

Toccatina Op. 40 No. 3

(Nikolai Kapustin)

Nikolai Kapustin was born in Gorlovka (the Ukraine) in 1937. He studied piano at the Moscow Conservatoire with Alexander Goldenweiser (a legendary teacher who had studied with Arensky and Taneyev, and who also taught Ginzburg, Nikolayeva and Kabalevsky). While studying, he also developed a strong interest in jazz music, and played with Yuri Saulsky's big band. After graduating, he became active in the Russian jazz scene, as well as composing. Kapustin is a prolific composer, writing in a fusion of classical and jazz styles, sometimes referred to as "crossover" or "third stream". His works follow in the traditions of George Gershwin and André Previn, and also show the influences of Oscar Peterson, Art Tatum, Errol Garner and Duke Ellington; they use the rhythms and harmonies of jazz, within classical formal structures. While he has composed orchestral, chamber and big-band works, the bulk of his output is for piano, and includes 13 sonatas, six concertos (as well as other works for piano and orchestra), a set of 24 preludes (Op. 53), a set of 24 preludes and fugues (Op. 82), studies (including eight concert studies Op. 40), bagatelles and numerous other short pieces.

There is a Kapustin Society for the promotion of his music, which can be contacted by email: <KapustinSoc@blueyonder.co.uk>.

A *toccatina* is a short *toccat*a, that is, a fast keyboard piece with a driving rhythmic pulse. The term *toccat*a is derived from the Italian *toccare* meaning "to touch". Many toccatas have a perpetual motion character due to the virtually continuous repetition of a single note-value - in this case, the semiquaver. Other important composers of toccatas include Bach, Schumann, Debussy, Poulenc, Prokofiev and Ravel.

Kapustin's *Toccatina* Op. 40 No. 3 comes from a set of eight *Concert Studies*. A study, or *étude*, is a work designed to improve a particular aspect of piano technique; a concert study is one which is suitable for concert performance due to its high musical interest.

The *Toccatina* Op. 40 No. 3 is in E minor, in a free formal structure, with a brief recapitulation of the opening material in the final bars.

Its style combines elements of jazz and classical traditions, and is characterised by:

- robust character and high energy levels.
- syncopation (off-beat accents).
- use of short motives or riffs rather than expansive melody lines.
- use of modal, pentatonic and blues scales, particularly featuring the flattened 7th degree (and also, sometimes, the flattened 5th degree).
- use of polymodality, free chromaticism, "blue notes" and other dissonance.
- a predominance of 4ths and 5ths (sometimes consecutively), and a general avoidance of triadic harmony.

Allegro means lively and fast.

- b.1-7 Introduction, E minor, with an almost constant semiquaver pulse.
 The 7th degree of the scale is not raised, making the natural minor scale (or *aeolian mode*). At times, the 6th degree is raised (to C#) making the *dorian mode*.
 Since the piece cannot be said to be consistently in any one mode, it could be described as *polymodal*, with a tonal centre of E.
 The tonal centre, E, is reinforced in the bass at the beginning of each of the first three bars, and then by repeated notes or accents in b.4-7.
 Some free chromaticism is used (e.g. end of b.2) without dislodging the tonal centre.
 The frequent use of 4ths or 5ths, sometimes consecutively, gives a bare, muscular quality to the harmony.
Syncopation (off-beat accents) can be found in every bar.
 The passage ends with the flattened 5th in the bass in b.5, followed by two bars of tonic note in b.6-7.
- 8-15 Theme 1 - a pentatonic melody (using E - G - A - B - D - the basis of the “blues” scale) is heard in the upper voice, over a semiquaver pulse.
 4ths and 5ths continue to be used in the bass.
 The tonal centre continues to be reinforced through repeated notes in the middle voice, and also from time to time in the bass line.
 The accompaniment mostly alternates between aeolian and dorian modes, both of which use D \flat rather than D#. D \flat s are particularly prominent in the motive in b.14.
- 16-23 Theme 1, restated in a higher octave, with some variation in the melody line and a denser texture.
 Some “blue note” clashes are used (e.g. G and G# used simultaneously at the start of b.16).
 The tonal centre of E remains, reinforced by repeated notes in b.16-19 and b.23.
- 23-35 Theme 2 - loud, and with full chordal textures in the right hand.
 Begins with an E minor tonal centre, becoming E major briefly in b.27.
 This passage contains extensive free chromaticism. Bars 29-34 have a chromatically descending bass line, moving through G - F# - F - E in b.29, then progressing more slowly (Eb - D - Db - C - B) over the following five bars.
 Triadic harmony can be found more readily in this passage than previously, but as a succession of major chords and 7ths, often harmonically unrelated, which temporarily obscure the tonal centre.
 When the bass line settles on B (the dominant note) in b.34, the tonal centre begins to re-stabilise, and there is a V - I progression to complete the passage in b.35-36.
 Grace notes (e.g. b.23-24) are used to resemble the “pitch bends” of popular wind and vocal music.
- 36-51 Episode, based largely on the blues scale (E - G - A - A#/B \flat - B - D - E).
- 51-62 A variation of Theme 2 in a quasi-improvisatory style.
 The bass line is very similar to b.23-34, descending chromatically from G to B in b.57-62.
- 63-66 A reprise of the introductory motive (b.1-4).
- 67-69 Coda, with V - I in the bass in b.67-68.
 A chord of 4ths (C#-F#-B-E-A-D in b.68) leads to the tonic triad at the end of b.68 (decorated with a “blue” note, Ab).