

Jody Rockmaker's *Character Pieces* for Viola and Piano (2014): A Study and Recording

by

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ABSTRACT

This document is a study of Jody Rockmaker's *Character Pieces* for viola and piano (2014). The study begins with discussion of the work's origin, then goes on to describe each of its three movements in some detail. A recording of the work with the author as violist is included.

The composer is a former violist and worked with the author on developing *Character Pieces*. Although the work is demanding, it was written with consideration of viola technique and the instrument's characteristics and sound.

The composition is of approximately 15 minutes' duration. Each movement is in a different tempo, fast-slow-fast, and with individual expression, though the pitch organization of all three movements is based on one hexachordal set. Rockmaker's intent was to depict certain personality traits often found among violists. These attributes are evident in the titles of the movements: the Class Clown, the Mellow Fellow, and the Hipster-Intellect. The music, in addition to being intricately organized and technically suited to both instruments, also expressively portrays these character types.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF MUSIC EXAMPLES	iii
CHAPTER	
1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION.....	1
2 CLASS CLOWN	6
3 MELLOW FELLOW	21
4 HIPSTER INTELLECT	29
REFERENCES	39
APPENDIX	
A [CD TRACK TITLES AND RECORDING INFORMATION]	40
B [COPYRIGHT PERMISSION]	42

LIST OF MUSIC EXAMPLES

Example		Page
1.	Example 1: <i>Character Pieces</i> , First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 1-12	8
2.	Example 2: <i>Character Pieces</i> , First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 1-4	9
3.	Example 3: <i>Character Pieces</i> , First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 10-12	9
4.	Example 4: <i>Character Pieces</i> , First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 1-12	11
5.	Example 5: <i>Character Pieces</i> , First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 23-29	13
6.	Example 6: <i>Character Pieces</i> , First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 35-40	14
7.	Example 7: <i>Character Pieces</i> , First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 44-54	15
8.	Example 8: <i>Character Pieces</i> , First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 94-107	17
9.	Example 9: <i>Character Pieces</i> , First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 148-156	19
10.	Example 10: <i>Character Pieces</i> , Second Movement (Mellow Fellow), mm.1-8
	22
11.	Example 11: <i>Character Pieces</i> , Second Movement (Mellow Fellow), mm.10-14
	23
12.	Example 12a: Hindemith, <i>Der Schwanendreher</i> , First Movement, mm. 1-18	25
13.	Example 12b: <i>Character Pieces</i> , Second Movement (Mellow Fellow), mm. 1-9
	26
14.	Example 13a: Hindemith, <i>Der Schwanendreher</i> , First Movement, m. 1	27
15.	Example 13b: <i>Character Pieces</i> , Second Movement (Mellow Fellow), m. 9	27
16.	Example 14a: Hindemith, <i>Der Schwanendreher</i> , First Movement, m. 1	27
17.	Example 14b: <i>Character Pieces</i> , Second Movement (Mellow Fellow), m. 9	28
18.	Example 15a: Hindemith, <i>Der Schwanendreher</i> , First Movement, mm. 1-3	28
19.	Example 15b: <i>Character Pieces</i> , Second Movement (Mellow Fellow), m. 9	28

Example	Page
20. Example 16: <i>Character Pieces</i> , Third Movement (Hipster-Intellect), mm. 1-12....	32
21. Example 17: <i>Character Pieces</i> , Third Movement (Hipster-Intellect), mm. 139-59	35
22. Example 18: <i>Character Pieces</i> , Third Movement (Hipster-Intellect), mm. 171-90	37

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Jody Rockmaker, the composer of *Character Pieces*, is a professor in the School of Music at Arizona State University. Rockmaker and I worked together in the ASU music administration office from 2011 to 2014. He was an Associate Director of the School and I was a student assistant. While we worked together, he would make viola-player jokes to me, but each time I corrected him, explaining how “viola jokes” don’t fit in the 21st century, because more composers appreciate the viola than ever before. One day, Rockmaker told me that he used to play the viola, though it was 35 years ago. I encouraged him to relearn the viola and offered to be his teacher. These lessons, often riotous, led eventually to the composition of *Character Pieces*.

Since the 18th century, there have been jokes aimed at violists’ perceived inferiority in music. The viola was regarded as a less-important instrument with its role often being as a filler and its parts having a reputation for being uncomplicated. Mozart stands out as an exception to this attitude. He played the viola, and his changing the string quartet into a quintet with the addition of a second viola gave the instrument increased exposure. By the 20th century, composers had recognized the potential of the viola, which was exemplified by such violists as Lionel Tertis (1876-1975), Paul Hindemith (1895-1963), and William Primrose (1904-1982). These musicians demonstrated the viola’s capabilities as an equal instrument in ensembles as well as a solo instrument.

In 2013, Rockmaker began to relearn the viola with me. To remind him of the viola techniques that he had forgotten, I made a decision that he needed to have a better understanding of shifting and playing in different positions with proper left-hand

configuration. I assigned him the piece that I thought would most help him, *Der Schwanendreher* (1935) by Paul Hindemith. Hindemith's compositions bring out the best sound of the viola while providing opportunities for perfect hand positioning and shifting. This particular work contains extensive chordal passages with double and triple stops that are complex, designed to help students develop their playing. While Rockmaker was working on the piece, he was astounded by Hindemith's compositional techniques, and was inspired to compose his own work that would also bring out the viola's rich sound, especially with chordal textures. This composition was completed in 2014 and was titled *Character Pieces*.

Rockmaker summarized our experience in his program notes to be included with the score:

Character Pieces for viola and piano is dedicated with much gratitude to my viola teacher, Hyun Sun (Gloria) Yoon, who renewed my love for this wonderful instrument. At an early stage of my studies, Gloria assigned Hindemith's *Schwanendreher* as an exercise for shifting and hand position. I had always thought of the work as way beyond my technical abilities. (Perhaps it still is, but at least I can get my fingers around the notes.) As I started to learn the piece I realized that the shifts, fingering patterns, and hand positions lent themselves to the note sequences and overall pitch scheme of the piece. Instrumental technique and compositional process were intertwined to a very high degree. One can picture Hindemith composing, viola in one hand, and a pencil in the other. I endeavored to do the same in these *Character Pieces*.¹

Jody Rockmaker's experiences of playing the viola helped him well to compose a work as substantial and engaging as *Character Pieces*. Born in New York in 1961, Rockmaker grew up in Brooklyn. His parents were artists, which, along with their passion for music, influenced Rockmaker's artistic taste and musical interests. Rockmaker often

¹ Jody Rockmaker, *Character Pieces*, "Program Notes," 2014

finds topics from his family and Jewish culture that inspire his musical compositions, such as *Yiddish Choruses* (2006),² which is dedicated to his family; *Child's Play* (2006),³ which pays homage to his daughter's love of Disney toys; and *South Mountain Sunset* (1997),⁴ a reference to the scenery near his home in Phoenix, Arizona.

Rockmaker studied at the Manhattan School of Music during a high-school preparatory program, and also at the New England Conservatory and the Hochschule für Musik und darstellende Kunst in Vienna. He received his Ph.D. in Composition from Princeton University. He has studied with such renowned composers as Milton Babbitt, Miriam Gideon, Edward T. Cone, Erich Urbanner, Claudio Spies, and Malcolm Peyton. Rockmaker has received a number of awards, including a Barlow Endowment commission, a Fulbright Grant, two BMI Awards for Young Composers, an ASCAP Grant, the George Whitfield Chadwick Medal from the New England Conservatory, and a National Orchestral Association Orchestral Reading Fellowship. He has held residencies at the MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, the Djerassi Resident Artists Program, and Villa Montalvo, and he also held a Composition Fellowship at the Tanglewood Music Center. Previously he taught at Stanford University and is currently an Associate Professor at the Arizona State University School of Music. Additionally, he served on the board of Earplay New Music Ensemble and was Associate Director of the Arizona State University School of Music from 2011–2013.⁵

² Jody Rockmaker, *Yiddish Choruses*, accessed January 30, 2019
<https://composers.com/compositions/7818/yiddish-choruses>

³ Jody Rockmaker, *Child's Play*, accessed January 30, 2019
<http://composers.com/compositions/4577/childs-play-string-quartet>

⁴ Jody Rockmaker, *South Mountain Sunset*, accessed January 30, 2019
<https://composers.com/compositions/4598/south-mountain-sunset>

⁵ Jody Rockmaker, "Biography," accessed May 16, 2018
<http://www.jodyrockmaker.com>

In addition to *Character Pieces*, Rockmaker has composed two other works that feature the viola:

South Mountain Sunset
for Viola and Piano (1997)

Duration: 5 min

First Performance: Arizona State University, October 1998

South Mountain Sunset is the first work completed by the composer in his new home in Phoenix, Arizona. The composition was inspired by the great beauty of the American Southwest, particularly the stunning sunsets witnessed each summer evening over the majestic South Mountain. The music tries to express the vastness, grandeur, and color of the beautiful landscape.⁶

Child's Play
for String Quartet (2006)

Duration: 15 min

Instrumentation: 2 Violins, Viola, Violoncello

Movements:

- I. Why Can't the Sky be Pink?
- II. Rebecca Sings Like a Ballerina
- III. Crunchy Bears

Child's Play for string quartet was completed by the composer in January 2006, after a year and a half of work. The composer says, "The piece may well be subtitled, 'The Disney in my life,' since the underlying program of each of the three movements involves his daughter's interactions with some Disney product. The first movement, 'Why Can't the Sky be Pink?', depicts the frustration that 3-year-old Rebecca felt while playing a Winnie-the-Pooh computer game. The title of the second movement, 'Rebecca Sings Like a Ballerina,' came from a comment the composer overheard after attending a stage production of *The Lion King*. The title of the last movement is simply a corruption of the now-classic movie, *Country Bears*."⁷

⁶ Jody Rockmaker, *South Mountain Sunset*, "Program Notes," 1997

⁷ Jody Rockmaker, *Child's Play*, accessed June 30, 2018

<http://composers.com/compositions/4577/childs-play-string-quartet>

I have performed *Character Pieces* in concert three times. The premiere was on Saturday, April 25, 2015, at the ASU Recital Hall for a concert organized by Professor Nancy Buck. After the performance, many audience members showed interest in the work, indicating its success. *Character Pieces* was performed again on Saturday, October 31, 2015, along with Paul Hindemith's *Der Schwanendreher* and Alfred Schnittke's viola concerto for my final degree recital in the ASU Recital Hall. The third performance was at the Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts on Monday, March 21, 2016, in a concert of new music chosen by the ASU composition faculty.

The recording of *Character Pieces* that accompanies this document is intended to promote public interest in the work as well as other compositions by Jody Rockmaker. The recording was made on September 24, 2018, at The Blue Door Studios in Phoenix, Arizona, and performed by Hyun Sun (Gloria) Yoon, viola, and Dr. Jeremy Peterman, piano. Noah Guttell served as recording engineer.

CHAPTER 2

CLASS CLOWN

Jody Rockmaker's *Character Pieces* (2014) is for viola and piano. Nearly fifteen minutes in duration, it is divided into three movements, each with its own tempo and character and organized in fast-slow-fast order. Rockmaker says of these movements:

As I relearned the viola after a 35-year hiatus, I thought of the type of person that takes up this noble instrument. Certain personality traits seem common to the breed. This work explores a different attribute in each of the three movements.⁸

The personalities are indicated in the titles of the movements: I. Class Clown, II. Mellow Fellow, and III. Hipster-Intellect. The first movement is vivacious and humorous, the second is relaxed and easy going, and the third is bustling with jumpy, driving energy throughout. As is evident in his choice to include a pun in the title of his work, Rockmaker himself would fall into his self-defined category of Class Clown.

The first movement describes vividly the characteristics of violists who are filled with humor and mischief. Throughout the movement, the viola and piano parts are equally virtuosic and linked to each other through the exchange and development of motives.

The movement is in a rollicking 6/8 meter from start to finish, with the tempo specified as dotted quarter note equals 72. It is marked "Playfully," and so to be true to the depiction of the Class Clown, the performers should give it a scherzo-like quality. Rockmaker assisted with the interpretation by including carefully marked dynamics and adding expressive directions in the score, such as *crisply* (m.1), *lilting* (m.25), *with growing*

⁸ Jody Rockmaker, *Character Pieces*, "Program Notes," 2014

energy (m. 52), *maintain intensity!* (m.89), *again, with growing energy* (m.113), and *a bit bombastic!* (m.119).

The movement is constructed loosely in sonata form: an exposition (mm. 1-46), which is repeated; a development section (mm. 47-100); a free recapitulation (mm. 101-147); and a small coda (mm. 148-156). The exposition unfolds overall by accumulating figures and ideas. It opens with a viola melody consisting primarily of eighth notes (mm. 1-9). A transition (mm. 10-22) adds sixteenth-note figures in the piano that make the musical energy increase as the viola continues with eighth-note fragments. The second theme (mm. 23-35) introduces a new, syncopated rhythm in the piano while the viola takes over the sixteenths. Finally, a grand closing section (mm. 35-46) combines all of these rhythmic elements in polyphonic arrangement, like that of a three-voice invention.

The development, too, expands from a sparse restatement of the opening theme, to continuing groups of sixteenths, with a closing section of thirty measures in which constant sixteenths rise from *piano* to a *fortissimo* climax, then falling back to a viola cadenza. The recapitulation includes variation, but overall it, like the exposition, surges in intensity with rising crescendos, culminating in a densely polyphonic ending. The coda restores calm and quiet. Within these large shapes, many abrupt changes of dynamic and figuration create a joking character, as do the back-and-forth exchanges of the viola and the piano. The frantic polyphonic portions suggest hysterical laughter.

The movement opens with a viola melody supported by sparse chords (Example 1). The viola's first phrase, mm. 1-4, is an arch shape, with leaps rising to a sustained high note in the middle, followed by a descent. The melody is full of large leaps, which suggest the high spirits of the class clown. The viola's second phrase, mm. 5-10, begins like the

first phrase, but is higher, and with a much broader gesture. The high, sustained note in m. 6 is a minor seventh higher than the peak of the first phrase. The downward side of the arch is delineated as before, but the phrase is extended with constant eighth notes (mm. 8-9) that increase the energy for a loud and high finish.

Example 1: *Character Pieces*, First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 1-12

Playfully, ♩ = 72

Viola

Piano

5

10

In the opening phrase, two quite different melodic motives are introduced and developed throughout the movement. Both are found in m. 1. The first motive is the shape

of a leap followed by a step in the opposite direction. It is indicated by the viola's leap from D3 up to C4, then its step down to B-flat3 (Example 2). This leap motive occurs again immediately, from the B-flat3 up to G4 and step down to F-sharp4. On the descending side of the arch shape, mm. 2-3, the motive is inverted to a leap down (from G4 to B-flat3) and a step up (B-flat3 to C4). Furthermore, within these first four measures, the motive appears in retrograde inversion (F-sharp4-E4-A-flat4) and retrograde (C4-D4-E3), as shown in Example 2.

Example 2: *Character Pieces*, First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 1-4

The image shows a single staff of music in 3/8 time. The first measure contains the original motive: a leap from D3 to C4 followed by a step down to B-flat3. This is labeled 'The first melodic motive (a leap followed by a step)' with a dynamic marking of *p*. The second measure shows the 'Retrograde inversion' of the motive, labeled 'Retrograde inversion' with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The third measure shows the 'Inversion' of the motive, labeled 'Inversion' with a dynamic marking of *p*. The fourth measure shows the 'Retrograde' of the motive, labeled 'Retrograde' with a dynamic marking of *p*.

The second basic motive found in m. 1 is a stepwise scale pattern. In its first appearance, it comprises three notes, G4 to F-sharp4 to E4, but at the start of the transition (Example 3), the three-note stepwise motion is lengthened into a straight-line shape, expressed as a sixteenth-note rhythm, and juxtaposed with the leap motive (m. 11).

Example 3: *Character Pieces*, First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 10-12

The image shows a two-staff musical score for measures 10-12. The top staff is in alto clef (C4-clef) and the bottom staff is in treble clef. Measure 10 shows the 'Leap motive' in the alto staff, labeled 'Leap motive' with a dynamic marking of *mf*. Measure 11 shows the 'Lengthened straight-line shape' in the alto staff, labeled 'Lengthened straight-line shape' with a dynamic marking of *mp*. The bottom staff contains a piano accompaniment with a sixteenth-note rhythm.

These motives are related to the type of pitch organization Rockmaker uses. All three movements of *Character Pieces* are based on a single hexachord type. A hexachord is a collection of six pitches that can be arranged in scale (stepwise) order. The particular hexachord involved here consists of half step, whole step, whole step, whole step, whole step, up or down, which can be represented with half steps numbered as 1 2 2 2 2. The first hexachord in *Class Clown*, circled in Example 4, is downward: G F-sharp E D C B-flat. The inversion of this hexachord appears in mm. 2-4, circled in the score, namely G G-sharp B-flat C D E. The circles in the rest of Example 4 show how transpositions of the 1 2 2 2 2 hexachord appear in the music. Each hexachord is treated as an unordered pitch set: its six pitches appear in any order and may be repeated, until a new transposition of the hexachord is introduced. Since the basic hexachord consists primarily of whole steps, it is suited to the two motivic shapes. The leap motive usually contains a large leap, that of a sixth or a seventh, which is created by octave displacement of adjacent pitches in the hexachord. The hexachord obviously lends itself to the straight-line, scalar motive.

Example 4: *Character Pieces*, First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 1-12, with Hexachords Labeled

The image displays a musical score for the first movement of *Character Pieces*, mm. 1-12. It features two systems of music: Viola and Piano. The Viola part is in 3/8 time, and the Piano part is in 3/8 time. The score is annotated with hexachord labels and fingerings, and includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mf*, *f*, and *mp*.

System 1 (mm. 1-4):

- Viola:** Hexachord 1: G F# E D C Bb (1 2 2 2 2). Hexachord 2: G G# Bb C D E (1 2 2 2 2).
- Piano:** Starts with a *p* dynamic and the instruction "crisply".

System 2 (mm. 5-8):

- Viola:** Hexachord 3: F E D C Bb Ab (5). Hexachord 4: F F# Ab Bb C D. Hexachord 5: Eb D C Bb Ab Gb. Hexachord 6: Eb E Gb Ab Bb C.
- Piano:** Dynamics include *mp*, *f*, and *mp*.

System 3 (mm. 10-12):

- Viola:** Hexachord 7: D C# B A G F.
- Piano:** Hexachord 8: D# E F# G# A# C. Hexachord 9: G# A B C# D# F. Hexachord 10: E F G A B C#.

The many whole-step intervals within the hexachords yield chords that are not overly dissonant. Of the eleven chords in the piano in the opening theme, mm. 1-9, for example, only four contain any minor second/major seventh intervals. The other seven chords are subsets of the whole-tone scale.

The pairing of hexachords and the rate at which they combine affect the density of pitch classes and the pace of the music. In the opening theme shown in Example 4 above, for example, the hexachords are paired: first, the hexachord downward from G is followed by the hexachord upward from G; the next two (mm. 5-6) are downward and upward from F; and the final two are downward and upward from E-flat. A hexachord and its inversion from the same pitch share four pitches, so only seven different pitch classes are sounded in mm. 1-4. This hexachord pair occupies 24 beats. The next pair, from F, occupies only 16 beats, and so the change to the next pair, on E-flat, is accelerated, and the hexachord downward from E-flat occupies only six beats, the shortest one thus far. This more-rapid change in hexachords occurs where the viola's melody completes its second arch shape (m. 7, beat 4) but continues for an additional two measures that rise to a *forte* finish and sets up the beginning of the transition in m. 10. At the same time, the piano changes chords more frequently. The sprightly opening theme does not rest, but rather connects to the start of the transition.

The transition, mm. 10-22, breaks into two parts. It starts with a new figure in the piano, sixteenth-note hexachords in normal order, hence in straight-line shape. At first the new sixteenth-note figure alternates with eighth-note leaps from the first theme in the viola (Example 4, above, mm. 10-12). The two motives create a dialogue between the viola and the piano: straight line - leap - straight line - leap - straight line - leap. In the second part of the transition, mm. 17-22, the viola and piano combine. The viola plays a different tempo while the sixteenth-note figures in the piano are strung together to rise twice to a peak, then they fall for two measures into the start of the second theme. The *decrescendo* through this fall and the sustained notes in the viola bring this energetic transition to a fading close that connects to the quiet second theme.

The beginning of the second theme, mm. 23-31, is marked by a new, syncopated accompaniment figure in the piano (Example 5). Marked *lilting*, the theme has a relaxed, lyrical, swing character, quite different from the scherzo-like first theme. After the two measures of piano accompaniment, the viola begins with the leap motive from the first theme, but then focuses on the sixteenth-note, one-directional figure from the transition (Example 5, mm. 25, 27-28, 30). At m. 31, the piano drops out and the viola suddenly takes off with a solo that reverts to the rhythm and leaps of the first theme, now *forte* and *poco agitato*. This passage is like a short cadenza for the viola, and the last note, A-flat, m. 35, closes the second theme.

Example 5: *Character Pieces*, First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 23-29, Beginning of Second Theme

The image shows a musical score for the beginning of the second theme. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system starts at measure 23, with the text "23 Second Theme begins here" above the first staff. The piano accompaniment (piano part) is circled in red and labeled "New Syncopated Rhythm". The tempo is marked "p" and "lilting". The second system starts at measure 26, with the text "26" above the first staff. The piano accompaniment continues with a similar syncopated rhythm. The third system starts at measure 29, with the text "29" above the first staff. The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythm. The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano accompaniment and a viola line.

The final A-flat overlaps with the re-entry of the piano, which begins the closing of the exposition, mm. 35-46 (Example 6). The closing summarizes motives from the

exposition, now developing them contrapuntally. The piano here brings back the sixteenth-note figure from the transition and second theme. As shown in Example 6, this return in m.36 launches a polyphonic treatment of the sixteenths against the syncopated eighths from the start of the second theme, now in the viola (mm. 36-39).

Example 6: *Character Pieces*, First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 35-40, Closing of Exposition

Contrapuntal Treatment of Motives

The musical score for Example 6, titled "Contrapuntal Treatment of Motives," spans measures 35 to 40. It is written in 3/4 time and features a contrapuntal treatment of motives. Measure 35 is marked with a box 'D' and a dynamic of *mp*. Measure 36 is marked with a dynamic of *p*. Measure 38 is marked with a dynamic of *f*. The score includes a bassoon part and a piano part with treble and bass staves.

For the first time, an identifiable functional chord appears in the piano, mm. 44-46, the last three measures of the exposition (Example 7). The piano outlines a subset of the hexachord from mm. 40-43, D - F-sharp - A - C. This major-minor seventh chord lingers for three measures, long enough to sound like a dominant seventh chord. With the repeat

of the exposition, this chord connects back to m. 1, where G is the lowest note of the piano's chord, the highest pitch in the viola, and the starting note of the first hexachord. Thus, there is a humorous moment of tonal focus to go along with the conventional repeat of the exposition.

Example 7: *Character Pieces*, First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 44-54, End of Exposition and Start of Development

44

47

51 *with growing energy*

The image displays three systems of musical notation for the first movement of 'Class Clown' from the 'Character Pieces' by Johannes Brahms. Each system consists of three staves: a top staff in bass clef, a middle staff in treble clef, and a bottom staff in bass clef. The first system (measures 44-46) shows a piano introduction with a *p* dynamic. The second system (measures 47-49) features a *mf* dynamic in the top staff and *p* dynamics in the piano accompaniment, with the instruction *p lilting*. The third system (measures 50-54) is marked *with growing energy* and includes a *f* dynamic in the piano accompaniment and a *p* dynamic in the top staff.

The development, mm. 47-100, is roughly the same length as the surrounding exposition, mm. 1-46, and recapitulation, mm. 101-147. The development divides into two sections. The first section, mm. 47-70, deals with motives from the exposition, as can be seen in Example 7, above, and the second section, mm. 71-100, is characterized by nearly constant sixteenths in the viola. Overall, these sixteenths grow from *piano, misterioso*, to *fortissimo* groups in the highest register. Although the register drops from this peak to the end of the development, the violist is instructed to *maintain intensity!*. The piano part drifts away, leaving the viola to end the development section by itself. The minor seventh (A-sharp and G-sharp) in mm. 97-99 anticipates the minor seventh to come at the start of the recapitulation, m. 101 (Example 8), which opens with the minor seventh leap D-C.

Example 8: *Character Pieces*, First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 94-107, Beginning of Recapitulation

94

98

poco rall. a tempo H

pizz. pp misterioso

104

with growing energy

arco p playfully

p playfully

As shown in Example 8, the piano and the viola switch roles. The opening melody comes back in the piano, down an octave and shortened, while the viola has accompanying *pizzicato* chords. The second part of the melody in the piano, however, is slightly deformed

while the viola returns to *arco* and adds short groups of sixteenths that recall the piano in the transition. The piano thus continues the melody and chords of the first theme while the viola overlaps with figures from the first part of the transition. The sweeping sixteenth-note gestures from the end of the transition appear in the viola, now with their directions reversed.

The second theme returns in a more recognizable form than the first theme. From here through the closing, the material corresponds in general to that of the exposition. Unlike the first theme, the second theme returns intact, but with some transpositions. Its character, however, is different. All of the dynamics are louder, and the expressive mark *lilting* is replaced with *broadly*. The generally bigger second theme is a step in the growth of the recapitulation from the sparse first theme to a more active, louder closing.

The end of the second theme overlaps with the start of the closing (m. 137), as in the exposition. Both closings are identical, but the recapitulation transposes the material higher, for a grander effect. The canonic figures in the exposition, mm. 44-46, now become the beginning of the coda (Example 9). The coda thins down both in dynamics and texture. The piano plays the two-voice canonic, playful figure, and the viola recalls the opening melody in mm. 152-153. The movement closes with the same notes (D, C, and B-flat) that opened the movement in the first measure.

Example 9: *Character Pieces*, First Movement (Class Clown), mm. 148-156, Coda

poco a poco calmo
148

151

154

For the violist to depict the character of the Class Clown in this movement, eighth notes are best played with martelé bow technique to keep these notes separated and light. For the passage in mm. 71-96, which grows in intensity for 26 measures, the violist should start at *piano* using very tiny bow lengths and then gradually extend the lengths to increase the dynamics and energy level. Also, it is helpful for the violist to reinterpret

enharmonically in both m. 86 and m. 131. In m. 86, the D-flat and B have a diminished-3rd relationship. So, if one reads the first three notes, E-flat, D-flat, and B, as D-sharp, C-sharp, and B, it will be easier to play this rapid passage. In the same manner, in m. 131, one may read C and G-flat as C and F-sharp.

CHAPTER 3

MELLOW FELLOW

The second movement features the character Mellow Fellow, the type of violist who is easy-going and relaxed. It includes a long cadenza for the viola, which suggests that the Mellow Fellow is either day-dreaming or meditative. In a slow 5/4 meter, the music does not have a strong metric pulse and is calm, like the Mellow Fellow. The portions for viola with piano stay mostly at *piano* and *pianissimo*. Rockmaker specifies in the score a tempo of quarter note equals 40 and provides the instruction, *Simply stated and relaxed*. Lasting less than four minutes, Mellow Fellow clearly functions as the slow movement of a fast-slow-fast arrangement.

This movement begins with viola and piano together (mm. 1-8). The viola then has a solo, *Ad libitum* cadenza, “with rubato.” The movement ends with a varied return of the opening section for both instruments (mm. 13-21).

In the opening section, the piano moves in smooth rhythm while the viola plays a melody that rises and falls and rises again in singing style (Example 10, mm. 1-8). As in Movement 1, Class Clown, the pitch organization is based on a half – whole – whole – whole – whole hexachord. Also as in the beginning of the first movement, the viola and piano change hexachords together, as shown in Example 10. Since the hexachord consists primarily of whole tones, strong dissonances are rare, which contribute to the relaxed character. In m. 6, the viola pauses on a high A while the piano repeats a two-chord figure to end the first part. The piano leaves in m. 9 and the viola takes over with a 32nd-note figure that launches the cadenza.

Example 10: *Character Pieces*, Second Movement (Mellow Fellow), mm. 1-8, with Hexachords Labeled

The image displays a musical score for the first eight measures of the second movement of *Character Pieces*. The score is written for Viola and Piano. The tempo is marked 'Simply stated and relaxed, ♩ = 40' and the mood is 'warmly'. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The time signature is 5/4. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 1-4) features a Viola part with a melodic line and a Piano part with a slower, more rhythmic accompaniment. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the Viola melody and Piano accompaniment. Hexachords are labeled above the notes: E D# C# B A G (measures 1-4), C# C Bb Ab F# E (measures 5-8), and E F G A B C# (measures 9-12). Performance instructions include 'p' (piano), 'mf' (mezzo-forte), and 'pp' (pianissimo), along with 'slow and calm' and 'pp meditative'. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

The viola cadenza contains several groups of 32nd notes that alternate with slower rhythms. In some groups, the half-step in the hexachord is omitted, so the pitches are a collection of whole tones. After two alternations, the 32nd-note groups start to break up and the fast-slow-fast-slow alternation moves more quickly. The dynamic rises to *forte* with the longest high note in the cadenza, E-flat5, roughly two-thirds of the way through the cadenza. Then the cadenza declines gracefully with a long *decrescendo* and melodic descent to the end. Alternating 32nd notes with slower rhythms, the descending line spans two octaves and comes to rest, *pianissimo*, on a C-sharp/G double stop. A half-step descent to an F-sharp completes the cadenza. While the F-sharp sustains, the piano resumes the last figure it had before the cadenza, and a retransition begins.

The opening melody comes back in the viola, m. 13 (Example 11), transposed down a fifth. The new melody has the same general contour as in the beginning, but 32nd-note

figurations, which recall the cadenza, exaggerate its ascents (Example 11, mm. 13-14). Unlike the first part, the piano moves in steady quarter notes, providing more motion to support the more-active viola melody.

Example 11: *Character Pieces*, Second Movement (Mellow Fellow), mm. 10-14, Retransition and Beginning of the Return

The last four measures of the movement contain the same hexachord (E, D-sharp, C-sharp, B, A, and G) pattern that opened the movement in mm. 1-2. The rhythmic note values are longer and more extended than the beginning. This creates an ending that sounds slower in pace and more peaceful. The last measure of the viola part is a variation of the piano's figure from m. 1, thus the movement ends as it began, full circle.

Rockmaker, himself a Class Clown violist, practiced Hindemith's *Der Schwanendreher* for his lessons to work on shifting and double and triple stops. This study

is evident in the viola solo, *Ad libitum*, in this movement. Here Rockmaker evokes Hindemith's compositional techniques with shifts, fingering patterns, and hand positions.

As shown in Example 12a, the viola solo at the beginning of *Der Schwanendreher* is an extensive chordal passage with double and triple stops. The passage sounds very difficult, but the double and triple stops naturally fit the performer's hand, and the shifts up and down between double stops make sense with their smoothness. While Rockmaker and I studied Hindemith's solo viola passage together, we found there are certain techniques Hindemith uses to make the double, triple, and quadruple stops natural to play, and Rockmaker composed the viola solo in this movement with the same techniques. For comparison, the opening of *Mellow Fellow*, including the beginning of the *Ad libitum* solo viola cadenza, is shown in Example 12b.

Example 12a: Hindemith, *Der Schwanendreher*, First Movement, mm. 1-18, viola solo

Hindemith DER SCHWANENDREHER

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Langsam (♩ etwa 60)

Example 13a and 14a

Example 15a

f

mf

p

p

Example 12b: *Character Pieces*, Second Movement (Mellow Fellow), mm. 1-9, Viola Only

Simply stated and relaxed, ♩ = 40
warmly

5

Example 13b

Ad libitum, with rubato

9

Example 14b

Example 15b

First, Hindemith uses open strings often to cover one or two of the chord tones. Example 13a shows the opening sonorities of *Der Schwanendreher*, which are built on open C, G, and D strings (circled). As shown in Example 13b, Rockmaker applies this technique in the *Ad libitum* solo. The passages shown here sound rich and complex, but they are made relatively easy to play by the presence of open strings, as circled in the examples.

Example 13a: Hindemith, *Der Schwanendreher*, First Movement, m. 1

Open C and G strings

Open D and G strings

Example 13b: *Character Pieces*, Second Movement (Mellow Fellow), m. 9, the beginning of the *Ad libitum* solo

Open C and D strings

Open G string

Another technique Hindemith used was to arrange sonorities in a way that allows one finger to stay in the same place or to cross strings in the same position. The circled pitches in Example 14a show that the first finger can remain in the same position on adjacent strings, making the moves from sonority to sonority simpler. In m. 9 of Mellow Fellow (Example 14b), this same technique helps the violist to connect D#/C# with F/A because the D# and A can be played with the first finger staying in place but crossing to the adjacent string.

Example 14a: Hindemith, *Der Schwanendreher*, First Movement, m. 1

Stay on 3rd position

1st finger on D-sting

1st finger on A-sting

1st finger on D-sting

Example 14b: *Character Pieces*, Second Movement (Mellow Fellow), m. 9

Also, in the opening viola solo of *Der Schwanendreher*, shifting between positions is smooth and connective because many of the shifts involve a semitonal change of position. In Example 15a, mm. 2-3, the shift from third position to fifth position is made easier because the hand moves only by a semitone, E-F.

Example 15a: Hindemith, *Der Schwanendreher*, First Movement, mm. 1-3

From Mellow Fellow, Example 15b is from the middle of the viola cadenza, which is shown in its entirety in Example 12b above. Here too, the shift from first position to second position requires movement of only one half-step.

Example 15b: *Character Pieces*, Second Movement (Mellow Fellow), m. 9, *Ad libitum* solo

The calm and relaxed double- and triple-stop figures in the *Ad libitum* solo viola cadenza fit well the day-dreaming character of the Mellow Fellow. The sonorous quality of the viola and the slow reaction of pitches on the instrument create a rich and smooth sound that contributes to the meditative quality of the cadenza.

CHAPTER 4

HIPSTER-INTELLECT

“What do you call two viola players playing in unison? Counterpoint.” “What do you call a viola player with half a brain? Gifted.” These jokes have themes that recur in viola jokes – bad playing, and the violists are timid and not very bright. According to Jody Rockmaker, the Hipster-Intellect is the opposite of the stereotype violist depicted in viola jokes. He is extroverted, he is smart, he plays boldly and well – as shown by the music of this movement. Among violists, he is different, outside of the viola-joke mainstream and therefore a hipster.

Structurally and expressively the most uncomplicated of the *Character Pieces*, the third movement, Hipster-Intellect, serves as the climax of the entire work. It has an aggressive mood created by perpetual-motion rhythms driving it forward. The movement is in a fast 3/4 with the quarter note equaling 144, and the expressive mark is *Aggressively, with intensity*.

The movement is in sonata form. There is an exposition (mm. 1-52), which is repeated and has two themes. The development (mm. 53-119) begins with a variant of the rhythmic figure from the opening of the exposition, and the start of the recapitulation (mm. 120-202) is marked by a varied return of the first theme. The coda (mm. 203-220) concludes with one last appearance of the opening theme. Lasting 5’45”, the length of this movement is almost equal to that of the first movement, which lasts 5’38”.

Hipster-Intellect begins with constant eighth notes in the viola supported by sparse, percussive chords in the piano (Example 16). These chords recall those in the opening theme of the first movement, but here they are more frequent and *forte*. The first melody

of the exposition is stated by the viola in mm. 1-9. The nine measures of the theme divide into 4+5 when the viola returns to the opening gesture in m. 5. Beginning in m. 10, the piano takes over and begins a repeat of the first melody, now transposed up a fourth. While the piano continues the constant eighths, a slow viola line, *dolce*, is added. The first three notes of the viola's slow melody recall the beginning of the first movement with a minor seventh up followed by a step down. By recalling a prominent figure of the opening, this movement rounds off the three movements. At m. 20, the piano drops out and the viola introduces a new, strongly-accented, double-stop figure for the transition.

Example 16: *Character Pieces*, Third Movement (Hipster-Intellect), mm. 1-12, with Hexachords Labeled

20

Hipster-Intellect

Aggressively, ♩ = 144

f with intensity!

Viola

Piano

E^b D C B^b A^b G^b

F E D C B^b A^b

5

E^b D C B^b A^b G^b

G F[#] E D C B^b

9

A

A^b G F E^b D^b C^b

f dolce

These opening 20 measures are unified by the unchanging *forte* dynamic and the constant eighth notes. The perpetual motion makes the theme sound motorized, like an engine running on high. As shown in Example 16, this movement is also written with a half – whole – whole – whole – whole hexachord pitch organization like the first and second movements. The application of the hexachords, however, is not as consistent. The

measures in Example 16 that do not have hexachords marked (mm. 3, 6-7, 12) are incomplete, containing only subsets of the hexachords around them. They serve as transition measures between complete hexachords. The only other place in *Character Pieces* that loosens the hexachord organization is the cadenza of the slow movement.

The impression of high energy is in strong contrast to the second theme, where the pace slows down. The second theme, mm. 26-45, is marked by a new dynamic, *piano*, and a slowing of rhythm both in the viola and the piano. Marked *lyrically* and *delicately*, the theme has a *legato*, singing quality. Although the character has changed, the eighth notes from the first theme continue in both the viola and the piano. The ever-present eighth notes support the overall character of the movement, vivid and smart like the Hipster-Intellect. The closing, mm. 45-52, is like a short cadenza for the viola. The piano leaves at the end of the second theme and the viola brings back the heavily-accented triplets and eighth-note figures from the transition. The increase in intensity and the rhythm of the closing make the return of the energetic first theme with the repeat of the exposition sound smooth and natural.

The motorized, perpetual-eighths figures from the beginning of the movement open the development. Almost the same length as the exposition, mm. 1-52, the development, mm. 53-119, contains elements from the exposition, such as the perpetual eighths, the viola's slow line that is added to the eighths of the opening theme, and the heavily-accented double stops and triplets from the transition. The development is comprised of four sections. The first section, mm. 53-63, consists of constant eighth notes, marked *lilting*; the second section, mm. 64-86, has a relaxed and lyrical character while the viola brings back the sparse chords from the opening, alternating between *arco* and *pizzicato*; the third

section, mm. 85-103, recalls the minor seventh up from the opening theme in the viola while the piano rises and falls with constant eighth notes; and the fourth section, mm. 103-119, prepares the recapitulation with material from the transition and closing. Overall, the development section has a big dynamic range, repeatedly and abruptly alternating between *pianissimo* and *fortissimo*.

The return of the viola's opening melody marks the start of recapitulation, mm. 120-202. This melody is transposed an augmented fourth higher, and the sparse chords in the piano are an octave lower. The basic ideas of the first theme – the perpetual eighths and the slow, *dolce* line – now alternate rapidly between the viola and the piano. As shown in Example 17, the triplet figures from the end of the first theme are expanded and increased to *fortissimo* in both the piano and the viola. Here is another application of double-stop techniques from Hindemith that appeared in the cadenza of the second movement, Mellow Fellow.

Example 17: *Character Pieces*, Third Movement (Hipster-Intellect), mm. 139-159, end of the recapitulated transition

139

142

ff *f* *intensely*

ff

Ad libitum
poco rubato

146

ff

poco a poco calmo **J**

152

p

p
calmly

In the recapitulated transition a short viola cadenza, *Ad libitum*, is added at the end, in mm. 150-159 (Example 17, above). The end of the transition in the exposition abruptly went into a slow rhythm for two measures (mm. 24-25) in preparation for the second theme. In the recapitulation, the two slow measures are expanded into the ten-measure cadenza, *poco a poco calmo*, which creates a much longer preparation for the character and pace of the second theme.

The second theme, which had a contrasting dynamic, *piano*, and a slow, singing quality in the exposition, is also enlarged in the recapitulation. A new, ten-measure passage is added at the end (Example 18, mm. 180-189) that recalls the third section of the development. In constant eighths and growing from *pianissimo* to *forte*, the new passage makes a longer transition back to the *forte*, angular character of the closing.

Example 18: *Character Pieces*, Third Movement (Hipster-Intellect), mm. 171-190, the recapitulated second theme

171

176

pp delicately

181

mf *pp* with growing intensity

186

f

The closing, transposed higher, is identical to the exposition until its ending. The opening perpetual motion comes back and the coda, mm. 203-220, begins. In the coda, the vivid and bustling energy fades out and the movement ends quietly. The repetitive eighth-note figures are alternating between viola and piano, against sustained notes and chords, and the dynamics drop gradually, from *forte* to *pianissimo*. Even the pitch material thins out to one hexachord that is the same as in the beginning of Hipster-Intellect. The movement thus rounds off by returning to the opening hexachord and eighth-note figure. Furthermore, the minor seventh fall at the very end in the piano recalls the minor seventh up from the beginning of Class Clown and rounds the work as a whole.

In conclusion, Jody Rockmaker's *Character Pieces* is a worthy addition to the repertoire for viola and piano. It is reminiscent of the first collection of character pieces for this duo, Robert Schumann's *Märchenbilder* (Fairy Tale Pictures), Op. 113, composed in March 1851. Although Schumann did not title the four short movements individually, each conveys a distinctive expressive character, and through them Schumann displays the rich sound and technical capacity of the viola. Like *Märchenbilder*, Rockmaker's *Character Pieces* will enrich the repertoire for the viola as a work that reveals the instrument's expressive range and its ability to be a partner with the piano.

As a violist himself, Rockmaker has facilitated the performance of difficult passages with his knowledge of viola techniques. He has enabled the violist to play extensive passages with double and triple stops by arranging them to fit the performer's hand. As a result, the passages may sound very difficult but are actually smooth and easy to play.

Bringing his personality into the work, Rockmaker depicts what he considers to be the three personality types of violists – the Class Clown, the Mellow Fellow, and the

Hipster-Intellect. Although *Character Pieces* is composed with sophisticated techniques of hexachordal pitch organization, the portrayal of these characters helps to make the music vivid and entertaining. The result is a work of musical substance and expression that is both gratifying for the performers and enjoyed by the audience.

Working with the composer was for me an invaluable and edifying experience. The relationship between composer and performer and the artistic process strongly affected my performance of the work. It is hoped that this study will not only encourage other violists to program *Character Pieces*, but also assist them in its preparation.

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APPENDIX A

CD TRACK TITLES AND RECORDING INFORMATION

CHARACTER PIECES WORKS BY JODY ROCKMAKER

Hyun Sun Yoon, Viola
Jeremy Peterman, Piano

TITLE	TRACK
<i>Class Clown</i> (5:49)	1
<i>Mellow Fellow</i> (3:43)	2
<i>Hipster-Intellect</i> (5:41)	3

This recording was made on September 24, 2018, at The Blue Door Studios in Phoenix, Arizona. Noah Guttell served as recording engineer.

APPENDIX B
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November 29, 2018

Hyun Sun (Gloria) Yoon
Arizona State University
School of Music

RE: Hindemith DER SCHWANENDREHER for Viola and Orchestra, first movement,
mm. 1-18, viola part

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