpeggios with wide ranges. The performer may reference practice techniques for the left hand arpeggios as already discussed for movement four.

Figure 21, Prokofiev *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, No. 9, mm. 1-3
Movement ten

In movement ten, Prokofiev uses the overlapping hand positions again in the B section, measures 18-30, with directions in the score to change the hand positions while playing the lyrical melody. However, the right hand must be performed legato while the left hand is staccato.

Conclusion

Prokofiev’s *Visions Fugitives*, Op. 22 includes twenty short movements, which he composed during the last two years of his Russian period. In the music of this period, he admired traditional forms and compositional techniques. At the same time, Prokofiev experimented with harmony and melody, and he started to develop his own musical style. The first ten movements that are discussed in this paper each consist of interesting characteristics and involve various pianistic techniques. This collection could be an appropriate transition to Prokofiev’s advanced piano sonatas from other keyboard works such as the *Music for Young Children*, Op. 65. By studying the *Visions Fugitives*, a pianist is able to learn how to express soft dynamics without tension, use additive-note practicing methods to learn flourishes and passagework, define the melody within chord progressions or complex textures, make rapid leaps or fast octave displacement in a wide range of the keyboard, use hand crossings or overlapping hand positions, and play melodies within chords or alternated hands. It is appropriate for late-intermediate to early-advanced levels. By performing this collection, pianists not only are able to experience the characters and compositional techniques of Prokofiev’s Russian period, they can also understand different practicing methods.
Bibliography


