STYLISTIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUES
IN THE PIANO WORKS OF CHARLES T. GRIFFES

by

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A Document Submitted To the Faculty of the
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS
In the Graduate College
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

1977
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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INTRODUCTION

In the Fall of 1919, the Boston Symphony, under Pierre Monteaux, and the Philadelphia Orchestra, led by Stokowski, premiered works of Charles T. Griffes. The performances met with phenomenal success. A reviewer in the Boston Globe found Griffes' music to exhibit "genuine originality and power of a sort that entitles its composer to be judged by the same standard as men like Ravel, Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky, not by that usually applied to works by unfamiliar Americans." The following Spring Griffes died at the age of thirty-five. Most sources agree that American composition suffered a great loss in the early death of Charles Griffes. His music has gained critical prestige and has won a small but significant position in the orchestral and solo repertoire in the concert hall as well as in the teaching studio.

Griffes' creative life spans the first two decades of the twentieth century. He was a pianist and over half of his compositions were for solo piano. In addition, many of his orchestral works are transcriptions of piano pieces. And yet, except for The White Peacock and the Sonata, his piano works are almost unknown and rarely performed.

This study seeks to trace the influences contributing to Griffes' general style, and explore the technical components character-

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istic of that style as they relate to his piano music. Its purpose is to create an interest in the study and performance of this important source of twentieth century American piano music.
BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Charles Tomlinson Griffes was born in 1884 in Elmira, New York. His musical training began at age eleven with an older sister, and after a few years he progressed to the piano instructor at Elmira Academy, Miss Mary Selena Broughton, who became an important influence in his life. With her encouragement and financial support, Griffes, at age 19, left for study at the Stern Conservatory in Berlin. There he studied piano with Ernst Jedliczka, a pupil of Nicholas Rubenstein and Tschaikovsky, and later with Gottfried Galston. Theory was studied with Max Julius Lowenstein and composition with Bartholomew Rufer and Englebert Humperdinck. He remained at the Conservatory four years. His training was thorough, but also of great influence was his exposure to the many concerts and attractions in Berlin.

Griffes returned to the United States in 1907 and decided to devote his energies to composition rather than a career as a pianist. Because of financial obligations he took a position as instructor of music at the Hackley Boy's School in Tarrytown, New York, where he remained until his death. He functioned as piano teacher, choir director and organist for the chapel. It was during these years that he composed nearly his entire output of music. Five of his early songs were published in 1909 by the G. Schirmer Co. of New York, who became the sole publisher of Griffes' works. However, not everything Griffes offered
for publication was accepted. Edward Maisel, principle Griffes biog-
grapher, states:

Not only the piano pieces but other songs were regularly
and unfailingly rejected after the period of his first
German music. And as often as they were resubmitted with
the hope of attracting a different manuscript reader, they
were rejected again, till at length he nearly lost hope of
attaining second publication.¹

This caused Griffes to write that he was "in a bad humor all day be-
cause Schirmer's write that they don't want my three piano pieces."

He continued:

I don't know what to think of it. Is it Schirmer's
mercenary spirit or was Arthur Farewell mistaken in
thinking so highly of the pieces? It takes away one's
confidence. Am I on the right track or not?²

During this time, and even later when he became a recognized
composer, Griffes composed many easy teaching pieces for children using
the pseudonym Arthur Tomlinson. These pieces became highly popular
and always were accepted immediately for publication.

It was not until 1915 that his first piano pieces were pub-
lished. The six pieces, all composed between 1910 and 1914, were
grouped under two opus numbers: Three Tone Pictures, Op. 5, and
Fantasy Pieces, Op. 6. They were initially rejected by Schirmer as
"too subjective...they could have little popular success."³ They were
published only through the intercession of Busoni whom Griffes had met
once in Europe and to whom he had sent the manuscripts.

¹Edward Maisel, Charles T. Griffes (New York: A.A. Knopf,

²Ibid., p. 125.

³Ibid., p. 146.
Eventually Griffes became acquainted with musicians who brought about performances of his works and he began to gain recognition. At a formal lecture at the MacDowell Club in 1917 on "Modern and Ultra-Modern Music", only Griffes and MacDowell were mentioned as illustrating American tendencies. Griffes had now arrived. His compositions were being reviewed in major newspapers.

When, in 1919, Stokowski and Monteaux requested scores for the current season, Griffes himself undertook the task of copying parts, for financial reasons. The strain of copying, coupled with the requirements of revision and rehearsals, and the necessity of keeping up with his duties at school, weakened him to such an extent that a bout of influenza became pneumonia and led to his death at age 35 in April of 1920.

Although Griffes spent his life as virtually an unknown composer, his death came at a time when he was beginning to be accepted by the musical world. In praising Griffes' music, Frederick Jacobi stated that "Griffes introduced into our music a certain element of daring and independence, an experimental frame of mind."¹ Aaron Copland summarized Griffes' contribution to music when he wrote:

No one can say how far Griffes might have developed if his career had not been cut short by death in his thirty-sixth year, in 1920. What he gave those of us who came after him was a sense of the adventurer in composition, of being thoroughly alive to the newest trends in world music and to the stimulus that might be derived from such contact.²


Three general style periods can be found in the compositions of Griffes. His early works, mostly songs and unpublished piano pieces, belong stylistically to the late romantic tradition of Johannes Brahms and Richard Strauss, the chief influences in Germany at the time. It is not surprising that after having studied four years in Berlin, he adopted the German musical language. What is surprising is that he spoke it so fluently.

Following this "Germanic" period, Griffes composed in a generally impressionistic style, from approximately 1910-1917. To this period belong most of his published piano pieces. Those composed in the later part of this period exhibit the absorption of Impressionist methods and moods more than the earlier pieces which blend Impressionism with late romantic characteristics. He became familiar with the French style while in Europe and used many of its devices. Griffes wrote:

> It is only logical that when I began to write, I wrote in the vein of Debussy and Stravinsky...those particular wide-intervalled dissonances are the natural medium of composers who write today's music.

Norman Peterkin, in a review in the Chesterian, 1923, wrote:

> Like many of the young composers, the world over, he was influenced by and temperamentally attracted to the methods and innovations of Debussy and Ravel and later to some of

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1Maisel, op. cit., p. 112.
the advanced Russians. However, he was never enslaved by these influences but was able to extract from them precisely those elements he needed to set free and express his own personality.

That he was not fundamentally imitative is seen in the fact that he was an impressionist in his approach to art and literature as well. He was particularly fond of the mystic, imaginative poetry of Fiona McLeod (pseudonym of William Sharp), Oriental folklore, and the arts of the East. From an early age, he showed himself responsive to colors and later came to associate certain colors with definite keys. For example, the key of E flat was a yellow or golden color, and C Major was an incandescent white light, the most brilliant key in the tonality.\(^2\) This preoccupation with color and its relation to music bred experimental handling of chords and unfamiliar tonalities. He was also a gifted artist. He could draw well with pen and ink, was an excellent painter of water color landscapes and later worked in copper etchings. With these inclinations, a response to Impressionism was almost a foregone conclusion. Among the better known compositions in this period are The Pleasure Dome of Kubla Khan and Roman Sketches. These have helped earn him the reputation of American Impressionist.

Griffes did not remain very long in one permanent style. He shared with many the interest in the Orient that was so prevalent in the early decades of the century. He studied and made careful notes of Malaysian, Javanese, Japanese and Chinese music and culture. In a letter, he spoke of his intentions to compose some short piano pieces

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\(^2\)Maisel, op. cit., p. 11.
in the mood of the Javanese, but added: "In America people always label you and then you can't get away from it. I don't want the reputation of an Orientalist and nothing more."¹ The Javanese pieces were not written but a fine example of Griffes' treatment of oriental material is contained in his Five Pieces of the Ancient Far East for voice and piano, later arranged for voice and orchestra.

In 1916 he heard a pianist play some Scriabin and discuss exotic scales. He also became well acquainted with Varèse and was very interested in his techniques. All of these influences are reflected in the compositions of his final, modern period.

During the last three years of his life, Griffes moved more and more into an experimental style employing a larger harmonic vocabulary, artificial scales, a more linear technique of writing and new techniques of cadence. He adopted a stark, uncompromising idiom bordering on atonality. His best known piano work of this period is the Sonata. Although much of his earlier music was now being heard, his latest songs and the Sonata met with poor reviews and fiascos in performances. He faced the same external barriers with his 'new independent development' that he had confronted in the earlier transition from his Germanic works to those of Impressionist influence. Concerning this last period, Griffes lamented: "Nobody understands what I'm doing now."²

These style periods were not bound by definite dates but each evolved slowly and traces of each style can be found in all his compositions. Collectively, they reflect his constant experimentation.

¹Ibid., p. 270.
²Ibid., p. 233.
As he sought to create his own unique musical expression, German influences were replaced by French and Russian: Debussy and Schoenberg as well as Ravel and Stravinsky. Since all were composing more or less at the same time, Griffes noted their innovations and assimilated those which would contribute to his own personal idiom. He was neither decisively shaped nor permanently influenced by any one person or musical style—only inspired and guided. In the thirteen years that separated his return from Berlin in 1907 and his death in 1920, he emerged as one of America's most significant composers.
Griffes wrote twenty-six pieces for piano, twelve of which are published. The others exist in autographed manuscripts in the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, and the Hamilton Library at Elmira College, New York. Of the twelve published pieces, ten belong to his second style period:

**Three Tone Pictures, Op. 5** (published in 1915)

- The Lake at Evening 1910
- The Vale of Dreams 1912
- The Night Wind 1911

**Fantasy Pieces, Op. 6** (published in 1915)

- Barcarolle 1912
- Notturro 1915
- Scherzo 1915

**Roman Sketches, Op. 7** (published in 1917)

- The White Peacock 1915
- Nightfall 1915
- The Fountain of Acqua Paola 1916
- Clouds 1916

The remaining two piano compositions are more characteristic of his experimental, neo-classic writing:

**Sonata for piano** 1918 (published in 1921)

**Three Preludes** 1919 (published in 1967)
The Three Tone Pictures, Op. 5, his first published piano pieces, are more advanced harmonically and much freer in form than the early, unpublished works. They are also much shorter and more closely knit. They contain many shifts in harmony, many seventh chords and a great deal of chromaticism. A sense of loss of tonality is apparent in Vale of Dreams. Although the key is E flat Major and a dominant seventh chord is used as a pedal in the first thirteen bars, the tonality is weakened by the use of parallel major thirds. It is ambiguous enough to destroy the E flat tonality (example 1).


The Barcarolle and Scherzo of Op. 6 employ non-impressionist harmony and display a curious mixture of twentieth century French and

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late nineteenth century German styles, as seen in the opening measures of the Barcarolle (example 2).

Ex. 2. Griffes, Barcarolle, page 1, measure 1.

In other passages the French influence is difficult to uncover. For example, the following bars are more reminiscent of Puccini than of Debussy (example 3).
Ex. 3. Griffes, Barcarolle, page 5, measure 1.

The opening theme of the Scherzo is also stylistically ambiguous (example 4).

Ex. 4. Griffes, Scherzo, page 1, measure 1.
The prime example of Griffes' employment of impressionist techniques is the Roman Sketches, Op. 6. Numerous examples of these techniques will be given in the section dealing with compositional characteristics.

As early as 1915, prior to writing the Roman Sketches, Griffes expressed increasing disappointment in the French moderns. To his friend Lillian Shoobert, he wrote:

I wish there were some new French things that seemed as interesting as the earlier ones. Somehow I can't help feeling that Debussy's latest things are a step backward instead of forward; they seem to lack the freshness and spontaneity of his earlier works.¹

This dissatisfaction, coupled with his constant experimentation led to a style far removed from the French influence.

The Sonata, one of the two works representative of his last and independent style, will be discussed in detail in the following section dealing with Griffes' compositional techniques. The Three Preludes are a culmination of the 'new' language he began to speak in the Sonata. Griffes referred to them as "experimental pieces".² They represent Griffes as a miniaturist, the longest being only thirty-two measures in length. Texture is similar to Schoenberg's Op. 19 and the Scriabin Preludes, Op. 74. (Griffes owned copies of and played both works.³) They are not bound to any tonality, although he stays closer to a token tonality than either Schoenberg or Scriabin (example5).

¹Maisel, op. cit., p. 140.
²Ibid., p. 261.
³Anderson, op. cit., p. 343.
The stylistic development seen within Griffes' lifetime was accompanied by changes in his compositional technique. In his early works, progressions are generally created by vertical sonorities. This is seen in a passage from the Scherzo (example 6).

Ex. 5. Griffes, Prelude No. 1, page 1, measure 5.

Later, moving lines replaced chords as the basic conception of composition. In the Sonata entire sections are made up of contrapuntal lines (example 7).

Ex. 7. Griffes, Sonata, page 28, measure 1.

The change from vertical to linear evolved slowly. Clouds, written midway between the early and late styles, displays two independent chordal lines (example 8).

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF GRIFFES' COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUE

Melody

Griffes composed original melodies for nearly all of his compositions. There are two exceptions: a Chippewa Indian song, used in his Two Sketches for string quartet, and a Chinese melody, incorporated into one of his Five Poems of the Ancient Far East for voice. His melodic material is derived generally from major and minor scales, but chromaticism is an important feature, especially during his Impressionist period. For example, the theme of The White Peacock is a descending chromatic scale (example 9).

Languidamente e molto rubato


A slow harmonic movement usually accompanies his chromatic melodies, placing the emphasis on the melodic line rather than the accompaniment. In his more mature compositions, Griffes gives the melodic line more prominence by creating simpler accompaniments.
The augmented second is a characteristic interval in Griffes' works employing artificial scales. Special emphasis is given this interval in the Sonata (example 10).

Ex. 10. Griffes, Sonata, page 27, measure 3.

Accompaniment

Griffes' accompaniment figures are at times as important as the melodic line. His basic techniques are chord repetition and extended
arpeggio. An added tone may be used to enlarge the chord without changing its function (example 11).

Ex. 11. Griffes, Barcarolle, page 5, measure 1.

The extended arpeggio is frequently used as a device for virtuosity (example 12).

The simplicity of some of his accompaniments can be seen in this passage from the Sonata (example 13).


Movement is sometimes created by a syncopated ostinato in the accompaniment (example 14).


Often an accompaniment is created for the purpose of sustaining a single chord while simultaneously creating motion through an animated rhythm (example 15).
Ex. 15. Griffes, Barcarolle, page 11, measure 1.

An accompaniment may contain added tones to heighten the color. In The Fountain of the Acqua Paola, the opening D flat melody is accompanied by a tonic triad colored by the added second and sixth (example 16).

Harmony and tonality

In most of his earlier works, Griffes employs harmonic techniques of the nineteenth century. There is normal progression toward the tonic and resolution of chords and cadences are mostly conventional.

In his impressionist writing, tonality is sometimes obscured.

Concerning harmony in Impressionistic music, Curt Sachs stated:

Harmony has lost its function. It is coloristic, not dynamic; it creates an emotional atmosphere but does not progress from chord to chord in keeping with any rules.¹

Techniques used to produce this vagueness of tonality include the use of polychords, chords in parallel motion, deceptive resolution, and the use of cross relations in progressions. Other impressionistic devices used by Griffes are whole-tone and modal harmony, and long ostinato pedal notes.

An example of Griffes' unconventional resolution is the parallel chromatic movement of augmented sixth chords in *Nightfall* (example 17).


Use of chords in parallel motion produces a very individual sound in *The Fountain of the Acqua Paola*. Here, progressions of dominant chords whose roots are a third apart are combined with chromatically ascending sixths and cascades of descending minor thirds (example 18).


Polychords are created by superimposing one chord upon another. In *Clouds*, Griffes uses them to temporarily distract us from the tonic harmony (example 19).
One of the most characteristic chord progressions in Griffes' works includes two chords whose roots are separated by a third or the enharmonic equivalent of a third. In Notturno this progression serves as a means of sudden modulation (example 20).
In the Roman Sketches, his final impressionist pieces for piano, the tonal center is indicated at the beginning and end of each piece, but the harmonic material used within has no relationship to that tonal center.

The final cadence of Griffes' impressionist compositions rarely progresses from dominant to tonic, and usually there is a deliberate avoidance of the leading tone. Nightfall ends with the progression mediant to tonic (example 21).


The Lake at Evening closes with the plagal, IV-I cadence (example 22).

In *The White Peacock*, a harmonic cadential formula is not present. Instead there is a dissipation of a supertonic ninth chord arpeggio (example 23).

![Musical notation](image)


A device Griffes used throughout his works is the omission of the third in a tonic triad at the end of the composition, indicating a conflict of mode within the work.

Experimentation in Griffes' last period resulted in chord formations other than those of tertian harmony, artificial scales, and new cadential procedures. It is also marked by reliance on polyphonic techniques rather than harmonic and by the neo-classic economy of materials. The earlier rich tonal palette is replaced by starkness. All of this is seen in the *Sonata* for piano of 1918, his largest work for the piano. Here he displays great use of artificial scales. The scale serves as the source of both melody and harmony. In the first movement, the entire artificial scale is seen in both the main theme and its accompaniment (example 2¾).
In the development section of the first movement, a three-note ostinato made up of tones from the scale is used to harmonize the theme (example 25).
Even in a more complex harmonization, the notes conform to this particular scale, offering a wide potential for the formation of chords, including clustered effects (example 26).

![Example 26](image1)

**Ex. 26. Sonata, page 4, measure 3.**

Often, these scale-tone clusters are arpeggiated (example 27).

![Example 27](image2)

**Ex. 27. Griffes, Sonata, page 4, measure 1.**

Griffes' method of harmonic progression in the Sonata is the exploitation of various sounds of the scale. Certain notes are made prominent by a simple repetition, added duration, or placement in the bass. In the last movement, a dominant-tonic progression is implied.
in the bass through emphasis, but neither is the actual tonal center (example 28).

Ex. 28. Griffes, Sonata, page 23, measure 17.

Another method of creating harmonic progression is through the polyphonic interplay of melodic lines made up of scale tones. Because of the absence of tonic-dominant relationships in his modern style, Griffes uses cadential procedures other than harmonic. Often, the impression of a momentary conclusion is created through slowing of movement and decrease in volume (example 29).


Cadence is also established through repetition of certain tones. The final cadence of the Sonata is established by the reiteration of
D in every chord of the last eight measures (example 30).


With Griffes, tonality has not been abandoned. It is merely derived through different procedures. In the harmonic procedures of his compositions, a definite trend is revealed. He continually worked toward an independent style not bound by the conventional procedures of the nineteenth centuries. That the goal was achieved is evident in his Sonata.

Rhythm

In general, Griffes was not as progressive rhythmically as he was harmonically, but in his later impressionist pieces he began to achieve freedom from regular rhythm patterns by the use of multi-
metric schemes which completely discard the traditional accent patterns and regular phrase groupings. In a passage from *The Fountain of the Acqua Paola*, the meter changes every measure (example 31).


In *Nightfall*, rhythmic displacement is achieved through the use of triplets (example 32).

Text Influence (Programmatic Aspects)

Most of the music of Griffes is of a descriptive nature, in which he attempts to portray musically a scene or mood. Sometimes this is accomplished through the title of the work, as in *The White Peacock*. Many of his works are prefaced with an excerpt of poetry or prose. In his Op. 5 piano pieces, he quotes from Yeats and Poe. For the *Scherzo* of Op. 6, Griffes wrote a verse himself, and the *Notturno* of the same opus quotes from Verlaine. The *Barcarolle*, Op. 6 and the four *Roman Sketches*, Op. 7 are all prefaced by prose of William Sharp. Complete texts for all the piano pieces are quoted in Appendix 2.

Often Griffes would seek the poem or title after composing the work.

In *Nightfall*, Griffes' preoccupation with mood is especially clear. It is prefaced with this verse:

The long day is over.
Dusk, and silence now:
And night, that is as dew
On the flower of the world.

The impression of darkness is conveyed through the tempo marking, *Lento misterioso*, and through several devices in the introduction. A tonic G sharp is used as a drone bass, over which uneasiness is communicated by a syncopated pedal which persists through the introduction and into the opening theme. An ominous effect is produced in the second measure by a slow moving motive creating a dissonance with the ostinato pedal. The entire introduction is blanketed in haze by the indication "sempre con pedale" (example 33).
Ex. 33. Griffes, Nightfall, page 1, measure 1.

The Sonata is an example of absolute music. There is neither a reference to poetry nor a suggestive title. However, moods are suggested by performance indications, such as 'Feroce' over the introduction, and the many markings of 'Appasionato' and 'Agitato'.

Form

William Treat Upton summarized the form of Griffes' songs, but what he says applies to nearly all of his compositions:
Griffes seems to have had almost a classical reverence for form; not at all in terms of binary, ternary, and the like, but of symmetry, balance and proportion... Unity is obtained in many ways - through phrases, and most of all perhaps through an almost never failing repetition (modified it may be) at the very end of the song of some melody or rhythm that has appeared earlier in some important or striking manner.¹

The "almost never failing repetition" is one of the most consistent characteristics of Griffes' work.

The Three Tone Pictures, Op. 5, are in three-part form, the middle section being a short development of the main theme. Griffes does not normally use a coda but in The Night Wind, a short coda is used to allow for a quiet close. In both the Barcarolle and Scherzo of Op. 6, he employs a rhapsodic form; a wealth of thematic material joined together by short transitions. Near the end of each, however, he returns to the original, opening material. The Notturno of Op. 6 is in three-part form.

The Barcarolle contains a brief canonic section, a procedure rarely used by Griffes (example 34).

Ex. 34. Griffes, Barcarolle, page 10, measure 1.

All four Roman Sketches are in arch form, in which a repetition of themes occurs in reverse order; A B C D C B A. In The Fountain of Acqua Paola, he varies the arch form slightly. The themes are present in the following order; A-transition-B-transition-C-B-transition-A-Coda, a perfect arch except for the omission of a transition between C and the returning B sections. The form is slightly modified by the inclusion of a coda.

Griffes originally programmed his Sonata as "a sonata in one movement", but it is best understood formally in three movements, although there is no clear break between movements. The first movement is written in conventional sonata form; introduction, exposition, development and recapitulation. However, since it is based on the notes of an artificial scale, the form is revealed through the identity of themes, rather than through key relationships as in conventional tonality. The sections are clearly delineated, not by conventional harmonic cadence but by decreasing tension through a slowing of movement, a diminuendo, or a pause.

The second movement is in three-part form. The theme, suggestive of a plainsong chant in modern tonality, appears initially in $\frac{4}{4}$ meter (example 35), while the second announcement of it occurs in $\frac{5}{4}$ meter (example 36).
The second movement closes with an accelerando which serves as an introduction for the final movement.

The last movement is in modified sonata form with coda. The modifications consist of a restatement of the first subject before the development and omission of same in the recapitulation. Also a portion of the second movement is recalled just before the coda. Unity is achieved not only through thematic material but also through a recurring rhythmic pattern (examples 37, 38 and 39).

Ex. 38. Griffes, Sonata, page 22, measure 1.

Griffes did not create new forms, and although he often modified the structure of his works, those changes are less impressive than his innovations in harmony and tonality.
Griffes' fame as an impressionist composer rests upon only one portion of his total output. A study of his compositions reveals three separate styles of writing. More than half of his entire output is for the solo piano and many of his orchestral works are rescored piano pieces. His fundamental stylistic changes and compositional techniques are seen in the piano works. The culmination of influences and his constant experimentation is the Sonata for piano, a work of great vitality and independence. In American music, his compositions provide a link between the romantic music of the American composer a generation earlier and the modern music of present day composers. Though not prolific, his compositions must be regarded as an important contribution to the history and development of American music.
APPENDIX I

THE UNPUBLISHED PIANO WORKS OF CHARLES T. GRIFFES

All of Griffes' autographed manuscripts are found in three libraries:

Elmira College Library, Elmira, New York
Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.
New York Public Library, Music Division, New York City

Abbreviations:

ECL: Elmira College Library
DLC: Library of Congress
NMU: New York Public Library

Six Variations in B flat major - 1898 (ECL)
Four Preludes - 1899-1900 (ECL)
Mazurka - 1898-1900 (ECL)
Sonata in F minor (two movements) - 1904 (?) (NMU)
Sonata in D flat major (one movement) - 1910 (?) (NMU)
Sonata in D flat major (two movements) - 1911 (?) (NMU)
Piano Piece in B flat major - 1911 (NMU)
Sonata in F sharp minor (one movement) - 1912 (?) (NMU)
The Pleasure Dome of Kubla Khan - 1912 (NMU)
Piano Piece in E major - 1914 (?) (NMU)
Rhapsody in B minor - 1914 (DLC)
De Profundis - 1914 (NMU)
Legend - 1915 (NMU) (cataloged incorrectly at NMU as Waltz in F sharp minor)
Piano Piece in D minor - 1915 (NMU)
Dance in A minor - 1916 (?) NMU
Every piano piece published during Griffes' lifetime included a text of prose or poetry. The text was often chosen after completion of the composition. In subsequent printings, Schirmer Co. omitted the text in all but The Lake at Evening and Roman Sketches.

The Lake at Evening, Op. 5, No. 1

... for always ...
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds
by the shore

William Butler Yeats
"The Lake at Innisfree", from The Rore

The Vale of Dreams, Op. 5, No. 2

At midnight in the month of June,
I stand beneath the mystic moon.
An opiate vapor, dewy, dim,
Exhale, from out her golden rim,
And, softly dripping, drop by drop,
Upon the quiet mountain top,
Steals drowsily and musically
Into the universal valley

Edgar Allen Poe
"The Sleeper"

The Night Winds, Op. 5, No. 3

But when the Night had thrown her pall
Upon that spot, as upon all,
And the mystic wind went by
Murmuring in melody,
Then - ah then - I would awake
To the terror of the lone lake.

Edgar Allen Poe
"The Lake"
Barcarolle, Op. 6, No. 1

... The old impetuous sea.
Changeless, yet full of change, it seems
The very mirror of those dreams
we call men's lives ... 

As ... one great wave
Doth rise and scorn an ocean grave,
And leaves its crown of foam where high
The cliffs stare seaward steadily;
So from love's throbbing pulsing sea
All lightning-lit by passion, reared
A mighty wave resistlessly.

William Sharp (1856-1905)
"A Record" and "Motherhood"

Notturno, Op. 6, No. 2

L'etang reflète,
Profond miroir,
La silhouette
Du saule noir
Où le vent pleure...
Rêvons; c'est l'heure

Verlaine
"La Bonne Chanson VI"

Scherzo, Op. 6, No. 3

From the Palace of Enchantment there issued into
the night sounds of unearthly revelry. Troops of
genii and other fantastic spirits danced grotesquely
to a music now wierd and mysterious, now wild and joyous.

Charles T. Griffes

The White Peacock, Op. 7, No. 1

Here where the sunlight
Floodeth the garden
Where the pomegranate
Reareth its glory
Of gorgeous blossom;
Where the cleanders
Dream through the noontides;
... . . . . . . . . . . . . .
... . . . Where the heat lies
Pale blue in the hollows,
Here where the dream-flowers,
The cream-white poppies,
Silently waver,
Here as the breath, as the soul of this beauty
Moveth in silence, and dreamlike, and slowly,
White as a snowdrift in mountain valleys
When softly upon it the gold light lingers:
Moves the white peacock, as tho' through the noontide
A dream of the moonlight were real for a moment.
Dim on the beautiful fan that he spreadeth
Dim on the cream-white are blue adumbrations,
Pale, pale as the breath of blue smoke in far woodlands,
Here, as the breath, as the soul of this beauty,
Moves the White Peacock.

William Sharp
Roman Sketches

Nightfall, Op. 7, No. 2

The long day is over.
Dusk, and silence now:
And night, that is as dew
On the flower of the World.

William Sharp
Roman Sketches

The Fountain of the Acqua Paola, Op. 7, No. 3

Shimmering lights,
As though the Aurora's
Wild polar fires
Flashed in thy happy bubbles,
Died in thy foam.

William Sharp
Roman Sketches

Clouds, Op. 7, No. 4

Mountainous glories,
They move superbly;
Crumbling so slowly,
That none perceives when
The golden domes
are sunk in the valleys
Of fathomless snows.

William Sharp
Roman Sketches


