

Abstract

Dissertation: Eugen d'Albert (1864–1932) and His Piano Sonata, Op. 10: Its Use of Unifying Devices and Formal Structure

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Eugen d'Albert was once one of the world's most famous performers on the piano. However, today his works receive little attention in concert halls. This paper seeks to illuminate his life in relation to his piano output and discuss his most ambitious work: his Piano Sonata in F-sharp Minor, Op. 10. A native of Scotland and product of the National Training School for Music of London, d'Albert traveled to Austria with Hans Richter and studied in Weimar with Franz Liszt. He performed throughout Europe and became a leading interpreter of the music of Bach and Beethoven. Unfortunately, his public persona was blemished by his many marriages, infidelities, and divorces. Only a few years after his death, he fell into relative obscurity.

D'Albert's most mature works are contained in his Opp. 10–12, including a piano sonata, string quartet, and piano concerto. The Piano Sonata in F-sharp Minor, Op. 10, pays homage to Beethoven, Bach, and Brahms and demonstrates an economic use of motivic material, innovative approach to theme, and unifying structure across movements. The first movement closely mirrors elements of Brahms's Piano Sonata in F-sharp Minor, Op. 2, by imitating its opening thematic material and approach to motivic ideas. This sonata-allegro movement exhibits a clear form that is unified by small motives. The second movement, a variation set, uses a dual-themed approach to provide thematic variety while incorporating a formal pattern that alludes to rondo and ternary forms. This movement recalls Beethoven in its austere sincerity, thematic contour, and formal approach. The third movement is a triple fugue that recalls J. S. Bach's *St. Anne* fugue. This rare instance of the triple fugue contains three separate expositions and reintroduces each subject in the final entry of each subsequent fugue.

The Sonata presents unity across movements via the motivic devices (echoing the motives used in the first movement), recurring gestures found in the introduction and close of movements, and in the general increase of complexity from the first to third movement. This work—one of only a few effective late-Romantic piano sonatas—deserves more concert exposure.