UNDERSTANDING RZEWSKI’S NORTH AMERICAN BALLADS:
FROM THE COMPOSER TO THE WORK

D.M.A. DOCUMENT

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ABSTRACT

This document provides performance guidelines for the North American Ballads, written by Frederic Rzewski (b.1938). This paper also discusses the composer’s biographical background and provides an overview of his published piano works. It was a great opportunity to conduct an interview with Rzewski during A Music Festival of New Music at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music in 2008. Rzewski discussed the North American Ballads from the view of a pianist. His comments during the interview were very valuable and helpful while analyzing his music afterwards. He provided a deeper understanding of his medium when he composes.

This document contains six chapters: Chapter 1, Introduction; Chapter 2, biography of Frederic Rzewski and overview of piano music; Chapter 3, the use of the medium in the North American Ballads; Chapter 4, origins of melodies and historical background used in the North American Ballads; Chapter 5, performance approach and guidelines for the North American Ballads; Chapter 6, summary and conclusion.
The original melodies and their use in the *North American Ballads*, the list of his piano works, the discography, and the interview with Rzewski are provided in the Appendix.
DEDICATION

To my parents,
Suncheol Kim and Youngsin Kang
Acknowledgements

Thank you foremost to Frederic Rzewski for sharing a deeper insight and understanding of his music from the view of the composer as well as that of a pianist. It was an honor for me to interview him. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my professor and advisor, Dr. Caroline Hong, who is full of energy and passion for music. I could not achieve anything without her guidance and support throughout my studies. Many thanks to Dr. Robin Rice for his encouragement and sincere support, and Dr. Graeme Boone who gave me valuable comments while I prepared for my interview with Rzewski. Thanks to Dr. David Frego for guiding me into a new music method, Dalcroze Eurhythmics; Dr. Kenneth Williams who gave me a chance to teach class piano; Professor James Hill for his support and serving on my committee throughout my study.

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Kyeongsoon, Pastor Yoon, Calvary Korean church family, Miseong, Yoojin, Seungmin, Jeongeun, Elaine, Leo, Laura, Aliea.

I believe that every experience I have had at The Ohio State University has prepared me to be a better musician. Lastly, special thanks to the God who has made this accomplishment possible.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Important features of the *North American Ballads* make Frederic Rzewski (b.1938) a well-known American composer. The music was written for Paul Jacobs, an American pianist who planned to make a recording of American composers with music based on American themes. Rzewski composed music based on the American labor movement. The folk tunes Rzewski employs in his writing represent the American music of the period, convey the unwritten living traditions, and express a sense of community (Wachsmann, 693). The folk tunes used by Rzewski in the *North American Ballads* are protest songs regarding the working or living conditions of laborers in North America. His work often reflects his beliefs and the historical events of the time period in which he composed. Therefore, it is important for the pianist to explore the different kinds of folk tunes used by Rzewski and the significant features within his music. Rzewski’s music is eclectic, encompassing various genres and borrows quotations from folk tunes.
The *North American Ballads* were written from 1978-1989. During this time period Rzewski was close to the American Folk singer, Pete Seeger. Rzewski and Seeger often discussed political music, and during one of their conversations Seeger gave Rzewski precious advice: “follow the example of Bach.” Bach’s choral compositions contain melodies that are easy to follow. In the *North American Ballads*, Rzewski makes use of Bach’s chorale composition techniques. He builds up a contrapuntal texture and transforms it using classical techniques: augmentation, diminution, transposition, and compression. Despite Rzewski’s variations and alterations, everything in the *North American Ballads* is still somehow related to the original tune.

It is important to acknowledge the religious aspect of the folk songs that Rzewski chose. Many of the folk tunes Rzewski used are a synthesis of different cultures and often have a different set of religious lyrics.

Rzewski has composed works for tape and mixed media, solo piano, various instruments, chamber ensembles, voice, orchestra, and the concerto medium. However, the main discussion and biographical information will be limited to his solo piano music. This document provides Rzewski’s biography with an overview of his piano works, historical background of melodies used in the *North American Ballads*, and suggested
performance approach. Lastly, to guide performers, the paper includes an interview with Rzewski that contains his personal suggestions on how to approach this music for performance.
Chapter 2

Biography

Frederic Rzewski (r’ZHEFF-skee) is an American composer and pianist who lived in Europe throughout his career. He was born in Massachusetts in 1938 to Polish parents of Jewish descent. In his early childhood, Rzewski was fascinated by the compositional styles of Shostakovich, who used folk material creatively and not merely as quotations. Rzewski studied at Harvard and Princeton, where he was exposed to the works of many contemporary composers including Cage, Stockhausen, and Boulez. Rzewski’s compositional style and approach to music changed during that time. Poem and the two Studies were influenced by the aforementioned avant-garde composers. He later studied serialism with Luigi Dallapiccola, an Italian composer who wrote strong, politically charged music. Rzewski was also interested in live electronic music and improvisation, which in 1966 prompted him to found Musica Elettronica Viva (MEV) in Rome. MEV was a very experimental, political, and social group of musicians. Members
included Frederic Rzewski, synthesizer Richard Teitelbaum, composer Alvin Curran, and Allan Bryant in electronics. Rzewski frequently improvised music based on traditional notation and was involved with jazz composition in this group. Some of MEV’s music dealt with social themes, which were associated with Rzewski’s social and political beliefs. MEV members are active both as a group and individually as composers. In 1967 there was a concert that included a performance of John Cage’s Solo for Voice 2 in Berlin.

Rzewski grew up in the 1960s during a somewhat unstable and difficult time in history. During the 60s, there were many political and social student movements. He started listening to those sounds of struggle and protest, and thus found his voice in his music. In the early 70’s he started composing music associated with current social issues, a reflection of his belief in social change. He was influenced by composers such as, Christian Wolff and Cornelius Cardew. His music maintained political aspects during the 1980 and 1990’s. Between 1980-1991, Rzewski composed seven pieces for solo piano: Eggs, The Turtle and the Crane, Mayn Yingele, Short Fantasy on “Give Peace A Chance”, Bumps, Ludes, and Sonata. During this time, he dedicated Three-Movement Sonata to Henri Pousseur.
Some documents show that Rzewski called himself a Marxist. To say that he is a self-proclaimed Marxist composer is not completely true, nor is it false. He is a composer who frequently chooses very political themes for his compositions. However, according to Rzewski, there is some confusion over his Marxist label because the name 'Marx' is shared by Karl Marx and the Marx Brothers. This is what Rzewski states about the issue:

“Groucho Marx, Marx brothers, famous American Comic Films through 1930s. I love Karl Marx. Yes, I think Karl Marx is a very interesting guy. (laugh) I like Karl Marx a lot. I kept call myself a Marxist? No, I don’t know where that came from. I’ve seen that before, but who cares if a composer is a Marxist? What kind of Marx? Harpo Marx (Interview, 93-94).”

Rzewski is a big fan of the five Marx Brothers, an American family comedy act originally from New York City. From the early 1900s to around 1950, five of the Marx brothers found success in motion pictures. He enjoys their comic films and reflects their wit and humor in his music.

Rzewski’s style has been described as eclectic and responsive to the times. He synthesizes different traditions and music languages from around the world. His style is directly influenced by traditional classical music because he has a strong background in classical composition. From his early years Rzewski was considered to be a gifted pianist.
He was regarded as a representative of the ‘composer-pianists.’ He easily juxtaposes various musical styles gleaned from his abundant musical education. These components create a base for Rzewski’s own musical style in the form of popular motives from folk music, classical elements, and improvisation.

Rzewski’s use of the folk music, which is a unique element in his music compositions, can be traced to other great composers, such as: Mozart, Schubert, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich, and Dvořák. Rzewski believes that a large gap exists between folk music and other kinds of music. He tried to fill the gap by incorporating folk elements into his works. He attempts to recall the past, and as a result, his music is accessible to a large audience.

The use of classical elements, such as strict formal structures and counterpoint, are present in most of Rzewski’s works. Also, the complexities found in his works are a result of his interest in the music of J.S. Bach. The music is very dense with a great deal of fragmentation, which reflects a state of disorder and confusion. Rzewski was strongly influenced by Pete Seeger, who was a well known American folk singer. Seeger said to him, “follow the example of Bach. He was one of the first composers who was concerned with audience participation.” The melodies written by Bach can be sung easily, so
everyone in Bach’s church congregations would sing along. Therefore, what Rzewski was trying to accomplish, especially in the four *North American Ballads*, was what Bach does in much of his organ and chorale music. He set up a contrapuntal texture and transformed it using classical techniques: augmentation, diminution, transposition, and compression. No matter what he altered, almost everything in each piece has some relationship to the original song, allowing the folk tune to still be audible.

Improvisation is an important element in Rzewski’s compositions. He believes that the art of improvisation is the soul of classical music. Rzewski was exposed to jazz music and jazz musicians, and what he inherited from jazz is the spirit of experimentation. Jazz music is accessible to most Americans, including Rzewski, and he utilized his experience and experimented with jazz in his classical composition.

Rzewski’s experimentation is also influenced by the twentieth century music: serial music of Schoenberg, the electronic music of Stockhausen, and the avant-garde writing of John Cage. There are extreme register and dynamic contrasts in their music. Rzewski has performed a lot of their music and borrows those features from them. He creatively incorporates these features into his own words and musical voice. Music is Rzewski’s chosen medium with which to express his world views. He is affected by wars
and protests, which are reflected in large portions of his music. Rzewski said that he
could not help avoiding those references when he composes music nowadays. He has
participated as the pianist and conductor in some of the recordings of his compositions,
and as the pianist in recordings of works by Boulez, Eisler and others (Lewis, 1992 and
Interview of Rzewski, 2008).

Rzewski has taught at the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of
Cincinnati, Hochschule der Kunste in West Berlin, and the Royal Conservatory of the
Hague in the Netherlands (Cornett-Murtada, 23). He has taught as a visiting instructor at
various schools throughout the United States and Europe. Rzewski currently lives in
Brussels, where he retired from a post as Professor of Composition at the Conservatoire
Royal de Musique at Liège, Berlin (Ferretti, 1).
Chapter 3

The use of the Medium in the North American Ballads

3.1 Ballad

It is important to research the definition of the genre “Ballad,” since Frederic Rzewski’s title is North American Ballads. Ballad (Eng.), Ballade (Ger.), and Ballade (Fre.) come from the Latin word ballere, meaning to dance. Though its genesis is dance song from the medieval era, its meaning has been lost since the late Middle-Ages. In the fourteenth century, the term was used in reference to a strophic solo song containing a narrative text. Traditionally, ballads were passed down orally, then they began to be printed in ‘broadsides’ during the sixteenth century. Those printed on a broadside usually did not contain melodies, just texts.

The ballads that focus on a single event are probably snapshots of a longer epic tale. Ballads have a local or nationalistic character related to historical or legendary
events, often having a tragic ending and usually correlated to violence or the supernatural (Kirby, 182). These texts can be found in the German art song, of which Schubert composed many (Chen, 38). The ballade was continually used in the area of vocal music as well until Chopin used the term as the title for a new genre of piano music of his own invention. He composed four ballades with beautiful melodies and harmonies. After Chopin, other composers including Brahms, Liszt, Grieg, and Faure, incorporated the ballad into their works. In jazz music, the term “ballad” is also applied to sentimental songs (Kennedy, 51).

Ballads have a direct association with folk songs, and the subject matter is related to folk traditions. Although there is diversity among the Western ballads, the common thread is the stories they convey. All of the characteristics of everyday life are reflected in the Rzewski’s *North America Ballads* (Hayashi, 79-80). In this composition, he was inspired to write about different important events of American history to convey a social and political message (Hayashi, 12-16).
3.2 Use of Quotation

According to *The New Grove Dictionary of Music*, quotation is the incorporation of relatively brief existing music into another work in a manner akin to quotation in speech or literature, or a segment of existing music incorporated into a later work. As such, the use of a quotation is an effective tool for composers who tried to bridge the gap between popular music and other styles of music in the twentieth century. Musical “borrowing” has existed throughout the history of Western music, and it still continues today. Rzewski believes that a large gap existed between classical music and folk music in the twentieth century; therefore, he tries to recall the past by incorporating folk elements into many of his works. By doing so, he convinces himself that the music is accessible to a larger audience. Throughout his life, Rzewski has tried to understand the world and people; music is the medium he has chosen to express his feelings and ideologies (Shin, 1-2). The twentieth century was a time of change and rapid growth, but it was also a time of tremendous irritation and sorrow. This period reflects a sense of complexity and anxiety; Rzewski reveals these conflicts and accepts many different
ideologies through his music. Rzewski uses classical elements, popular motives from folk music, and improvisation to blend many styles with ease and conviction (Shin, 2).

Rzewski quotes American folk melodies, folk tunes, and spirituals in a large portion of his piano music. He effectively applies the cumulative-setting quotation in the
North American Ballads, which requires that he first quote the tune as a fragment, and then extends it with each reoccurrence until it is revealed in an entirety at the end of the work (Cornett-Murtada, 13-15). In the composition, he bases each of the pieces on union tunes through the use of folk music. It is essential for the pianist to mark the original melody or fragment of the folk song into the score. In order to perform North American Ballads, it is necessary to understand the origins of the melodies he utilizes in each piece of the set.
3.3 The Importance of Title

The choice of the title sets the tone and direction for the piece and serves to evoke a response. The response of the audience is vital to the purpose of Rzewski’s composition. His titles have a strong connection to his socio-political agenda and his personal feelings (Shin, 5), while also conveying socio-political ideas or pictorial scenes. However, there is some misunderstanding of Rzewski being a self-proclaimed Marxist, as I previously remarked.

Rzewski has also been influenced by important events within American history, events that he was inspired to incorporate into his music. He combines significant social and political implications as a way to send an intense message through his music (Hayashi, 12-16). Although socio-political issues exist within Rzewski’s music, he recognizes that the most important aspect of the music is communicating with the audience (Hayashi, 35). He realizes that it is more effective to quote from familiar material that originally involved words or titles, because the connotation of the words affects the listener more strongly than just the melody. Listeners then have a better general idea of the theme based on the title of the piece. Rzewski thought if he quoted
familiar tunes, listeners could easily recognize the tune or rhythm when the melody is transformed in different ways. Despite Rzewski’s variations and alterations, everything in the *North American Ballads* is still somehow related to the original tune. Based on the requirements of his commission from Paul Jacobs, Rzewski decided to employ folk tunes in order to compose the most accessible American music. Using American folk tunes was, for Rzewski, the best choice in writing the music.
Chapter 4

Origin of Melodies and Historical background used in the American North Ballads

In this section, each piece of the *North American Ballads* is discussed with a focus on the origins of the melodies and related historical information. The original melodies and their use in the North American Ballads are attached in the Appendix.

4.1 Dreadful Memories (After Aunt Molly Jackson)

Rzewski bases the first piece on a protest song that describes the Kentucky coal mine strikes of 1931. This song is modeled after the similar hymn *Dreadful Memories*. Aunt Molly Jackson, who was a witness to the death of many children of coal miners due to starvation, wrote the text and sang this song (Lewis, 69). He wrote “Aunt Molly Jackson” directly after the title and associated that historical problem with her, because
the “dreadful memories” belonged to her. At that time, songs were an important element in the civil rights struggle because they helped to educate the workers and encouraged them to maintain their unity.

The original melody for *Dreadful Memories* is easy to recognize and is memorable to listeners because of its simplicity. It consists of a simple harmonic progression (I-IV-V), rhythm and melody, and four bar phrasing. The music and the text are relatively contradictory; however, Rzewski believes that it is not strange to find a ballad or folk song that uses a cheerful melody while dealing with a sad or tragic subject (Cornett-Murtada, 34). He composed this piece in the key of A♭ major, and it is sixteen measures in length. Also, he composed this tuneful pentatonic melody within a narrow range, spanning the interval of a sixth and repeating the chorus as the significant folk song idiom (Figure 4.1).

![Figure 4.1: Dreadful Memories](image)

Figure 4.1: *Dreadful Memories*
Dreadful memories! How they linger,
How they pain my precious soul!
Little children, sick and hungry,
Sick and hungry, weak and cold.

Little children, cold and hungry
Without any food at all to eat.
They had no clothes to put on their bodies,
They had no shoes to put on their feet.

Dreadful memories! How they linger,
How they fill my heart with pain.
Oh, how hard I’ve tried to forget them,
But I find it all in vain

I can’t forget them little babies,
With golden hair as soft as silk.
Slowly dying from starvation,
Their parents could not give them milk.

I can’t forget them coal miners’ children
That starved to death without one drop of milk,
While the coal operators and their wives and their children
Were all dressed in jewels and silk.

Dreadful memories! How they haunt me
As the lonely moments fly.
Oh, how them little babies suffered!
I saw them starve to death and die (Greenway 274-275).

A different verse supplied by Bell and Olmstead:

Hungry fathers, wearied mothers
Living in these dreadful shacks
Little children, cold and hungry
With no clothing on their backs (Bell and Olmstead, 452).
4.2 Which Side are You On? (After Florence Reese)

This is the second part of the *North American Ballads*. Rzewski states that there is a misspelling of the name on the score: Florence Reese. He recommends a documentary film, *Harlan County USA* (1976), which is about a coal miners’ strike in the same part of the world. It was made by a collective of women in the United States. Florence Reese is in this film at the age of 90 and sings the song (Interview, 98-99).

The melody came from a traditional Baptist hymn, *Lay the Lily Low*, or the traditional British ballad *Jack Munro*. (Fowke and Glaser, 55) The question of the title emphasizes the two sides presented in the music, and questions the audience directly. Rzewski develops the question-answer idea of the text by dividing the music into two parts: a written part and an optional free improvisation section. The parallel structure establishes a duality which is reflected in the title (Cornett-Murtada, 60).

Reese wrote the song during the mid-1930s as a description of the coal miners attempt to unionize in Harlan County, Kentucky. Her husband, Sam Reese, was the organizer for the United Mine Workers of America and was directly involved in the toughest and bloodiest battle to accomplish unionization. The miners of that region were
locked in a violent struggle with the mine owners. Deputies hired by the mining company threatened the Reese family. Moreover, they illegally entered and observed the Reese family home. Sam Reese had been warned before and safely escaped, but Florence and their children were scared in his absence. That night, Reese wrote the lyrics from her personal experience on a calendar in the kitchen after company thugs had attacked her house in retaliation for her husband’s actions. The mining companies and their hired deputies were on one side and the independent freewheeling coal miners of Kentucky were on the other (Fowke and Glaser, 55). The original protest song, which is Rzewski’s favorite protest tune (Hayashi, 114), is simple and straightforward and begins on an upbeat. He uses the key of B minor, making this the only song in a minor key within the *North American Ballads*. The tune seems to imply a question-answer feeling through the use of ascending and descending in B minor scales (Figure 4.2).
Come all of you good workers,
Good news to you I’ll tell,
Of how the good old union
Has come in here to dwell.

Chorus:
Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?

(The chorus is repeated after every verse)

My daddy was a miner,
And I’m a miner’s son
And I’ll stick with the union
Till every battle’s won.

They say in Harlan County
There are no neutrals there;
You either are a union man
Or a thug for J. H. Blair.

Oh workers, can you stand it?
Oh tell me how you can,
Will you be a lousy scab,
Or will you be a man?

Don’t scab for the bosses,
Don’t listen to their lies,
Us poor folks haven’t got a chance
Unless we organize (Fowke and Glazer, 54-55).

Additional verses supplied by *American Folksongs of Protest*:

We’ve started our good battle,
We know we’re sure to win,
Because we’ve got the gun thugs
A-lookin’ very thin.

They say they have to guard us
To educate their child
Their children lives in luxury,
Our children’s almost wild.

With pistols and with rifles
They take away our bread,
And if you miners hinted it,
They’ll sock you on the head.

Oh workers, can you stand it?
Oh tell me how you can.
Will you be a lousy scab
Or will you be a man?
My daddy was a miner,
He is now in the air and sun (Blacklisted and without a job)
He’ll be with you fellow workers,
Until the battle’s won (Greenway, 170-171).
4.3 Down by the Riverside

The third song of the *North American Ballads* is a well known traditional African-American spiritual also known as *I Ain’t Gonna Study War no More*. It was performed in the spirit of nuclear protest demonstrations and the anti-war sentiment of the 1960s. However, it was a rather peaceful song, spiritually based on a folk song of protest (Cornett-Murtada, 73).

Every two years, Berlin, Germany was host to a Festival of Political Song concerning issues from different countries. Vietnam was featured in 1979 and was the inspiration when Rzewski began composing this piano piece. He was supposed to compose the work based on the folk song of Vietnam: *Boat Woman*. However, he changed his mind in the middle of writing because he was relatively unfamiliar with that particular folk song. He had to be careful when working with songs from different countries. First, Rzewski tried to find a tune which had a symbolic relationship with Vietnam. Unable to find a suitable folk song, he finally decided upon an American tune that was often sung during the period of the Vietnam War by members of the American
Peace Movement (Interview, 112-113). This specific piece is spiritual, while his other pieces are political “protest tunes” that symbolize the hardship of the working class.

The original tune is set in D major and is thirty-two measures in length, with the measures equally divided between the verses and chorus (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: Down by the Riverside
Gonna lay down my sword and shield, down by the riverside,
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside.
Gonna lay down my sword and shield, down by the riverside,
I ain’t gonna study war no more.

*Chorus:*
Ain’t gonna study war nomore, ain’t gonna study war no more.
Ain’t gonna study war no more.
Ain’t gonna study war no more, ain’t gonna study war no more.
I ain’t gonna study war no more.

I’m gonna talk with the Prince of Peace, down by the riverside,
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside,
I’m gonna talk with the Prince of Peace, down by the riverside,
Ain’t gonna study war no more.

(Chorus is repeated after every verse)

I’m gonna stick my sword in the golden sand, etc.

I’m gonna shake hands with every man, etc.

I’m gonna walk with my brothers in peace, etc.

I’m gonna make love, make love, not war, etc.

I’m gonna put on my freedom robe, etc.(Whitman, 152-153)
4.4 Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues

The title makes reference to the noise of machines in a southern textile mill. This piece is the most programmatic and effective of the four *North American Ballads*. Bill Wolff and Pete Seeger recorded *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* in North Carolina, however the author of the text and the origin of the melody are unknown (Cornett-Murtada, 87). This traditional blues song describes the poor working conditions of laborers in a textile mill in Winnsboro, North Carolina in 1930. The original setting is twenty-two measures in length, is written in 4/4, and is in the key of D major. The repeated rhythms, scales, syncopation, and pick-up notes help to establish a blues feeling. Although the harmony in the chorus does not quite fit that of the traditional blues, it is very similar and therefore this piece is classified as a blues song (Hayashi, 123). This is the most interesting use of folk-tune quotation in this set (Figure 4.4).
Old man Sargent, sitting at the desk,
The damned old fool won’t give us no rest.
He’d take the nickels off a dead man’s eyes,
To buy a Coca Cola and an Eskimo pie.

Chorus:
I got the blues, I got the blues, I got the Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues;
Lordy, Lordy, spoolin’s hard;
You know and I know, I don’t have to tell,
You work for Tom Watson, got to work like hell.
I got the blues, I got the blues, I got the Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues.

When I die, don’t bury me at all,
Just hang me up on the spool room wall.
Place a knotter in my hand,
So I can spool in the Promised Land.

(Chorus)

When I die, don’t bury me deep,
Bury me down on Six Hundred Street;
Place a bobbin in each hand,
So I can doff in the Promised Land (Fowke and Glazer, 74-75).

(Chorus)
Chapter 5

Performance Approach and Guidelines

5.1 Dreadful Memories (After Aunt Molly Jackson)

Table 5.1: Dreadful memories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1-24</td>
<td>Introduce full theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Polyphonic stretto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>Use of Banjo texture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>41-51</td>
<td>Reminiscent of Chopin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>52-65</td>
<td>Climax followed by relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>66-76</td>
<td>Rushing with banjo texture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>77-85</td>
<td>Quiet lullaby</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In section A, the piece opens with a complete statement of the melody in Ab major (mm.1-8). The opening tempo indicates “steady swing pace: afterwards generally flexible tempi throughout.” and “legatissimo; with abundant pedal.” Rzewski inserts various tempi throughout his music, including little slower, hesitantly, a little faster than Tempo I, and accelerando. These tempo changes imply an improvisatory character in the music, therefore the performer needs to understand the relationship between the different sections and moods. The music starts in a 4/4 meter and the theme is in a compound rhythm (four against three) because of the tenuto marking for the left hand. Rzewski said, “I guess the important thing here and this statement of the theme is the double rhythm. Four in four and in three because you have these notes here with the tenuto marks on. It’s actually in three, it is four against three (Interview, 96).”

The performer can play two meters in this first section: the right hand obviously performs 4/4 while left hand plays in 6/8 (Cornett-Murtada, 39). Also there are two dynamic indications: mp for the right hand and piano for the left hand (mm.1). The melody should be clear with swung eighth-note accompaniment patterns, which should not overwhelm the melody. This is what Rzewski said:

“I think the most important thing in this piece is to realize what kind of tune this is, it’s a lullaby. Song that mother sings to put the child sleep, this is to me lullaby. And it has to do with particular phrase how the children died in her arms so you can see that she is maybe rocking child to sleep, so I think this first piece is, you think of that rocking motion, singing to the child and rocking arms. She talks about how these children were hungry and had nothing to eat and died
in her arms, it’s a very sad song. And she talks about how they died in her arms, and it’s very very sad (Interview, 94-96).”

Therefore, the performer should play this piece like a lullaby, as if a woman is rocking and singing to a dead child in her arms. It depicts a very miserable situation, hence the dark and gloomy mood. The pedaling needs to be abundant without being overly heavy in order to support the tender melody.

The second statement of the melody (mm.8-16) in the right hand moves to the bass register, as if this was sung by a different person (Cornett-Murtada, 39). The mood is less bright than the first statement because of the dynamics and the lower register. The pick up note of the melody (mm.8) could possibly be E instead of C, as Rzewski explains in his interview (Interview, 96).

The third statement of the melody (mm.16-24) is located in an inner voice in the right hand, while the accompaniment is written with a dynamic marking of \(mf\) and has a thicker texture. Right before the theme splinters, it sounds much fuller and more open. It is more effective to mark the inner theme with suitable fingerings to aid in projecting the melody. The theme should be played with the thumb of the right hand, and it should be noted that the notes are very hard to connect together. Therefore, the soprano part should be connected to create a good legato sound (Example 5.1).
In section B, there is a stretto section of a fugue (mm.25-34). The melodic fragment imitates itself between the two hands. The tempo is a little slower and the music is hesitant, as if having lost its path. In this section, the composer uses fragments from the original melody written in different tonalities. There is a sudden change of dynamics and extreme changes in the register of the keyboard. There are two tempo markings: *rit.* (mm.29) and *allargando un poco* (mm.12). However, their functions are slightly different. The first one implies the end of the phrase, while the second one leads to fuller, wider sound effects which are followed by a sudden decrescendo to *p* in preparation for a new section.

The next section returns to A♭ major with repeated fast sixteenth notes alternating between both hands. The tempo is slightly faster than *Tempo I*, as Rzewski
marks, and the sixteenth notes should be steady and even. While the pianist is shifting hand positions, he must be sure to keep the eighth rest in the middle of the sixteenth note patterns clear. This is very rhythmic, dry and crisp, as if someone is picking banjo strings. It would be very effective for the pianist to practice the pivotal notes with the right hand first and add the left hand later (Example 5.2).

Example 5.2: *Dreadful Memories*, mm.35-36

At measure 38, the left hand needs to be practiced first since the composer changes the rhythmic units. These melodic fragments serve to reinforce the original melody. Rzewski’s sense of humor is shown in this section, the joke being that nobody expects the rhythmical banjo texture.

This section is smoothly connected to the next tremolo section despite the sudden meter and key changes: 12/8 in e minor. The quarter note is then equal to a dotted
quarter note. Therefore, the last four notes are very important in shaping the next section (mm.40). Those notes act as a pedal to open the sound and slow the tempo down slightly in order to set up a new tempo and direction. Melodic octaves in the left hand need to be played majestically with a forte dynamic (mm.41-42). The *tenuto* articulation needs to be distinguished from the *staccato*. The tremolo on the G major triad should not overwhelm the melody. In mm. 41-48 the melody shifts every two measures through the use of octaves and sixths between the right and left hands. The music becomes more dramatic and technically demanding in this section. The use of proper fingerings should be considered in order to clearly project the melody. It is important to use the thumbs effectively, executing the melody notes which are added to the major seconds in mm.45-46. Using the fingerings I suggest in Example 5.3 will help the passage to sound smoother.
Example 5.3: *Dreadful Memories*, mm.42-46

This arpeggio section is reminiscent of Chopin’s figurations and the melody from the protest song is played against the arpeggio pattern (Hayashi, 99). Therefore, performers need to first practice the main melody and the arpeggio patterns separately. Once the performer feels secure and the melody is connected smoothly, the melody and arpeggio patterns can be practiced together (mm.45-51).
Like Chopin, Rzewski inserts a magnificent and technically challenging section. The dotted note is equal to a quarter note and the tempo is a bit slower than *Tempo I*. The music is broadened to achieve a climax. Therefore, the first note should be ringing as if it is bursting out (mm.52). To achieve the sound, I suggest holding the damper pedal much longer on the first note. It is challenging for performers to execute the complex rhythms between the two hands, big leaps, and frequent meter changes. The pianist could manipulate both hands by using substitute hand positions. I personally suggest possible hand positions for this passage (Example. 5.4). The original melody and its thematic use in this section are attached in the Appendix A.

Example 5.4: *Dreadful Memories*, mm.52-55
The music begins to calm down with an extreme decrescendo to *pianissimo*, and half notes in the left hand help bring down the mood in mm.60-63. Performers need to enjoy the sonority. The touch should be very delicate and subtle at the *pianissimo* (mm.64). Those measures are a very important transition leading into the unexpected banjo texture again. Performers should manipulate a large crescendo between the two pianissimo sections to create a contrast (mm.64-66).

The music returns briefly to the banjo texture, a sound which the listener does not anticipate. It should be rhythmical and light. After a quarter rest, Rzewski prepares another extreme crescendo with an accelerando to a *fortissimo*, as if one is trying to forget the dreadful memories (Hayashi, 101). It is helpful for performers to find a melody line between the two hands first, then practice with a full legato touch instead of staccato (mm.68-69). The octave melody in the left hand should be decisive and be played with a full sound as marked. The breathing marking should not be ignored because it serves an important function (mm.70): creating a space before shifting hands, stretching a musical idea, and preparing precise rhythms.

Rzewski effectively applies an extreme contrast of dynamics in his writing, which is an important compositional device. At measure 77, there is a *subito pianissimo*
right after a *fortissimo*. The key returns to the original A♭ major with the same opening lullaby. However, the overall mood and sound are much subtler and quieter, as if a woman was whispering a lullaby. I suggest holding the soft pedal throughout this section because the overall the dynamics are *pp* to *ppp* (mm.77-85). It is necessary for performers to use the finger pedal as much as they can even though the damper pedal is already in use. The rhythm of the accompaniment in the left hand should be precise when performers practice (Example 5.5).

Example 5.5: *Dreadful Memories*, mm.82-85

There are important markings in the last two measures (mm. 84-85): very *slightly retard.*, *ppp*, *to silence*, *fermata* and (*ca/4’30’’*). The music should fade away with silence while slowing down a bit. Therefore, the performer should hold the last chord until it fully disappears. Rzewski calculates the length of the playing time at the end,
much as Bartok did. If the performer plays with a brush touch in this section, they can balance and depict this gloomy mood.
5.2 Which side are you on?

Table 5.2: Which Side are You On?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1-14</td>
<td>Rhythmical Confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>15-25</td>
<td>Bi-tonal usage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>26-33</td>
<td>Expressive antiphonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>34-50</td>
<td>Stretto and swing rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>Romantic sound effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>61-95</td>
<td>Stretto with trill and tremolo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>96-130</td>
<td>Minimalistic passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finale</td>
<td>131-138</td>
<td>Majestic full quotation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addendum</td>
<td></td>
<td>Possible ending for improvisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Which Side are You On?* is one of Rzewski’s favorite protest tunes, and he effectively utilizes melodic fragmentation and word association in the piece. He
frequently uses a chorus fragment from the original song throughout this entire piece, more often than any of the other pieces in this set. He states,

“The structure of melody illustrates the words, *Which Side are You On?* So are you in this side? Or are you on that side? Are you supporting the minors? Or are you supporting the bosses? It’s a question. So the idea is that you have to be the one side or the other. The music is intended to illustrate that simple idea. So it’s divided into two parts. The first section is complex, the second section is simple (Interview, 100).”

This piece starts with scattered fragments of melody, while the other pieces begin with simple and full quotations of melody. It creates confusion and poses questions, as the title of the music displays: *Which Side are You On?* This is one of the challenging parts for the pianist; there are a lot of meter, dynamic, and register changes. In section A the meter changes ten times throughout 14 measures. What the music is telling is that the question is a complex question to answer (Interview, 100). That is why he frequently changes the meter incorporating the question mark. It can be helpful for the pianist to subdivide the rhythm using 16th notes to execute the precise rhythm, measure by measure (mm.1-9). The pianist should mark the fragments of the melody and pay attention to the different articulations: staccato, legato, tenuto, and accents. Rzewski quickly changes the dynamic from f to p immediately following the quarter rest in m.12. There are large
intervals between the two hands. The pianist should roll the chords or intervals gently, so as not to break the musical line.

Rzewski sets up section B in B♭ minor and creates a very musical section that is slower than the previous section. The bass and tenor voices are an imitative counterpoint (mm.15-21). There is a bi-tonal passage introducing a chorus from the original song: *Which side are you on?* (mm.22-25). The sound should be very soft and gentle, as if to whisper to the audience. Pianists can use the soft pedal while feeling the direction, ascending and descending, with precise rhythm (Example 5.6).

Example 5.6: *Which Side are You On?* mm. 22-23

After the last fermata (m.25) he gently introduces into the music an expressive and tranquil section, noted in the music as *very freely, expressivo.* He uses the antiphonal
technique, which is influenced by folk tradition. The full quotation of the melody is introduced by the right hand and played gently while the left hand plays a two note phrase. He adds a grace note to create exotic sounds in m.30-33, influenced by Scottish Folk Music (Hayashi, 108) The pianist can take their time and enjoy the grace notes in the slightly slower tempo.

There is an abrupt change of mood and meter with $sfz$ while setting up a contrapuntal stretto; the pianist can mentally prepare for this change at the end of the previous section. The original melody and its thematic use in this section are attached in the Appendix A. The top note of the right hand, G, should be projected and the pianist should set up the Tempo I in m.34 (Example 5.7).

Example 5.7: *Which Side are You On?* mm. 34
The inner voices of the sixteenth notes should flow smoothly and connect to create a swinging feeling in mm. 37-39. The music portrays excitement through the use of a hemiola between both hands (mm.40-41). The pianist needs to pay attention to the ascending direction of the third in the left hand to achieve the ‘moving forward motion’ as Rzewski notes: *piu mosso, rushing*. In mm.43-45 it is hard to cover the wide interval with only the left hand, so the substitute fingerings can be used to play the left hand notes with both hands. The pianist needs to take advantage of the eighth rest as the right hand moves swiftly from the lower to the higher register of the keyboard (Example 5.8).

Example 5.8: *Which Side are You On?* mm. 43-45

After big leaps and frequent meter changes, the music slows down with a section of whole notes and quarter notes that prepare for the next section.
Rzewski sets up the new meter, key, and tempo with the note: *Slightly faster, molto leggero*. It sounds free and improvisational with homophonic variation of the folk tune in G # minor (Cornett-Murtada, 58). The repetitive accompaniment in the left hand should be very light and delicate in order to generate a Romantic sound. Rzewski frequently modulates in this section from the key of G # minor to F # minor and E minor. The melody in the right hand should not be overwhelmed by the accompaniment. In m.55 it is effective to use a soft pedal, especially when the pianist introduces a fragment of the melody in the lower register with *sotto voce*. In addition, the pianist should control the thumb on the first note in *ppp* while crossing over the hands.

Rzewski introduces the chorus from the original song (m.61) in the lower register. This sound should be decisive. The texture becomes dense and the rhythm is more complicated. He uses abundant trills and tremolo. The pianist should use the pedal while executing the trill and tremolo, as marked (mm.69-73). Rzewski alludes to the minimalist section that is in the following section by briefly introducing the melody in m.75-76. The pianist needs to execute different articulations between the ascending and descending melody; the ascending melody is legato and the descending melody is staccato. The pianist should pay attention to the dynamic contrast in m.83: *ff and subito*.
pp. Rzewski cumulatively builds the dynamic up to the climax with the tremolo, trill, and glissando with the palms of both hands from the highest E to the lowest E (Example 5.9).

![Example 5.9: Which Side are You On? m. 90](image)

There is a chorus from the melody in different registers through the section, interchanging between the bass and treble clef. So, the pianist should shift hands very quickly to execute this part decisively and with a marcato sound.

There is a large minimalism section in which the pianist should play each bar twice with *marcato*. Rzewski explains minimalism: when people listen to repetitive sounds, such as the same words or sounds, they begin to hear things that are not actually being played or spoken. The process can create a sort of hallucination (Interview, 123-124). He conveys that repetitive technique in this section, but it is not entirely minimalism music because he changes the motive slightly. It is important to project the
third beat of each bar. Therefore, the pianist should sustain the last chord of each bar, which is tied and marked as tenuto. Rzewski used the minimalism technique in the low register of the keyboard, but every measure has slight variations and the overall melody is moving into a lower register. He reinforces the melody by playing it in both hands from m.111. The pianist should gradually make a crescendo from \textit{pp} to \textit{ff} using the pedal, thus making the texture thicker. In m.126 he repeats the measure 4 times ending the minimalist section. The following section is a transition to the finale. This is rhythmic and full of rich sound due to the dotted notes and thicker texture. Rzewski offers optional free improvisation to the pianist, explained as follows:

Optional free improvisation, subject to the following conditions:

1. Improvisation should begin as a sudden radical change, with no “transition.” That is, there should be no ambiguity about where the written music ends and where the improvisation begins. The manner in which this sense of a leap to a different kind of order is evoked is left to the interpreter. A few simple limitations, however, apply:

2. Begin by alluding in some way to the tonality of B minor. This may be brief. End with a rather long section in C mixolydian (scale: C-D-E-F-G-A-B♭-C).

3. Improvisation may use techniques employed in written music (polytonal transpositions of theme, etc.) or not; but in any case should represent a different “side” of the same form (many different tonalities in the first part, one tonality in the second).

4. Improvisation, if played, should last at least as long as the preceding written music.

5. If no improvisation is played, pass immediately to the finale.
Rzewski’s approach to writing music with the “question-answer idea” creates unique and individual performances. The pianist is allowed to improvise, so a new variation of Rzewski’s work is created. His idea is a symbolic idea that establishes a parallel communication: between the composer and the performer, a written part and an improvisation, rational and irrational, predictable and unpredictable. He says,

“It’s a difficult question, Which Side are You On? … Maybe the first part is complex, second part is simple. So you have this question of two things in both the written music and the improvised music. And also there is this difference between written music and improvised music. Are you on the side of the written music? Or are you on the side of the improvised music? That’s why the two things should be approximately the same length (Interview, 100).”

Based on his interview, the attempt to improvise can be more important than the skill of the improvisation. Rzewski believes that it can be stylistically acceptable, despite being criticized for the piece containing improvised music than written music (Interview, 102-104).

If no improvisation is played, the pianist moves directly to the finale. Finally, Rzewski introduces the full protest song in the original key of B minor. The pianist needs to project full and decisive sounds to generate a majestic and grand finale. It is imperative for the pianist to notice that both hands are set unusually far from each other on the third beat of each measure with sffż. It is a challenge for the pianist to move their hand
positions very quickly while staying in the exact tempo. Therefore, it would be helpful for pianists to strengthen their muscle memory by practicing the motion without playing on the keyboard.
5.3 Down by the Riverside

Table 5.3: Down by the Riverside

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1-18</td>
<td>Gospel Style accompaniment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>19-36</td>
<td>Contrapuntal texture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>37-66</td>
<td>Climax and optional improvisation section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>67-82</td>
<td>Gospel-blues feeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>83-90</td>
<td>Coda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This specific piece is spiritual, while Rzewski’s other pieces are political “protest tunes” that symbolize the hardship of the working class. This piece begins in D major, with a gospel style accompaniment in the left hand. The composer marks the tempo $\dot{=}$ 80-88, but it should actually be slower than he wrote it. He believes that an appropriate tempo is $\dot{=}$ 60 (Interview, 113). In section A, Rzewski uses a gospel style ostinato throughout the section. He marks the tenuto in the left hand, which is the counter melody of the right hand (Example 5.10).
Interestingly, the counter melody came from *Which Side Are You On?* This is not quite audible to the ear, but Rzewski tried to unify the music as a set (Hayashi, 117). He marks the dynamic markings in each measure, crescendo and decrescendo, to be more expressive and resemble a wave of sound. Thus, the pianist needs to practice the left hand separately to effectively execute the proper wave-like sound effect. He presents the full quotation of the melody for the right hand. The melody starts in 6th or 3rd intervals with syncopation. The pianist should bring out the top notes of the melody so that the sound is not overwhelmed by accompaniment. In m.9 the melody of the parallel 6th transforms to dissonant chords by adding 7th notes. Again, he adds an octave on the dissonant chords to make a fuller and wider sound. In m.14 the melody is one octave higher than the beginning of the piece and the sound is getting bigger while the texture is thicker.

Example 5.10: *Down by the Riverside*, mm. 1-3
The key quickly changes and opens a contrapuntal section that is very complex to play. He juxtaposes small fragments from the original melody. So, the pianist should mark the melody line on the score throughout all of the section B before playing. The original melody and its thematic use in this part are attached in the Appendix A. It is very important to recognize the composer’s notes: *Lo stesso tempo, ma con rubato e flessibile; quasi una fantasia.* In B section, it is difficult to follow the contrapuntal texture, but it is flexible and allows for the performer to play freely and embrace the composer’s note to produce a fantasy-like sound. The dynamic markings are significant in this section.

Rzewski inserts contrasting dynamic markings in almost every measure, from forte to piano. There is a transition that slows down with a big decrescendo from *f* to *pp*, so the performer needs to calculate how to execute the end of the phrase with the pedal (m.25). In mm. 26-28, the first inversion of major triads and the octave adds thickness to the sound thus the melody is thicker and broader. The right hand holds B♭ while the left hand plays a very delicate melody. The performer can enjoy and listen carefully to this sonority balancing the melody in the left hand (mm. 35-36).

Rzewski changes the key to E♭ major, marked *pp* with abundant pedal. In the beginning of section C the mood is dreamy and tranquil. The sound is quiet and delicate,
yet slightly moving forward as noted: *poco piu mosso*. The pianist needs to hold a long enough dotted quarter note on the top line, which is expressive, while the inner voice should be controlled. It is required for the pianist to have a good rhythmic sense because there is 2:3 rhythmic pattern between the hands in mm. 37-39. It is very important to notice the 16th rest because there is a big contrast. The rest gives time to prepare subito *pp* right after *ff* in m.45. Rzewski opens the section with stretto and the texture of the melody becomes thicker while building the dynamics. The music becomes rushed and impulsive with accented notes on the extreme register of the keyboard in m.51. The pianist needs to pay attention to the use of staccato octaves in the left hand while projecting the theme, *I ain’t gonna study war no more*, in m. 54 (Example 5.11).

Example 5.11: Down by the Riverside, mm. 54-55
Rzewski drives the music forward to a climax by building the intensity of the dynamics with clusters. The pianist needs to prepare these clusters on the lower register of the keyboard by leaning on the keyboard (Example 5.12).

![Example 5.12: Down by the Riverside, m. 57](image)

The breath marking in m.59 serves an important function because it provides an amount of time before shifting hands, changing dynamics, and preparing triplet rhythms on left hand. The pianist should hold the pedal, as marked in the score, and the melody of the right hand should be delicate and musical in $A_b$ major. The pianist needs to play thoughtfully, similar to someone recalling a memory. Rzewski uses bi-tonality in mm.60-61 and then a fermata. The following section offers an optional improvisation and returns to the previous chord. This fermata and optional improvisation can be treated as a little cadenza. He states that in the early piano literature of Beethoven, there often is a fermata.
which means that the pianist is supposed to improvise a little cadenza, rather than holding
the sound for a while (Interview, 106).

This is the only movement where Rzewski utilizes quotations from other
movements to unify the music as a set. According to Hayashi, he inserts the end of the
melody from *Dreadful Memories* (Example 5.13).

![Example 5.13: Down by the Riverside, mm. 64-66](image)

In section D, the music goes back to the original key of D major with repeat
signs. The walking bass line in the left hand sets a four-bar phrase where the pianist has
to be both precise and free at the same time (Interview, 114). The pianist needs to pay
attention to what Rzewski notes on the score: the pianist is to omit the tenor voice and
play bass with an octave lower the first time. The dynamic starts from *ppp* and gradually
builds up to *mf* (Example 5.14).
Example 5.14: Down by the Riverside, mm. 67-68

The pattern of the right hand is rhythmic and free because of the use of the syncopation and grace notes. It has a gospel-blues feeling. On the repeat, the pianist plays the tenor part as it is written with the dynamics from mf to $\textit{fff}$. The pianist manipulates the use of the thumb and index finger in the left hand executing the tenor parts. I would suggest that the pianist first practice the left hand part with both hands: the left hand should play the walking bass while the right hand plays tenor part. That way the pianist can more easily play the two different rhythmic patterns in the left hand. Rzewski creatively introduces a full quotation of the melody by the tenor parts as well. The music gradually becomes more dense and full until it peaks at m.83.
Unexpectedly, Rzewski stays away from the tonal music by writing a contrapuntal setting. He adds an eight measure coda instead of finishing the piece. The coda starts with an extreme dynamic of \textit{fff}, but suddenly changes to \textit{ppp} in m.88. The left hand plays in tenths throughout the final section, which is reminiscent of traditional gospel style (Lewis, 77). The pianist needs to ring the bottom note of the left hand by rolling the chords. The sound is full and rich and becomes very majestic until m.87. After the \textit{sfz}, the sound dramatically changes to \textit{pp}. The sound is very delicate with \textit{ppp}, but it should remain open until the end of the measure. The music should slowly decrease in tempo and volume so that it seems to fade and vanish in the air.
5.4 Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues

Table 5.4: *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1-34</td>
<td>Din of Machinery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>35-85</td>
<td>Boogie-woogie ostinato with the blues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>86-110</td>
<td>Sentimental blues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>111-135</td>
<td>Technically demanding melodic stretto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>136-146</td>
<td>Boogie-woogie ostinato with the protest tune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>147-155</td>
<td>Diminishing cluster</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is the most programmatic and effective piece among the four American Ballads. It is also a very challenging piece for the pianist. Ursula Oppens, a close friend of Rzewski, states that this work sounds pianistic and good for a recital, since it sounds three times as hard as it is (Lewis, 8). Rzewski obviously inserts very difficult and complex structures in this music to achieve great sound effects from the keyboard as Chopin did in his fourth piano ballade.
It will be very helpful for the pianist to understand the notation since Rzewski uses unusual notations such as clusters in this specific work. He explains that there are three functions of the notation: The first function is that it tells the pianist what notes to play. The second, it shows what kind of motions the pianist needs. This is different from the first in that the motion of the rhythm tells the pianist which notes are not so important. The third function is just one example of a possible way it could be written down. It is not really important whether the pianist plays a particular pitch or not (Interview, 130).

Rzewski was inspired a movie called ‘Norma Rae’ (1979) which is about a young woman who tries to organize the union in a southern textile factory. There is an amazing sound track where the recording of the machinery is very loud. He realistically depicts a scene from that sound track where the actors are having a conversation over the sound of the machinery. They are almost shouting but it is still hard to understand what they are saying to each other because the machinery is drowning everything out (Interview, 119). He sets the music in a very creative way: The loud machinery is in the left hand and the song is in the right hand. Rzewski really wants the melody to disappear into the machinery. The melody is overwhelmed by the accompaniment. This is his intent, to execute complete opposites, which hardly happens in classical music. Also, it is a
crucial point to make sure of what he really wants to try in this music. Therefore, it is challenging to a classical pianist who trained that the top melody line should always be brought out rather than the accompaniment.

It is helpful for the performer to understand what Rzewski marked in the beginning of the music: “expressionless, machinelike and marcato, non legato, con grande precisione ritmica, e con intensità constant (with absolute rhythmic precision with a constant intensity).” Also, there is a metronome marking: $\text{♩}=88/92$. He starts $pp$ with a half–step ostinato in the lower register of the keyboard imitating the din of machines far from somewhere in a southern textile mill. The pattern is followed by black and white note clusters covering a fifth in the same register (mm.2). Clusters are notated in black notes only for the right hand, and white notes only for the left hand (Example 5.15).

Example 5.15: *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, mm. 1-2
The motor-like ostinato repeats 12 times in a measure (the former note is a quarter note). Rzewski inserts certain notes from the theme with tenuto at the 12th time. He states that it is like the changing gears of the machine (Example 5.16).

Example 5.16: *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, m. 4

The pianist needs to feel each tenuto or accent recognizing the original melody. The difficult thing in the beginning of the *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* is to know that pianists do not accent the right hand. Even though the right hand is on the beat and left hand is off the beat, it should be the same. It is not easy to get absolutely like a machine (Interview, 118). The performer should execute the same touch and volume of playing. Also, the use of a metronome is unavoidable in this section. Then, Rzewski extends to
octave clusters with a palm of each hand in mm. 4. The pianist should employ flat and firm hands to execute this technique at the keyboard.

Sing note → a fifth cluster → an octave cluster

\[(pp) \quad (p) \quad (mp)\]

There is a big crescendo setting up a loud mechanical sound in mm. 8. Rzewski starts using upper clusters with forearms while the melody is gradually growing up. The pianist needs to play the smaller pentatonic clusters that appear above the low ostinato of the palm clusters with the right elbow (Example 5.17).

Example 5.17: *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, mm. 9-10

These clusters are gradually played on the black keys with the right elbow, and Rzewski adds E natural which gives the blues sounds in m. 19-25. It is tricky to get the exact the melody notes but it is not as important whether pianists play the exact notes as
long as they can get the shape of the tune with their elbows. He also states that it is supposed to sound like early rock and roll from the 50’s (interview, 122). It is also essential to confirm what Rzewski notes: “If the pitches of the upper arm clusters are given precisely, they are not necessarily to be so precisely executed, and still less are they to be clearly heard. They are intended rather as a subtle coloration of the underlying drone.” This is the scene that Rzewski tries to describe a dialogue above the din of machinery. Clusters with the weight of the forearms create the full machine noise in mm. 25. Therefore, the pianist needs to almost lean on the keyboard by using upper body weight rather than pushing harder. Rzewski insists that any sounds in his music should not be produced by banging or pounding the keyboard (Interview, 127). The clusters gradually start to decrease in contrary motion, playing with elbows, palms, and fingerings. The size and volume are chromatically getting smaller until motor-like half-steps remains in m. 34.

In B section, a mechanical boogie-woogie ostinato in F major continues with a blues chord in the right hand. There is a four bar phrase changing the bottom note of a chord. Therefore, the performer needs to recognize a half step of the bass line with the thumb on a right hand (Example 5.18).
The right hand always keeps a dynamic level of $f$ while left hand starts with $p$. The boogie-woogie ostinato in the left hand gradually builds up to $fff$, eventually drowning out a chord. The accent of the fourth note in the left hand gives a jazzy feeling, so the performer needs to feel this syncopation. Rzewski introduces the folk melody above the mechanical ostinato in m.51. Rzewski notes that “great care must be taken to keep the left hand at a constantly extremely loud level, while maintaining the expressive variations in the intensity of the right hand melody, which is therefore sometimes hardly to be heard.” Therefore, the left hand should be very mechanical with an extreme range of sound while the right hand executes a musical and legato melody by bringing out the top notes of the chords. There is a challenging part to manipulate both hands (m.59) because of a crossover of dynamics between two hands: right hand starts hardly audible
to $f$, left hand makes a diminuendo from $fff$ to $f$. It is his intent, as he stated previous, for a classically trained pianist to execute these opposites. The pianist needs to practice separately until able to reverse the roll of both hands. After that, Rzewski slightly changes the repeated patterns by inserting fragments from the melody. Performers should mark the pivotal notes on the score to bring out the melody effectively (Example, 5.19).

Example 5.19:  *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, mm. 60-63

He experiences a certain component of minimalism in this section, however, he would not say this is not exactly a minimalistic piece of music (Interview, 123-124). He slightly changes repeated patterns by adding some figures of melody, rather than merely repetition.

There is the most extreme dynamic marking of $ffff$ in this piece at an extreme registers of the keyboard as if the machine is almost exploding in the air in mm. 80. The pianist needs to drive through these percussive passages until $ffff$. After then, a sudden pause of five measures of rests is followed (Example 5.20).
Example 5.20: *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, mm. 79-85

The pedal should be held from mm.74 to mm. 86, creating a cumulative sound effect. He suggests keeping the length of the measures strictly uniform (Interview, 124). This is a very important moment in changing the mood, therefore, the pianist not only experiences the big sound effects but also mentally and physically prepares the next blues section.

Rzewski divides into two sections in this music which is similar to *Which Side are You On?:* The first part is fixed and mechanical, mimicking a machine and the second part is free and human. He states that “there is the wistful idea of being in heaven, but everything is still the same as before (Hayashi, 127).” This blues section is very pianistic and reminiscent of Gershwin sounds because of the traditional blues notes and grace-note slides. Rzewski follows the style of Pete Seeger who formatted 16-bar blues instead of
the standard 12-bar blues (Hayashi, 127). The pianist finally needs to change a pedal to build up B♭major in 12/8 (mm. 87), and needs to emphasize the third beat of the rhythm to create a blues feeling. He frequently uses the motivic idea of the protest tune throughout this section: *I got the blues.*

The walking bass of dotted half notes should come out in the left hand in mm.101-104. He reinforces the words “I got the blues” with tenuto at the end of each measure in mm.104-106 (Example 5.21).
Example 5.21: *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, mm. 104-106

The sound should be relaxed and broaden to achieve a full sound effect of *ff*.

This chromatic arpeggio figuration is reminiscent of Chopin again. In mm. 108, the half step ostinato accompanies a melody which is the ending lyrics of the protest song: *I got the blues, I got the blues, I got the Winnsb’ro cotton mill blues*. The top notes of the
melody should come out to reinforce its lyrics, then this section gradually fades away in mm.108-110.

In the D section, Rzewski is back to the machinery again, introducing the opening line of the protest tune in 4/4. However, the mood is somewhat different from the previous section. The overall mood is quieter and lighter, thus the pianist recognizes what kind of piano touch needs to be played in this section: *ppp, marcato and leggerissimo.* The original melody in the right hand should sound like a simple and tonal song. Listeners can recognize the original tune, which is playful, even they can start to sing the melody. However, Rzewski suddenly changes the setting and makes them stop singing by inserting the most technically demanding section in mm.117. This abrupt change is an important composition device. The performer can be challenged by its dense texture, big leaps, complex meter, exchanging voices, and intricate rhythms between both hands. It can be the most difficult part of the entire ballad set. Rzewski juxtaposes melodic fragments using classical techniques like augmentation, diminution, transposition, and compression. It can be helpful for the pianist to mark melodic fragments especially checking accented or tenuto notes before playing this part. The original melody and its thematic use in this section are attached in the Appendix A.
Rzewski states that he inserts one or two extraordinarily difficult parts to ensure that an average pianist can not play it (Hayashi, 128). He is inclined to be sure that the most complicated and difficult part can be heard as gorgeous, referring to the last page of the fourth ballade by Chopin (Interview, 126). There is a long pedal marking as a transition to the next section in mm.133-135. The pianist needs to calculate how to make an effective decrescendo using different touches, which get lighter with a long pedal. Rzewski surprisingly changes the mood and the key to F major in mm.136. He finally introduces the original protest song with boogie-woogie accompaniment. The pianist brings out tenuto notes, giving an ascending direction in the left hand in mm.141-144. There is a transition moving toward to the last surprising section in mm.145-146. The pianist needs to execute the chromatic passage with speed in the left hand.

Rzewski uses extreme dynamics, from *pppp* to *fff*, which makes it necessary for the pianist to accomplish big layers of dynamics by applying effective pedals and upper body weight in the last section. There are diminishing clusters in contrary motion with both forearms with *fff* in m.147: the highest note of the right forearm is C and the lowest note of the left forearm is D♭. Rzewski states:

“You could write just clusters with no pitches, maybe graphically making these cluster get smaller and smaller. In fact, perhaps that would be closer to the truth than writing these pitches, because these pitches are very confusing. Some
people might think it is very important to get some pitches, others might play different ones. But that is not important. There are three different levels of what you can read a in text. We are talking about the bar on page 63 at the top (m. 147), where cluster goes up. The only thing that is important there is the basic motion of the whole bar. Of course, that could be done in many different ways (Interview, 130-131).”

The pianist should hold the pedal all the way through this section as it marks:

*Ped. sempre fino alla fine.* Rzewski starts the same manner of clusters at the beginning, then he changes to a roll cluster upwards. It is essential for the pianist to have solid fingertips to execute this harp-like sound from *ff to pppp* (Example 5.22)

Example 5.22: *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, Roll cluster upwards

Rzewski frequently changes dynamics from *pp* to *ff* almost every measure, which makes it necessary for the pianist to execute large layers of dynamics. The pianist has to apply a delicate touch at the highest part of the keyboard to accomplish the dynamic of *pppp*. The rhythm of constant roll clusters is changed to syncopation and the size of clusters is getting smaller and quieter until only the C note is left. The noise of
machinery fades away into silence as if the machine gradually turns off in mm.155 (Example 5.23).

Example 5.23: *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, m. 155
Rzewski was inspired by different events in American history, so it is important for pianists to understand the philosophical and political beliefs that are reflected in his music. His piano music incorporates an interesting blend of styles. He creatively combines various elements of different genres and experiments with sound effects at the keyboard in the *North American Ballads*. His music is also sectional. Each piece from *North American Ballads* consists of several sections which are creatively connected. He sometimes inserts unexpected sections which are witty and humorous.

The pianist should understand the function of the notation used, especially in *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*. Rzewski explains that there are three functions of the notation: The first, it tells the pianist what notes to play. The second, it shows what kind of motions the pianist needs; the motion of the rhythm tells the pianist which notes are not so important. The third function is one example of a possible way it could be written.
down. It is not really important whether the pianist plays a particular pitch or not (Interview, 130-131). Therefore, it is the responsibility of pianist to understand these functions in relationship to the score.

He applies folk tunes to impart the quality of the “most accessible American music,” to meet the requirement of the commission and to appeal to large audiences more effectively. Therefore, the pianist should know that Rzewski considers communication with the audience to be an important aspect of his music. The pianist should also know what kind of American folk song or spiritual he quotes in each piece. He uses elements of fugal structure, especially stretto or antiphonal techniques. Thus, it can be very complex for the pianist to follow the direction of the musical lines once the melody enters in the different voices and is then divided between the hands. While executing this piece the pianist should not lose the musical tension or sense of direction. Therefore, the pianist has to begin by marking tunes or fragments of the folk songs into the score and indicating where one needs to sustain the melodic lines.

It is imperative for the pianist to notice carefully what Frederic Rzewski indicates in each piece: titles, tempi, meters, dynamics, phrases, comments, etc. He
gives clear and detailed directions on how to perform and create certain sonorities or moods.

Rzewski wrote precise tempo markings in each piece and he sometimes calculated the length of the playing time at the end of the first piece as Bartok did. It should be noted that he believes that the original tempo marking in *Down by the Riverside* is too fast. Therefore, the performer needs be attentive and not play this as fast as indicated in the score; the proper tempo is $\downarrow = 60$, the tempo he personally suggests in his interview.

This music requires the pianist to have an excellent sense of rhythm, since each piece has many tempo and meter changes. Rzewski varies meters in every measure for the first nine measures of *Which Side are You On?* Also, there are both precise and flexible sides of rhythms. He tries to imitate the sound of machines in the *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*. These rhythms should be very precise and fixed. On the other hand, he marked *Lo stesso ma con rubato e flessibile: quasi nma fantasia* in *Down by the Riverside*. The key of this section lies in the flexible and free rhythmic playing, which is a reflection of his jazz background and improvisation ability.
There are extreme dynamic and register contrasts in this set. Therefore, the pianist should calculate where one should cut back the dynamics to execute more effective crescendos or decrescendos along with determining how to approach the climax gradually. He uses extreme dynamics from \textit{pppp} to \textit{ffff}, which makes it necessary for the pianist to accomplish big layers of dynamics by applying effective pedals and upper body weight. He stresses a piano technique from the pianist, David Tudor, which is to play very close to the piano keyboard to get a very big sound by using arm weight. Consequently, the pianist has to know how to produce a big sound from the instrument without banging or pounding to execute the dynamic of \textit{ffff}.

Rzewski extends the technique of the keyboard by associating fingers, palms, forearms, and body weight to create certain sonorities. The early piano technique focused on five-finger patterns with good articulation. In this technique, the arm needed to be suspended over the keyboard in a weightless manner since the keyboard of the harpsichord or the clavichord is much lighter than a modern piano. Accordingly, the movement of the arm was to be executed in a quiet, graceful, and curvilinear manner (Gerig, 9). However, the more the keyboard was developed the more piano technique was extended through the application of performer’s arms and upper body weight while also
including good articulations. Rzewski tries to mimic the noise of machines, which requires lots of energy and upper body weight in the Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues. His experimentation with sonority of sound on the keyboard through the application of these different techniques is due to him being a virtuosic pianist and composer.

The North American Ballads requires very large hands in order to perform, because both hands must span intervals of tenths and must frequently fill in chords at a very fast tempo. The above requirement is one of the definitive challenges and limitations for the pianist in Rzewski’s keyboard compositions, which is as he intended. The challenge requires that the pianist sometimes rolls the chord or interval so that musical line and tempo would be as consistent as possible.

Lastly, there are many romantic factors in this set such as: the use of the term ballad in the title, the demand of advanced techniques, the use of the defining tonal language, the extreme dynamics and sudden dynamic changes, the extreme range of the piano, and the pragmatic ideas. Therefore, he may be classified as a Neo-Romantical composer. As a highlight, he personally recommends the pianist should sing and listen to the original tunes frequently to be familiar with the music. And he wants the pianist treat his music with freedom. It is acceptable to him if pianists want to add or change
something as long as they have fine ideas. It is also helpful for the pianist to understand
the significant features and salient attributes of the music and history of the *North
American Ballads* in order to give a successful performance.
APPENDIX A

THE ORIGINAL MELODIES AND THEIR USE
IN THE NORTH AMERICAN BALLADS

The Phrases of the tune are subdivided and marked with capital letters to understand their usages in each work. It will be helpful for the performer since there is significant polytonal contrapuntal layering and thematic use of melodic quotation.

Figure 5.1 The original Dreadful Memories

![Musical notation of Dreadful Memories](image-url)
Figure 5.2 Thematic use of *Dreadful Memories* by Rzewski
Figure 5.3 The original *Which Side are You On?*
Figure 5.4 Thematic use of *Which Side are You On?* by Rzewski
Figure 5.5 The original *Down by the Riverside*
Figure 5.6 Thematic use of *Down by the Riverside* by Rzewski
Figure 5.7 The original *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*
Figure 5.8 Thematic use of *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* by Rzewski
INTRO

(Rzewski was looking at the score while I gave the interview. I used the score published by ZEN-ON Publishers.)

FREDERIC RZEWSKI: I think this line here is intended to show that¹. (Humming the melody) So you jump from this note to that note with the right hand, but make sure it is connected (Humming the melody).

SUJIN KIM: I see.

FR: Anyway, it could be a mistake, but I like the note the way it is.

SJ: Why do you it like this way?

FR: Because sometimes people make mistakes and the mistake is better.

SJ: Yes, you’re right.

¹ Dreadful Memories, mm.7-9.
FR: *I don’t remember now, but it could very well be a mistake.*

SJ: It is very hard to rationally explain music.

FR: *It has to be a C because otherwise the line would not make sense.*

SJ: But the original melody fits with E more than C.

FR: *I know.*

SJ: Can I start?

FR: *Yes please, are you recording this?*

SJ: Yes

FR: *Oh with this machine, okay.*

   *How do you know it’s recording?*

SJ: Because I pressed the button.

FR: *You have faith in a machine.*

**Part-1**

SJ: First of all I really appreciate your time, help, and advice. I am very interested in your music. The more I play your music, especially the *North American Ballads*, the more it is attractive to me. May I ask what your thoughts are regarding the *North American Ballads*?

FR: *I don’t think much about it anymore.*

SJ: Anymore? You used think about it, then?

FR: *30 years ago (laugh).*
SJ: I know. So I wonder how to approach your music. As you said, it has been a long time since you composed this music. What do you think about the fact that recently the meaning of the music has changed? How do you feel about this music now?

FR: Recently I haven’t been playing too often. What would you like to know?

SJ: As a composer and a pianist, is there any specific meaning in this music that has changed? The way you look at the music, the sound, or meaning.

FR: Well. I suppose it has, over 30 years, yes. But I have nothing general to say at this point. Maybe something will come out in the course of conversation.

SJ: I see.

FR: You should check the original songs, if you can.

SJ: Yeah I did, actually. I have the original folk tune.

FR: Yes yes.

SJ: Otherwise it’s hard to understand, to follow the music.

FR: These things are not really folk. No, they are folk, it is folk music but it is not really just folk music. Most of these tunes were originally religious songs.

SJ: Most of them?

FR: Most of these Appalachian songs are actually coming from Scotland.

SJ: Scotland?
Yes, the people who originally came to that part of the United States in the 18th century came from places like Scotland and Ireland. Much American folk music is a synthesis of different cultures. So these songs were originally religious hymns with completely different words and in this case the folk songs like this one are simply old tunes to which new words have been attached. So I forget which tune this is, I think it’s called Lay the Lily Low. And I don’t remember the original words but it’s a religious song, probably from the Calvinist tradition of Scotland. But this version of Aunt Molly Jackson has to do with the coal mining strikes that took place in the 1930s.

Right. I read some articles about that.
So each song has a title. This is very interesting to me, and then I’ve read in my resources that the titles come from the original. There are corresponding historical events for the music. Can I say that you were influenced by those events or that they inspired you when you composed this music?

Well, I don’t know what that means, you can say it if you want to. (laugh) But what does it mean?

You are funny.
Lots of articles shows that you are more like a self-proclaimed Marxist.

Oh~ God!!

It’s not true?

What does that mean?

I don’t know.

Groucho Marx, Marx brothers, famous American Comic Films through 1930s.
I love Karl Marx. Yes, I think Karl Marx is a very interesting guy. (laugh)
I like Karl Marx a lot. I kept call myself a Marxist? No, I don’t know where that came from. I’ve seen that before, but who cares if a composer is a Marxist? What kind of Marx? Harpo Marx. Do you know the Marx brothers movies?

SJ: No, sorry about that.

FR: No, doesn’t really matter.
But these tunes were written for this pianist called Jacobs.

SJ: Yeah, commissioned.

FR: He was planning to make a record of music by American Composers based on American popular themes.

SJ: The most accessible and recognizable American music.

FR: Yes, so I decided to make some pieces which are somehow based on the American labor movement, especially that period of the 1930s. So in this particular song, a very beautiful song of course, she is talking about a particular strike that took place in Kentucky in 1932. It was particularly difficult, many people were very poor, and this woman took care of the children when the workers were out on strike. She talks about how these children were hungry and had nothing to eat and died in her arms. It’s a very sad song. (sing) “Dreadful memories, how they linger, how they pain my precious soul. Little children cold and hungry without any food to eat at all.” And she talks about how they died in her arms, and it’s very, very sad.

SJ: So you are kind of a representative of that situation. You just expressed your feelings about them by composing this music?

FR: I guess so. Why I chose this particular tune? I don’t remember.
SJ: You don’t need to explain it. It just impulsively happened. I am wondering how one approaches your music, especially pianists who are not familiar with Jazz music. What kind of training or background do musicians need to play your music well? Would you please suggest some specific ways to go about learning your music?

FR: Well, it’s meant for classical pianists, obviously. I am classical pianist, for my formations, classical. I am not a particularly expert in Jazz or Folk music or any of these things, but anyone growing up in America is somewhat familiar with this material.

SJ: So my interview today concentrates on how to better play your music by focusing on these specific four pieces. So, can I say that the more I am exposed to jazz music, the more I understand this music?

FR: Perhaps yes, it’s probably different from most classical or serious music, and there are certain elements that perhaps come from Jazz, a certain freedom, perhaps.

SJ: Actually I took Jazz piano classes for two quarters. Whenever I had a lesson with my instructor, I felt very free, as you said, freedom. Because I am always stuck with the score in the practice room, and just playing what the composer wrote, I found that Jazz music involves some different aspects of music than classical music does. So sometimes there is an improvisation section with a Jazz feeling, and I like Jazz, but I don’t know what to do. Who can be a good role model, such as a Jazz pianist or other musician, for learning to improvise. Do you have any ideas about that?

FR: Well, umm. Let’s stick to these particular pieces.

SJ: Of course.

FR: In this piece there is no improvisation, but that doesn’t mean you couldn’t. No, I guess in this piece, there is no improvisation. Well, I think the most important thing in this piece is to realize what kind of tune this is, it’s a
lullaby. A song that mother sings to put the child sleep, this to me is a lullaby. It has to do with particular phrase, how the children died in her arms, so you can see that she is maybe rocking the child to sleep. I think this first piece such that you think of that rocking motion, singing to the child and using rocking arms. Of course, there are many different ways of playing it. But ask some specific questions and I will try to answer them.

SJ: Okay, in the music score, my first question is already answered, but you said those three notes need to be connected with each other?  

FR: I think you can do it any way you like. You can treat it as C or you can treat it as E.

SJ: Can I? Are you serious?

FR: Yes.

SJ: Wow! You give lots of freedom to pianists, performers.

FR: Yes.

I guess the important thing here in the statement of the theme is the double rhythm. Four in four and in three, because you have these notes here with the tenuto marks on them. It’s actually in three, it’s four against three.

SJ: And then it’s very fascinating with the banjo rhythm. In the middle of the section here, can I just connect e♭ and f, e♭, f or just e, e♭, e♭?

FR: I don’t get the question.

SJ: Okay. So this is mi mi fa, and then I just want to connect mi fa mi fa fa la, or mi mi mi mi fa la? Either one is fine?

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2 Dreadful Memories, mm. 7-9.
FR: *It’s staccato anyway, so nothing is connected (Humming the melody). Sure (humming the melody). I think if you just play it the way its written it will play itself. You can play any way you like.*

SJ: Going back to your master class. You said Chopin and lots of composers put very hard parts in the music, I read in an article that you did that on purpose to make sure that only advanced pianist can play your music. Will you explain that reasoning? It is very hard to play, but it still comes out sounding very good. Can I say that the trickiest part is the most gorgeous part in your music?

FR: *You can say that if you want, I have no opinion on that. (Laugh)*

SJ: Or are there any specific reasons that you put in a very hard part? Just the sound effect? That’s all?

FR: *You mean these places where the rhythms are complicated? Or what?*

SJ: There are technically demanding parts especially. The fourth ballad after the blues, this part has lots of leaping, jumping around, and a complicated rhythm. Sometimes I feel bad about this place because I have to skip certain notes and I can’t play it.

FR: *That’s fine. Play whatever sounds best to you.*

SJ: Okay.

Rachmaninoff said that every piece of music has one climax, and it’s up to the performer to find the musical peak in composition.

FR: *Who said this?*

SJ: Rachmaninoff, Sergei.

FR: *Rachmaninoff?*
SJ: Yes, Rachmaninoff said that there is one climax in every piece of music. It depends on the pianist. Where do you think the climax is in each piece?

FR: *Well I don't know, that's Rachmaninoff's opinion. I don't particularly think about climaxes especially.*

SJ: Everybody has different opinions about them.

FR: *No, I wouldn't say that. There is no particular climax.*

SJ: How about the second one?

FR: *The second piece?* 

SJ: Yes, the second piece.

FR: *Are we done with the first piece now?* 

SJ: Yeah. I think so.

FR: *Okay, so now we are on to the second.* 

_Well, this piece, Which side are you on?, is also about the coal miners strike of Harlan county during the same time period. It's different. Oh! Her name is Reese, Florence Reese, “R” is missing for some reason. ³_

SJ: Oh yeah, I wanted to ask you about that.

FR: *She was another famous folk singer. There is a documentary film that was made in the United States in the 1970s, a very good documentary film about a coal miners' strike, in the same part of the world. Its called Harlan County USA. It's a very good documentary film made by a collective of women. I forget the name of the woman who actually made the film, but it's a very very good film. I recommend it. Florence Reese, is*

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³ The title of *Which Side are You On?* in the score.
in this film at the age of 90, and she sings the song. (sings melody) “Which side are you on? Come on you good miners, good news to you all, tell of how the good old union has coming here to dwell, Which side are you on, Which side are you on.” Until quite recently, this song was still being sung in demonstrations. It’s a very well known song. Again this is originally a religious hymn.

SJ: That’s very interesting. I never thought about the religious hymn. The way I play this is to just stick with the folk song and protest song.

FR: Many American folk songs, especially revolutionary or political songs, were based on these religious hymns and new words were added. There is a reason for that. At the beginning of the 20th century, there was an organization called I.W.W., the Industrial Workers of the World. The communist party of the United States came out of that organization. Those people were not communist exactly, they were anarchists. The people of the I.W.W. called themselves Wobblies. That was the name was given to these militant anarchists who organized demonstrations at that time. They would take these religious hymns and sing them at the same time as religious people; the Wobblies would come and sing songs that people knew as religious songs, but with a radical change of words.

SJ: Lyrics?

FR: Many of the political songs originated from the context of religious meetings where people sang these religious songs, and the Wobblies would come and sing along, but with different words.

SJ: It makes sense. So do you think when I interpret and play your music, the lyrics are a very important component?

FR: Well at the time that I wrote these pieces, some of these songs were still fairly well known. Now, perhaps they are not known so much anymore. But still, yes, I would say in order to understand them, you have to understand the social context from which they came. Now this particular
song Which Side are You On? is a very interesting combination of music and words. Although the music was not intended originally to communicate those ideas, they were religious songs, not political songs, the structure of melody actually illustrates the words, Which side are you on. (sing a melody) “Which side are you on, which side are you on.” So are you on this side? Or are you on that side? Are you supporting the miners? Or are you supporting the bosses? It’s a question. So the idea is that you have to be on one side or the other. The music is intended to illustrate that simple idea. This side? or that side? It’s divided into two parts. The first section is complex, the second section is simple.

SJ: You know what? Frankly speaking, this part[^1] is a question mark, as you marked here.

FR: Yes.

SJ: The rhythmic pattern is complex and very tricky.

FR: Yes. What it says, what the music is telling you, is that this question is not a simple one. It’s a complex question.

SJ: That’s why you changed the meter all the time?

FR: Yes, it’s not a question that has a simple answer. It’s a difficult question. Which side are you on? So the first part is complex, and the second part is simple. In the improvisation, which you can play or not, you should try to also have the improvisation do sort of the same thing the written music does. Maybe the first part is complex, and the second part is simple. So you have this question of two things in both the written music and the improvised music. Also, there is this difference between written music and improvised music. Are you on the side of the written music? Or are you on the side of the improvised music? That’s why the two things should be approximately the same length.

[^1]: Which Side are You On? mm. 1-14.
SJ: I found two very interesting dissertations about this music, one by Hayashi, I think you had an interview with her 10 years ago, and one by Cornett-Murtada.

FR: *I haven’t read them.*

SJ: It’s okay. They have different ideas about that improvisation section⁵. For example, Hayashi suggests that the performer should have a certain confidence regarding improvisation and outstanding skills to create music, otherwise it would be arrogant and bold to attempt it. On the other hand, Cornett-Murtada wrote that the attempt to improvise is more important than the performer’s improvisation skill, because the effect of the edited improvisation section is to answer the question of the title.

FR: *Perhaps.*

SJ: So what do you think about it? Which side are you on? (laugh)

FR: *Well, I’m not on either side, I think it could be both ways, you can perform this piece with improvisation or without improvisation. There are many classical pianists who have little or no experience with improvisation, and that’s fine, too. You don’t have to, but whether or not you do the improvisation is up to you.*

SJ: But they have different ideas. Hayashi writes that we have to have certain skills to create this music, but Cornett-Murtada wrote that one’s attempt is more important than one’s skill.

FR: *I don’t know, that’s an individual decision. Some years ago I was in New Zealand, and some students played one of these pieces. I don’t think it was this piece, I think it was the next one. There was a student who was going to play the piece that evening.*

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⁵ Optional free improvisation of *Which Side are You On?*
SJ: Only this piece?

FR: No, I think it was the third one. And she was going to play that night. The same day, we had this workshop in the afternoon and she explained that she didn’t do any improvisation. She didn’t know how to improvise, so I said, “well it’s easy, all you have to do is put your fingers on the keys and wiggle them.” And so that evening in the concert, she played an improvisation, which she has never done before, and it was fine. It was very good.

SJ: Well you inspired her.

FR: (Laugh ) I don’t know.

SJ: Frankly speaking, most classical pianists are not trained to improvise. I know the Baroque musicians were very good at improvising music, but as time went on, composers became very strict about that. Nowadays I want to improvise certain music, but it’s very hard. I can play any piece when I have the score, but without the score it is hard. That is why I asked you if you knew of any good Jazz pianists or classical pianists that can be role models or provide some improvisation inspiration. Do you have any ideas about that?

FR: No, I wouldn’t say that, but I would think that perhaps the best way to approach it is to think about what Beethoven would have done, because Beethoven was primarily known as an improviser.

SJ: Right. Mozart and Beethoven.

FR: Yes. Of course, we don’t know what they did because they were no recordings. But sometimes if you look closely at the written music, you can see that much of it has to do with improvisation. And you can get some

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6 Down by the Riverside.
ideas about what Beethoven or Mozart might have done simply by looking closely at the written text in situations where there is clearly some kind of improvisation.

SJ: I never thought that way.

FR: Well remember Bach’s organ music, it was improvised, a written out improvisation. Take the word ‘Präludium’ in German. A prelude is an improvisation. So a prelude is basically a written out improvisation. It’s a simulation of what one might be playing, it’s an example of how you might improvise. Very often notated music does not mean that you have to play exactly what is written.

SJ: But professors never allow that.

FR: Well I don’t know your professor.

SJ: Not specifically my present advisor. In my experience, professors want to explain when the composer writes something it is written for a reason, and we have to get into the music as much as we can.

FR: Yes. But that doesn’t mean that the written text allows only one correct form of interpretation and all the other forms are wrong. No. Some composers are particularly interesting in that respect. I would say Beethoven is a very good example of this, especially his piano music. One can even say that sometimes the notation is merely an example of how something could be done. But it could be done in a different way. Of course, it’s difficult to tell what the composer really wants. It can be done one way, and in some cases the written text is merely providing a suggestion of how it could be played. I think Beethoven is a particularly good example of that ambiguity. For example, the chords in the beginning of the Waldstein Sonata (sings a melody). The score is very precise, and Beethoven was very careful about what he wrote. But at the same time, it allows for many different possible interpretations, all of which can be equally interesting. And that’s what makes the music alive. With each new
one finds a new way of playing that same music. And that’s why people still continue to play Beethoven’s music, because it’s always possible to find some new thing in it. Things which Beethoven wrote, but also things he didn’t write. And of course it depends on the type of instrument you are playing. You know the same written music can sound many different ways. And of course people who did that probably better were old pianists of the 19th century who very often changed the text, or combined one movement with another movement of another sonata, or added octaves, or changed the place. People were much freer 100 years ago than they are today. Today it is fashionable to treat text like a sacred text which cannot be changed. But older generations of classical pianists were much freer. And that was true until quite recently. Have you heard of German pianist Wilhelm Camps?

SJ: Yes. He is a very authentic pianist, especially concerning Beethoven, I think.

FR: Yeah but he was also very free. A friend of mine, Gordon Mamba, a composer, told me about a concert that he went to sometime in 1950s in Carnegie Hall. All it said, in the poster, it was, “Wilhelm Kempff (1895-1991) plays Beethoven.” What he did was, he played 7 Beethoven sonatas without stopping, playing improvised transitions between each sonata.

SJ: Really?

FR: Yes, now of course that’s not fashionable today. If you do such things today, you probably won’t get hired.

SJ: Thanks for your advice (laugh).

FR: Or the critics will say you can’t do that. You can’t treat this text in such free way. But actually you can.

SJ: But I will not be hired.
But they won’t hire you. That’s right.

So when you compose your music, you can imagine that kind of situation. When one plays your music, there are lots of possibilities, more than you expected, every time.

Yes, in general, I’m hoping that the musician will find his or her own way of playing it and find an original way of playing this text.

It was very impressive in your master class today, because I got the point about why you think improvisation is important. Because as you said, real life is not symmetrical, is not mathematical, is not square. There is rational or irrational, predictable or unpredictable. That is why improvisation is more like unpredictable and it’s kind of a symbol of your freedom.

Yes. Well, many people don’t realize that improvisation is a very very important part of classical music. It is something that has been much forgotten. There are many different ways of playing a written text. The notation, especially in older classical music like Mozart, the actual writing only tells you a part; it may suggest different ways of playing. And that’s my personal approach to classical music. Sometimes when people ask me to play classical music I will do it, but I have to tell them “well maybe you won’t like it because I am going to play this music in a very free way.” And that’s not fashionable today. But I don’t see why one would play old music except if you have something new to add to it. Otherwise I don’t see any reason to do the same old thing. It’s been done before, probably by people who are better than I am, and why play the same old thing? If I am going to play a Beethoven Sonata or something else from that period, I will probably add some free improvisation somewhere.

But how about this? What if Beethoven just wanted us to play just exactly what he wrote? That was his intent?

Well sometimes he doesn’t, sometime it’s open. Especially in the early piano literature of Beethoven, very often there is a fermata. Now, a
fermata is usually interpreted as being held to sound for a while before continuing. But in many cases it means you are supposed to improvise a “little cadenza.” Sometimes this is very obvious, but very often you hear a very strict interpretation of classical pieces where the music arrives at the fermata, there is a pause, and then the pianist continues with no improvisation. This to me is comical, creates a comical effect, because clearly the composer expects you to improvise at that point. So, but most performers of classical music don’t do that. So you have this rather embarrassing pause where there’s nothing happening, and then the music starts again. I think in the early Beethoven sonatas there are many examples of where you should add something.

SJ: You say that as a composer? Or as a pianist?

FR: What difference does it make?

SJ: Okay. And how about your piece? When the performer just improvised a certain part even you didn’t say anything about the free improvisation like that. Is that okay with you?

FR: Well. I prefer it personally when people treat this text with freedom. And if they want to add something or change something, that’s fine with me as long as they have good ideas.

SJ: Very generous.

FR: Well.

SJ: Sometimes composers are very proud of their music, and if somebody just adds to a certain part or makes something up, they just don’t like it. The composers sometimes see it as a sign of disrespect to the music.

FR: Well there are some pieces of music where that is true, and others where it’s different. In the case of what I write I usually like it when somebody
puts in something that is not in the score. Of course not everybody knows how to do that.

SJ: And how about the second piece?, do you have any idea about the climax?

FR: You keep talking about climax.

SJ: I just wondered. I have some ideas, but I want to hear your opinion.

FR: Well, some music has climaxes, and some music doesn’t have climaxes.

SJ: Do you think?

FR: Yes of course.

SJ: I see, let’s skip it.

FR: I think if Rachmaninoff wants to think about climaxes that’s fine, that’s Rachmaninoff. But personally I am not terribly interested in climaxes. I mean what is a climax anyway, it’s a sexually orgasm. (laugh) Well it probably it can be interesting, but if you do it too much, it gets boring, right?

SJ: Climax just to me, its kind of a big wave. We see the sea, there is a small wave, a medium size, and a big one. The climax means the biggest one among them.

FR: Well, some music has climaxes and some doesn’t.

SJ: Ok.

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7 *Which Side are You On?*
FR: It depends. What is more important to you? The climax? Or everything that comes before and after. I think it’s a matter of choice. But this music is not really intended to have any climaxes.

SJ: On page 40, there is a glissando at the end of the page⁸. I listened to your CD, you did very good job, very quick, but I don’t know what to do. I wish I had a piano in front of us, and you could just demonstrate it, but right now we don’t have one, but technically, I don’t know what to do there.

FR: Well.

SJ: Can I just take a little more time? Yours is a very precise one beat glissando, but in my case, it’s kind of hard. How should I treat this small note?

FR: Well obviously you have to do what is comfortable to you. Not everybody will do that in the same way. Yes I think you can be very free with these rhythms. They are not necessarily exact and precise, and I play a lot of serial music in which there is usually very little freedom. But here, I would say there is a little of both. If you want to make a big thing out of the glissando, go ahead and do it.

SJ: Thank you. You are so generous about your music. I have tried to find certain recording artists who improvise this section, and I think you are only one who improvises it so far.

FR: Well these pieces are not played often.

SJ: Why is that?

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⁸ Which Side are You On? m. 90.
FR:  *These particularly pieces have not been played by many people. I don’t know why, I suppose people tend to play others. I don’t know why some pieces are played more than others.*

SJ:  I know it depends on individual preferences, but we human beings have common tastes. For example, one singer makes an album, and there is a bunch of music, but some songs are more popular. Why? I don’t know. Nobody knows, but there is common taste, and some things are just very popular.

FR:  *I don’t know. For instance, the first piece in this volume, the squares, nobody plays this.*

SJ:  I will do it (laugh).

FR:  *Good, I’m glad to hear that.*

SJ:  And actually in Korea, nobody plays your music yet, so I think it’s time to introduce your music in Korea.

FR:  *I think it’s already been done. Do you know there is a female Korean composer, Hyo Sim Ra? She lives in San Francisco.*

SJ:  Who is she?

FR:  *Hyo Shim Ra*

SJ:  She played your music? Actually I am searching for dissertations on a Korean website, but there is no dissertation about you. Not yet. So I’m going to do it.

FR:  *Okay good. But she is quite a good composer. She lives in San Francisco, she is married to a good pianist named Thomas Schultz. He plays her music a lot.*
SJ: Hyo Shim Ra, she played your piece in Korea?

FR: *I don’t know if she herself has played it, but I know that we’ve corresponded over the years. She sends me her works and I send her mine.*

SJ: When I listen to your improvisation section from this CD, I feel like the original written music is very confused and vague.

FR: *Very what?*

SJ: Complicated and ambiguous, but your improvisation is very clear and very steady. I just realized you tried a very different side of the music.

FR: *Yes, yes. As I said, this piece is about different ways of looking at one thing. So I don’t remember what that is, it was recorded years ago. I never listen to these records so I don’t remember what’s in it.*

SJ: Really? How come?

FR: *I basically don’t like recordings. I am more interested in live music.*

SJ: I understand. There is a cantus firmus, the Bach composition style. Your improvisation feels like a clear cantus firmus-like bass line, and then just you playing.

FR: *But as I said I don’t remember.*

SJ: Hayashi said that in your music the cantus firmus is very important.

FR: *Well, I suppose. These pieces were written at the time when I liked folk singing. I was close to American folk singer Pete Seeger, a very well known American folk singer. Now he is quite old. He was very popular at times. I talked to him one point about something else, we were talking about political music in general. He gave me some advice, he said, ”you should follow the example of Bach.” I asked, “what do you mean?” He*
said “yes, well in Bach’s music there is always something that everybody can sing.” For example, in his chorales, everybody knew these tunes, so presumably people in the church would sing along, and of course that has nothing to do with these pieces. But I remembered what he said about following the example of Bach, so in these pieces what I was trying to do was what Bach does in much of his organ music, where everything in the piece is somehow is related to basic tune. So that’s what I tried to do in all of these pieces, I tried to take the original tune and do things with it like turn it into different transpositions, octaves, different keys, different rhythms, expanding, contracting, because one thing you can do with these folk tunes is you can change them a lot and the folk tune is still audible.

SJ: No matter what you transform.

FR: Yes, so actually almost everything in these pieces has some kind of relationship to the original.

SJ: Right, fragment and figures.

FR: Yes.

Part-2

SJ: There is an optional improvisation section in the third work (page 48)9. As you said, this fermata has the same meaning as Beethoven’s fermatas? Does this idea come from what Beethoven intended, but nobody did?

FR: What’s Beethoven?

SJ: You said when Beethoven composed the concerto, there was a fermata right after the orchestra played. Then, the piano enters. You said a fermata is a possible improvisation between them.

9 Down by the Riverside, m 62.
FR: Yes.

SJ: Does it come from that idea?

FR: I do not think this has anything to do with Beethoven. This is written so that you can do the improvisation or not. It does really not make whole a lot of difference.

SJ: Ok.

FR: I do not always do the improvisation when I play these pieces. Sometimes you want to give a short performance. It depends on the situation.

SJ: I see.

SJ: Even though I did not have any ideas about the religious origin of these melodies, it feels more spiritual. I find the third movement to be more spiritual or religious, as you said. Other songs are more like protest songs.

FR: Well, yes. This is originally a spiritual.

SJ: I really like the left hand accompaniment. The right hand melody is played with that accompaniment part and it sounds very beautiful.

FR: This piece, Down by the Riverside, was written for a specific occasion. I used to go to East Berlin in the seventies. There was a festival of political song. Each year was devoted to music of a specific country. That particular year was Vietnam. They asked me to write a piece for the opening concert, which had many different things on it. I first tried to write a piece based on a very beautiful Vietnamese song called Boat Woman. I started to write it and then in the middle of that I thought ‘wait a minute. I really do not know that much about the Vietnamese traditional music.’ As an American, at that particular time, I thought I should be

\[10\] Down by the Riverside, mm.1-18.
careful to do something that would be proper in that situation. I was worried that if I dealt with Vietnamese music, I might unknowingly do something that might not be right. So I changed my mind and decided I'd better write a piece based on an American song, something that I do know something about, and a song that has some relation to the war with Vietnam. Now at that time, there were many demonstrations in the United States against the war. There were several songs that had special significance. The best known of the songs was called We Shall Overcome. But probably the second most familiar song was this one, because the words had to do with war.

SJ: Vietnam war?

FR: Yes.

SJ: Lots of people sang this song?

FR: Yes. (Singing a melody) This song has been done in many different versions, such as fast and slow, but originally this is a song from the slavery period. It was a work song.

SJ: Black people?

FR: Yes. Working in the plantation, carrying heavy loads of cotton in the fields. Originally it was a slow song. It is about hard work in the field. So actually the tempo marked here, 82~88, is quite fast.

SJ: Hmm. I read this some where.

FR: Oh you did? So then I found that I actually prefer the slower tempo. It does not matter how slow, but more like 60 or something maybe. It does not really matter, you can play it fast or slow. It is all right. What are we talking about here now? I don’t want to get away from the question.
SJ: Your music is very contrapuntal. The counterpoint and certain parts create a very dense texture to play. So every time I write it down like this.

FR: Where is it?

SJ: For example here. Otherwise, it is very hard to play. As you said in your master class today, it sounds like it’s not that hard, playing it is a different story. It is very hard to play. Overall this music has a dense texture. It does not sound that hard, but when I played this part, it was tricky. When you talked about that, I totally agreed with you. Can I say that it is better to mark figures and fragments every time?

FR: You are talking about page 45? Everything is in some parts of the tune, maybe in a different key or time, but what part you consider the main elements is up to you. Sometimes it is the soprano line, sometimes it is the bass line. But I think it could be either one. You can play this piece in many different ways. It is not particularly difficult. A lot of students play this particular piece for some reason. It seems to be something a student would play. Yes of course! This is difficult. I found most difficult part is page 49, which is sort of a gospel piano version.

SJ: Yes. There are walking bass notes in the left hand.

FR: For me it is not so easy to do. You have to be both precise and free of this at the same time I think. Because of the style suggested, gospel piano, it is both precise and free.

SJ: Ok I see. Personally I feel like there is extreme contrast in your music.

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11 Down by the Riverside, mm.19-25.
12 Down by the Riverside, mm.19-25.
13 Down by the Riverside, mm.67-82.
Yes. Because I played lot of Stockhausen, Boulez, and stuff like that. All of the stuff is very much about extreme registers and extreme dynamics and so on.

It feels like a piano and forte, big contrast.

Yes. I think perhaps what is important is to get those sudden changes between forte and piano.

I see. I really enjoy the moment when I change the color of the dynamic, such as f to p or p to f. There are certain sonorities happening. I really like that.

It depends on the instruments of course.

Yes. Of course. When I played the Brahms clarinet trio last quarter, it was a pretty a big piece. I tried to change the mood and color very quickly between forte and piano, but the professor did not like it. He thought that it was wrong even though I was playing from the Henle urtext edition, and it should be a gradual crescendo or decrescendo.

Yes, I know. It seems to be a conventional way of playing classical music, avoiding these extreme contrasts. Well, that’s a convention. That’s all.

How about in your music?

When I played the classical music, people asked me “we want you to play the Beethoven.” I said “All right! I will play Beethoven but you won’t like it!”

(Laugh)

Why not? Because I play it the way it was written. It is one thing that Beethoven does all the time. He has a crescendo to forte and a sudden piano.
SJ: Subito piano.

FR: Yes. Nobody plays that way. If you play that way, people will say you cannot do that, you have to make it smooth. I do not think that is what Beethoven wanted. I think Beethoven wanted very sudden contrast. That’s why he was somewhat unusual, because he broke the rules.

SJ: Right! He was very creative.

FR: Yes. I think that probably tells you something about the way he improvised. He probably improvised with very big contrasts and sudden changes.

SJ: So when I play your music, do you expect things like extreme contrasts and dynamics?

FR: Yes! Yes! I think so. I think that sense. I would say that the classical music is usually not played or done that way. If you do that kind of thing, if you play exactly what Beethoven wrote but people don’t like it. Probably if Beethoven came back to a life and played his music today, people would tell him that his playing is at all wrong.

(Both laugh loudly)

SJ: Yes. Who knows?

FR: So I do not know what your professor is telling you, but I can imagine that he is probably telling you that if you want to win competitions or something like that, you have to play this way not that way. But that’s probably not the way Beethoven played. It is the way that wins the competition today, which is of course something entirely different.

SJ: Hmm.
FR: So he is probably right. He said if you want to win the first prize of competition you have to do it this way, not that way. But it is probably not the way Beethoven would have played himself. (Laugh loudly)

SJ: That’s very interesting.

FR: Yes. So these sudden changes on the third line of page 48, yes! I would say if you want to know where that kind comes from, just look at the Beethoven’s op. 57, Appassionata. It is full of things like that.

SJ: Yes. There are big contrasts all the time.

FR: Appassionata. It is about passions and emotions. There are not smooth transitions. There are sudden changes.

SJ: By the way, I have a quick question. You marked the length of music in your first piece14, but in others you did not say anything. Is there any reason for that?

FR: NO no no. I would not pay any attention to that.

SJ: OK.

FR: It is not important.

SJ: I see. Can I move on to the next movement? This last piece is what I was supposed to play from these four ballads, but I changed my mind.

FR: Ok.

SJ: It was fascinating. When I first listened to this music at my colleague’s recital, it was very attractive and fascinating.

14 Dreadful Memories, m.85.
FR: Yes.

SJ: There are two big different sections. It is divided into two like black and white.

FR: Yes. I guess so. All right.

SJ: I personally feel like the first section is very mechanical. Then the second part seems to be bluesy and jazzy, like freedom and wishful heaven.

FR: Yes.

SJ: Can I say that these are kind of similar to ‘Which side are you on?’

FR: Yes. I supposed so. Yes I guess so.

_The difficult things here in the beginning of this Winnsboro cotton mill blues is to make sure you do not accent the right hand._

SJ: I see.

FR: _Even though the right hand is on the beat and the left hand is off the beat, they should be the same. This is not so easy to do, to get it absolutely like a machine._

SJ: How about these tenuto markings here?^{15}

FR: _Where? End of the second line? Yes, because this comes from the theme. This is the theme of course._

SJ: Ok.

^{15} _Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues_, m.2.
FR: In line four?\textsuperscript{16} Oh well. I do not know what that is. Well, this comes from the theme of course. But it is like the changing gears of the machine or something. Shift to something different.

SJ: Oh! I see. Interesting. I read some articles about how this music was inspired by a movie.

FR: Again yes. This is a different movie also from the 70s. The movie is called ‘Norma Rae,’ and it is about a young woman who tries to organize the union in a southern textile factory. It has a remarkable sound track where the recording of the machinery is very loud.

SJ: From the sound track?

FR: Yes. It is very beautifully done, and the actors are talking to each other over the sound of the machinery.

SJ: This part is like that conversation is going on.

FR: Yes. The machine is drowning everything out. This is a very difficult thing to do on later on when you play page 56.\textsuperscript{17} You have the theme on your right and the accompaniment on the left hand. The machine is in the left hand. The song is in the right hand. The machine is always very loud and the song is getting softer and softer. It goes down to pianissimo at the end. You can hardly hear it. But I found that as a classically trained pianist, this is something difficult to do because in classical music you are taught that the top line is the important thing and the accompaniment in the bottom line is of secondary importance. This is the opposite, so you have to do the opposite.

SJ: Did you do it on purpose?

\textsuperscript{16} Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues, m.4.

\textsuperscript{17} Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues, mm.51-58.
FR: Yes, because this is what happened in the movie.

SJ: Ok. I see.

FR: The machinery is very loud and the actors are shouting each other over the machine. You almost cannot understand what they are saying because the machinery is so loud.

SJ: So when I play this part, audiences might not understand what I’m doing?

FR: I know. It is a very simple idea but it is something that seems very strange. The melody is overcome by the accompaniment. It is like something that almost never happens in classical music.

SJ: Oh. Really?

FR: And it is hard to do! But I really want that sound of the melody disappearing into the machinery.

SJ: I see. I have a quick question about that. When I listened to the CD, you emphasized this bass line every time. But there is an accent in the middle of the left hand.18

FR: Page 55 and 56. Yes.

SJ: You did not accent it that much.

FR: No.

SJ: What does it mean then? Can I play it the same way you did?

18 Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues, mm. 39-58.
FR: *I do not remember what I did. That was several years ago. So I do not remember what it sounds like. I have not listened to this recording in a long time.*

SJ: OK

FR: *Yes. I do not think the accent necessarily needs to be a particularly strong one. But it is simply syncopation.*

SJ: Yes. It is a syncopation and kind of a jazzy feeling.

FR: *Yes. It could be.*

SJ: Can I emphasize the bass line more, like a machine?

FR: *Yes.*

SJ: This is a very interesting piece because I have never used this kind of technique and motion on the keyboard. It is more fun than I thought. But this is tricky because I have to play all of the black keys and white keys. No missing keys.

FR: *Well. That is not so important. Yes. It is basically that you try to get all of the notes, but whether you get them all is not as important. What is perhaps important then is not so easy to get. Let’s go back to page 53 where the tune gradually builds up and you are playing with your elbow.¹⁹ Now of course it is difficult to get the exact the notes, and the way is not that important, but you can possibly play the tune with your elbow. It was supposed to sound like early rock and roll.*

SJ: Oh! Is it?

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¹⁹ *Winnsboro cotton mill blues*, mm. 13-22.
FR:  Yes. From the 50s. That is what I think it is. Early rock and roll. (singing a melody)

SJ: OK. There are some instructions about this here. It should not be that clear sounding.

FR: Yes. The main thing is of course always the machine sounds. You do not need to hear that melody very clearly, but if possible it should sort of come out of the machinery. Sometimes if you listen to machinery like that you start to imagine sounds. But I’m not really there.

SJ: I don’t get it. Are they?

FR: Yes. I used to work in a factory. I was 16 years old. I had a summer job working a large factory, and machinery was going all the time.

SJ: I see. There was always a mechanical din?

FR: Yes. When you are listening to repetitive sounds like that, which is the same thing over and over again, you start hearing things that are not really there. That is the whole point of minimalism.

SJ: Oh! Interesting.

FR: If you listen to Phillips Glass’s early music, it’s always the same thing over and over again, it does not change. But with these repetitions your brain starts to synthesize patterns. They are not really in the music, but they are happening in your brain.

SJ: I see. You are kind of using minimalism here.

FR: Yes of course.

SJ: Is it your intent that if the audiences keep listening to certain passages, they can imagine certain sounds in their brain?
FR: It depends on a great deal of different things. What kind of instruments, the places you are playing in, what kind of audiences there are, how much revelation there is. Sometimes there is another piece which is like that. There is a work called Four Pieces for Piano, and the fourth one has a lot of repetitions in it. And sometimes it seems like the sound is moving around in space, flowing around. It depends a lot on the acoustics at the time, of course, and the way it played. I think this is similar case. You know there were experiments carried on by psychologists in the 1950s. People were repeating and hearing the same words over and over again. If you take one word or phrase and say it over and over, you start to hear different words.

SJ: Yes. It could be.

FR: It is a sort of hallucination. Minimalist composers came along like Steve Reich, Phillip Glass, composers who really exploit those particular phenomena which were well known to scientists. Long before the composers came along, something happened with hypnologic suggestion. You take one thing and repeat it over and over again, and people start to hear different things.

SJ: Some documents said the intent of minimalism is that we can listen to a fundamental sound itself.

FR: I do not know what that means.

SJ: Ok.

FR: This is not exactly minimalism because it changes all the time. It is not really about repetition, it’s about slow changes. I was of course living in New York in the early 70s. At that time many people tried to explore these things. Of course most people knew the music of Steve Reich.

20 Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues, m. 13-50.
Phillips Glass, Terry Riley and so on. There is a certainly influence there, but I never felt that close to minimalism. There is a certain thing in it which seems interesting at that time. So I supposed to a certain extent here you might call it minimalism, but I would not say this is a minimalistic piece of music.

SJ: There are two rhythms against this and that on page 56.\textsuperscript{21} I just play it approximately. Is that ok?

FR: Yes. This is the song after all. This is a simple song. And I mean it does not need to be absolutely mechanical.

SJ: Ok. I see.

FR: Sure. Why not?

SJ: I'm just afraid I will ruin your certain sounds when I roll it every time.

FR: No. I do not think so. It is ok.

SJ: I see. There is a very fascinating moment on page 57 (Line four).\textsuperscript{23} After the crazy big sounds, I enjoy the sonority here. Can I pause a little bit, like a fermata?

FR: Well. I usually do it strictly. One thing again, this depends on the instrument. What I like a lot is if you have a large instrument and the strings are vibrating a lot, especially the low strings. When you take the pedal away gradually the dampers do not stop the string vibrating when they come down on the string, and the sounds gradually become louder.

\textsuperscript{21} Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues, mm.53-58.

\textsuperscript{22} Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues, mm.68-74.

\textsuperscript{23} Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues, mm.81-85.
SJ: Oh. Really?

FR: Yes. It’s not possible on every instrument.

SJ: You mean it happens with certain pianos or instruments?

FR: Larger instrument easily get that effect because the string is very long. It will be moving a lot and of course it is quite heavy, the low string. When the dampers come down, the string will fluff against the dampers and the sounds become louder to make a crescendo that way. And I like it a lot.

SJ: Oh I see.

FR: Before it disappears entirely it gets louder.

SJ: Is it more like the skill of pedaling?

FR: Yes. It is tricky. It’s not always easy to control it. It does not always happen. Sometimes it does and if you can make that happen, it is a nice effect.

SJ: I watched you play on Youtube.

FR: I’m playing this piece on Youtube?

SJ: Not this piece, I don’t think so. I tried to find it but I never did. But Roger Wright played this in the video.

FR: Roger Wright? I saw that. That is quite good!

SJ: Yes. He is quite good. I agree with you.
Well. I think this is a very good example of how to use the pedal in your music. That is why you marked this crescendo at the end of the pedal marking here.
FR: Yes.

SJ: This is a very technically demanding part on page 60, the third and fourth lines.24

FR: What about it?

SJ: Almost impossible.

FR: Well. Slow it down!

SJ: What if I miss certain notes? (laugh)

FR: Well. Yes. It happens to everybody, but the more you can get those notes, the better it is. Perhaps it is not a bad idea to play slower. Start off slower here than the original tempo. Yes. This is a very hard page of course, like what I talked about earlier with the last page of Chopin’s fourth ballad. Most of those pieces are not hard to play, but that page is hard to play. Rubinstein talks somewhere about what he had to do in an exam at some conservatory. They gave him this piece, the fourth ballad, to play because they knew he would make mistakes. And he did it of course ruin that hard place of Chopin. But he is telling this story to illustrate a point of how you can do certain things in live concerts that you cannot do on a recording. He said that he completely ruined that page, then when he got to the end of piece he threw his hands up in the air. And the whole audience, because those exams had audiences, rose to their feet to applaud and they had to give him the diploma.

SJ: Even though he messed up that page? Well, if I messed up this page, I’m going to do that. (laugh)

FR: Yes! Exactly. That’s right. (laugh)

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24 Winnsboro cotton mill blues, mm.117-132.
SJ: I would like to talk about certain piano techniques. I feel like when you play, you kind of pound the keyboard to produce certain full and big sounds. Can I use the word ‘pound’ to describe the playing?

FR: No, I don’t think so, because that is something I do not usually do. I learned a great deal about playing new music from watching pianist David Tudor, for whom a great deal of Stockhausen’s early music was written. Because of his curiosity he has a very personal way of playing. I have never studied with him but I watched his playing very closely. One thing that is very special about his way of playing which is very suited to new music is how he never did anything or any gesture that was not necessary. One thing he did not do was pound. He did not hit the piano. His way of playing was to play very close to the piano keyboard and to get a very big sound by using arm weight. He made very few gestures that were not necessary. I’ve kind inherited that from him. So one thing I’m still able to do today, even though I’m an old man, is to get a big sound out of the instrument without actually moving a great deal.

SJ: I see. It is from him.

FR: Yes, yes! I would not use that word. No! That is something I do not do even though people might think so. Because sometimes I’m able to get a very loud sound out of the piano.

SJ: Even though you tried to describe ‘machine sounds’, you don’t want to use that word, pound?

FR: No, no!! (Strictly)

SJ: OK.

FR: The way I like think about it is, do you swim?

SJ: Yes!
FR: You are swimming in the pool. You know sometimes you come to the end of the lane and you turn around to go back in the other direction? There is a way to turn using your feet to kick and push yourself back in the opposite direction. That’s how I like to think of playing the piano. I do not hit the instrument, but I sort of push away from it.

SJ: I see.

FR: Because that kind of technique is very useful if you have to make very big leaps. If you have to go from here to here, if you hit the first note then you have to make another gesture to go to the next note. It wastes time and energy. So I think the basic technique for playing the first note is to play with the same idea of using your feet to turn back when you are swimming. It becomes one gesture. So playing of first note is actually a way of taking off and making one gesture to go that way. It is one thing and one movement. It is easy and much more accurate. If you put all your energy into hitting the first note and then you have to travel a long distance to the next note, you will probably hit the wrong note. If you want to be very accurate it is very better to go like ‘one, two,’ not ‘one, two, three.’

SJ: One motion, one energy!

FR: Yes, that is what I learned from David.

SJ: I see. That is good!

When I play your piece, I try to use my arm and upper body weight to produce big sounds. I think that is related to the development of piano. In the past, the harpsichord and clavichord did not have hammers, so the keyboard was very light. We did not need to use our arm weight at all to play these, we just needed fingering patterns. But the more the piano was developed, the more we began to use arm weight. Otherwise, it does not work as effectively. I personally have to use arm and upper body weight very effectively.
FR: *That seems to make sense. I find that it is hard to talk about these things, because I'm not a piano teacher.*

SJ: But you are a very good pianist.

FR: *I'm pianist but I'm not a piano teacher. So I found it is difficult to explain what I do. I don't even know what I do.*

SJ: Yes. It is hard to explain.

FR: *It is more like question of a subjective feeling. I can't really communicate that to another person.*

SJ: I see.

One thing in page 63. It seems to be humorous to me. This is tonal music and suddenly you change the mood. That came out unpredictably. I'm not sure but this length of arm can be fitted well to the length of your arm.

FR: *Oh yes. I see.*

SJ: But my arm does not reach to this length.

FR: *That is not important.*

SJ: Okay. Do you look for a certain sonority or sound effect? Is that enough?

FR: *Yes, yes!*

SJ: Can I play C and Db instead of focusing on these notes?

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25 *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues,* m.147.
FR: Notes are not important. It is just that these notes here I’ve written because they are all white notes, and these are all black notes. So that is another example of notation. It is a problem of music notation. The pitches here are very precisely notated, but it does not mean that they have to be played precisely. This is simply an example of the basic motion. What is important here is the motion. It’s not important whether you hit those particular notes or other notes.26

SJ: Ok. I feel better (laugh)

FR: Yes. Some things you can express clearly with music notation, some things you cannot. That is one of them.

SJ: Ok. I see.

FR: Sometimes notation can have several different functions at the same time.

SJ: What does it mean?

FR: Well. One function is that it tells you what notes to play. Second, notation includes what kind of motions you need, which is different from the first. Maybe the motion of the rhythm tells you which notes are not so important. The third function tells you if it is not really important whether you play this particular thing or some other thing like it. This is just one example of one possible way it could be written down and it could be written down an entirely different way. You could write just clusters with no pitches. Maybe graphically making these cluster get smaller and smaller. In fact, perhaps that would be closer to the truth than writing these pitches, because these pitches are very confusing. Some people might think it is very important to get some pitches, others might play different ones. But that is not important. There are three different levels of what you can read a text. We are talking about the bar on page 63 at the top, where cluster goes up. The

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26 *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, m.147.
only thing that is important there is the basic motion of the whole bar. Of course, that could be done in many different ways.

SJ: I see.

FR: The pitches are the least important thing.

SJ: Ok.

Some articles show that you are using black and white keys. It is a kind of the symbol of race? Black or white people?

FR: Oh no, no!

SJ: I see. It has nothing to do with that?

FR: No!!(strictly)

SJ: I feel like you are very sensitive about the war.

FR: Well. Who is not?

SJ: Well. If people have a job and can have a meal every day, they do not always care that much about the war in the other countries.

Part-3

SJ: I feel like you are very sensitive about the war because lots of people died.

FR: Yes, one of these four pieces is about war, ‘Down by the Riverside.’ It is related to the war of Vietnam.

SJ: You said in your master class that you composed music within the last five years about the war.

\[27\] *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, m.147-154.
FR:  Yes. Almost everything I have done at the last five years has some relation to the horrible war. Yes, this is true.

SJ: Is there any certain motivation or inspiration to you?

FR:  Well. What do you mean ‘Inspiration’?
    I happen to like to write music that has some kind of relationship to the war around me. And the last five years, this war seems to be everywhere. I could not think about anything else. I can’t help it.

SJ: You just feel very sad about that.

FR:  Well sad, angry, whatever, all these things. I just feel that I can’t write music that has nothing to do with what’s happening in the world.

SJ: Can I say that music is only one medium to express your beliefs or feelings?

FR:  That’s what I do best. If I become a writer, I would write wars.

SJ: I see. Lastly, would you please give some advice or important ideas to prospective pianists and students for when they play this music?

FR:  This specific music?

SJ: Yes, I mean the Four Ballads.

FR:  Advice? Well. I would say listen to the original songs and sing them. Sometimes I used to do that. I still do that. I would sing maybe not all of the songs but maybe one or two of them. Sometimes that helps to break the ice at classical concerts. People come expecting to hear some kind of abstract or contemporary music or something, and I don’t always do that. You should not do it, it is artificial, but it seems like it is a useful thing to
do sometimes. I might sing the song to myself. Since these are folk songs it does not matter if I sing well.

SJ: With lyrics?

FR: With words? Yes yes! I sing them.

SJ: When I listen to the music, I cannot hear the lyrics since I’m a pianist. I don’t know why, but I can listen only to the melody and music. It is very hard for me to remember the words or lyrics.

FR: Well. It does not that matter that much. You know Mendelssohn wrote songs without words.

SJ: That is good for me (laugh).

FR: And people asked why did you do this? He would say well, why are they without words? And he would say the trouble with words is that they can be too limited. Words mean this thing or that thing and nothing else. Sometimes words are not enough to express a very specific emotion or emotional state which can be much more complex than anything words can express.

SJ: I have a question. The North American Ballads have a title. Is there any purpose for that? You want to try to express only certain historical events?

FR: Not every piece. No, I wrote the pieces simply called trio or something like that.

SJ: In this case about…?

FR: These are based on songs. So these titles simply tell you what song it is. That’s all. But titles sometimes are important.
SJ: Sure! We can get some general ideas from titles even before we listen to the music.

FR: Sometimes I do not name the original song because somebody owns the song. If you call your piano piece by the same name as a song, let’s say a popular song from the Beatles or something, you get in trouble. The important thing for the publisher is the title. It is about money.

SJ: Copyright?

FR: Yes! I had that experience once. Akitaka Hassi asked me to write about something. She asked many composers to write a song based on Beatles songs. So I chose a song from John Lennon, Give Peace a Chance, and I called it ‘Fantasy on give peace a chance.’ And then I registered it with the performing right site. They told me I was not the composer. The composer was John Lennon who actually stole it from Brahms.

SJ: Oh my God!

FR: The finale of the First Symphony is where that tune appears. John Lennon just stole it from Brahms. Actually he did not write it at all. But as far as performing rights...

SJ: He has a copyright?

FR: Yes! So I found that I was not the composer. So all I did was change the title. I called it Fantasy, and I also added some wrong notes where the tune is very clear. So you can’t say that I actually quoted the tune because it is all full of wrong notes. You can’t hear the tune that clearly (Laugh). Nobody cares. They don’t care. You can steal all of the music you want. That is not important. The important thing is the title! So I always tell my students to be very careful about titles because the titles might belong to somebody. They don’t even know, so before you give a title check it out. You should check the title see whether it is actually owned by somebody. Because you may end up finding that you are not the composer anymore.
This happened to me with People United’. I wrote this piece based on a song written by Sergio Ortega, a Chilean composer. The English translation is the ‘people united will never be defeated.’ 25 years after I wrote this song, a pianist name Marc-Andre Hamelin made a re-record of it. The record started to sell. When that happens, people wake up and then say ‘well. Wait a minute! This title is actually the same title as the song.’ So actually I’m no longer the composer of this piece. I’m merely the arranger of the tune. Of course, it does not really make any difference because they don’t give you any money anyway. But still if I had been intelligent I would have called it something else (Laugh).

SJ: Sorry about that.

FR: But it is too late. The composer did not care. He is a good friend of mine. He did not care. It made it no difference to him. But the publishers care because it is about money. So actually I have never received any money at all for those. They sold something like twelve thousands CDs. I’ve never received any money.

SJ: Oh. That is not fair I’m so sorry about that. I feel bad about it.

FR: Whether it is fair or not does not matter (Laugh).

End
APPENDIX C

List of terms used by the composer in his works for piano

Antiphonal singing: When two parts of a choir sing alternately, one answering the other. The term ‘antiphonal’ is generally used to describe the effect created by groups of singers or instrumentalists stationed apart from each other.

Banjo: Instrument of the same general type as the guitar. This instrument originates from Africa, and it was in use among the slaves of South America. It became the accepted instrument of ‘Negro Minstrels’ in the 19th century and found a place in jazz bands in 20th century.

Blues: Slow jazz song of lamentation, often for an unhappy love affair. It is composed of 12 bars, each stanza being 3 lines covering 4 bars of music. The blues notes consist of the flattened 3rd and 7th of the key. Harmony tended towards the plagal or subdominant. The earlier history of the Blues is traced by oral tradition as far back as the 1860’s, but the form was popularized about 1911-1914 by the Negro composer W.C. Handy. Composers such as Gershwin, Ravel, Copland, and Tippett have used the term to indicate a blues-type mood rather than a strict adherence to the form.

Boogie-woogie: The boogie style is characterized by the use of blues chord progressions combined with a forceful, repetitive left-hand bass figure. Many bass patterns exist, but the most familiar are the
‘doubling’ of the simple blues bass and the walking bass in broken octaves.

Gospel: A large body of American religious song with texts that reflect aspects of the personal religious experience of Protestant evangelical groups, both white and black. Such songs first appeared in religious revivals during the 1850s, but they are more closely associated with the urban revivalism that arose in the last third of the 19th century. Gospel music has gained a place in the hymnals of most American Protestants and, through missionary activity, has spread to churches on every continent. By the middle of the 20th century it had also become a distinct category of popular song, independent of religious association, with its own supporting publishing and recording firms, and with performers appearing in concerts.

Minimalism: This term applies to a style of music which began in 1960’s, involving repetition of short musical motifs in a simple harmonic idiom. A minimum of material is repeated to create a maximum hypnotic effect. Its practitioners are called minimalists. Prominent minimalist composers include Phillips Glass, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and John Adams.

Spiritual: This is a folk-hymn which developed during America religious revival of the 1740 and took its name from ‘spiritual song’. Publishers used this term to distinguish it from hymns and metrical psalms.

Stretto: In fugue, when the entry of the answer occurs before subject is completed, overlapping with it. This is a way of increasing excitement. The value of this technique for fugal composition has been recognized since the mid-17th century, when musicians began to advocate its use near the end of a piece as a means of increasing excitement and intensity, thus leading the piece towards a suitable close.
Walking bass: A pizzicato line played on a double bass in regular crotchets in 4/4 metre, the notes usually moving stepwise or in intervallic patterns not restricted to the main pitches of the harmony. A type of bass line, often found in Baroque compositions, it moves continuously and with purposeful regularity, setting off the more sustained melodic writing above. It simultaneously contributes pulse, harmony and counter-melody.
APPENDIX D

THE SOLO PIANO MUSIC OF FREDERIC RZEWSKI

*Chain of Thought* (1953)
*Tabakrauch* (Tobacco Leaves) (1954)
*Preludes* (1956)
*Poem* (1958)
*Study* (1960)
*Study II* (1961)
*Falling Music* (1971)
*No Place To Go But Around* (1974)
*The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* (1976)
*Four Pieces* (1977)
*Squares* (1978)
*North American Ballads* (1979)
*Eggs* (1986)
*The Turtle and the Crane* (1988)
*Mayn Yingele* (1988)
*Short Fantasy on “Give Peace a Chance”* (1989)
*Bumps* (1990)
*Sonata* (1991)
*De profundis* (1992)
*Andante con moto* (1992)
*A Life* (1992)
*Fougues* (1994)
The Road (1995-2002):

Turns (1996)
Tracks (1996)
Tramps (1997)
Stops (1998)
A Few Knocks (1999)
Traveling with Children (1999)
Final Preparations (2002)
APPENDIX E

Discography

1. Listing by Performer and Album Titles


Rzewski, Frederic. Four Pieces; Ballad No. 3, Which side are you on? From North American Ballads. Vanguard VA 25001, 1980. LP.


Supovê, Kathleen. Figure 88. CRI CD 653, 1993. CD.
2. Live Performances by Frederic Rzewski


Bibliography


