I, Shawn Timothy Daly, hereby submit this work as part of the requirements for the degree of:

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ABSTRACT

Title of Document: **ABRAM CHASINS: A STUDY OF SELECTED WORKS FOR SOLO PIANO AND TWO PIANOS**

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Abram Chasins (1903-1987) had a widely varied career as an author, pianist and broadcaster. Much has been written about his life and career. But through it all, it is his contribution as a composer that has drawn the least amount of attention. He left a large body of works in several genres for several media. But since he gave up on composing relatively early in his career, most of his music has fallen into complete obscurity.

Chasins’s oeuvre although uneven in quality contains some real gems that deserve hearing. The purpose of this study is to shed some light on his music for Solo Piano and Two Pianos and to perhaps stimulate some interest in these works among performers and the listening public.
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Abram Chasins had a career that would be the envy of many in the musical world, yet he remains one of its biggest secrets. His achievements include becoming a world-class virtuoso pianist and instructor in piano at the famed Curtis Institute when still in his twenties. He was a composer, whose music was played by many of the great artists of the 1930s to 1950s. He was an author of renown, writing as many as five well-regarded books on music (including a popular biography of Van Cliburn). And finally, he was a widely respected broadcaster whose work on classical radio stations in New York and San Diego was heard in syndication throughout the country. In spite of all he accomplished, very few people have heard of Abram Chasins.

The chief sources of information on Chasins’s life are two doctoral theses, one is a general biography, and the other, also a biography, focuses on Chasins’s piano concerti and briefly mentions some of his other piano music. Also extant is a volume in the Columbia Oral History Series which is essentially an in-depth interview with Chasins. To reproduce a full biography of Abram Chasins here would be redundant and is well beyond the scope of this study, especially since composing seems to be the smallest part of his very active professional career. The highlights of his time among the living are as follows: He was born in New York in 1903 to Russian-
Jewish immigrants. His father was a druggist whose business endured many ups and downs, the result of which was a great strain on his parents’ marriage. Although he loved both of his parents, he was much closer to his aunt and uncle, the violinists, Mark and Vera Faronoff, who took great pleasure in nurturing the musical talents of their nephew. At the Faronoff house, Abram became acquainted with many of the musical luminaries of the day, including Leopold Godowsky, Vladimir da Pachmann, and many others. His studies took him to the Curtis Institute where he was a protégé of Josef Hoffmann (later to be his assistant) and Rubin Goldmark. His career as a pianist was short, but brilliant. He toured Europe to great acclaim and he was elevated to instructor at Curtis. Later in life, he became interested in broadcasting and its possibilities for educating and enlightening the masses. He had a distinguished career at WQXR in New York and KUSC in San Diego. He died at the age of eighty-four in 1987.

Chasins’s compositional career was active but short, lasting from circa 1925 to 1950. He wrote nothing for the last three decades of his life. What he did write is somewhat uneven in quality, but some of his works are very fine and show a spark of genius.

The purpose of this study is to shed some light on Chasin’s compositions for solo piano and two pianos, by focusing on a few selected works. I myself have had the pleasure of performing many of Chasin’s works for two pianos. His music is challenging, but fits under the hand beautifully, which is a testament to his virtuosity as a pianist. All of his music is out of
print and to find copies one must look to libraries far and wide, and to the Abram Chasins collection at the International Piano Archives in College Park, Maryland.
CHAPTER ONE

The Large-Scale Works for Solo Piano: The Preludes and *Narrative*

Since Chopin completed his monumental set of Preludes in 1839, several composers have tried their hand at producing their own group of twenty-four (either all at once or throughout their career). Among them are Alexander Skryabin, Dmitri Shostakovich, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Charles Villiers Stanford, Edwin York Bowen, and Abram Chasins.

Chasins completed the last of his own set of twenty-four preludes in 1927. He composed them in four volumes of six pieces each (Opp. 10, 11, 12, 13); they were published in 1928 by the Oliver Ditson Company. Each piece bears a dedication to one of his friends and colleagues; included are such well-known names as Gershwin, Moiseiwitch, Godowsky, Hutcheson, Hess and Goldmark. Without knowing more about the personalities involved, it is hard to say whether the preludes were meant as musical portraits (like some of Chasins’s later pieces) or whether they are simply gifts to friends.

Most of the preludes are between one and four pages long, with two examples reaching a length of six pages. As with most of his piano music, the preludes are lush and romantic and owe a great deal to the influence of the Opp. 3, 23, and, 32 of Rachmaninoff. They are pieces written by a
virtuoso for virtuosi. In general, they require a large span and a strong flexible technique.

Like Bach and Chopin, Chasins wrote an example in every key, but arranged then in a slightly different way. Instead of the Chopin arrangement of major to relative minor then down a fourth (C major, A minor, G major, E minor, etc.), Chasins groups the majors and minors into twos (C major–A minor–E minor–G major–D major, etc.). Why Chasins chose this arrangement is unclear. Perhaps he thought that it created more cohesion by dividing the set into six tightly knit groups of four pieces each.

When it came to his own compositions, Chasins was his own worst critic. Upon re-examining the preludes later in his life, he expressed a desire that many of them should have never been published. He was embarrassed by many of them and dismissed them as mere juvenilia. He would only give his endorsement to ten of the twenty-four (Op. 10, Nos. 1, 2, 4, 5 & 6; Op. 11, no. 1; Op. 12, nos. 2, 5 & 6; Op. 13, no. 1). ¹

Indeed, Chasins’s Preludes are a bit uneven in quality and on the whole, are perhaps not worthy of the exalted position of those by more famous names. However, even the lesser of the preludes show Chasins’s considerable skill as a composer and a pianist. However clumsy some may be musically, the writing for piano is superb. What follows is a guided tour of the Twenty-Four Preludes highlighting the salient features of each and shedding some light on the many people to whom they are dedicated.

**Prelude No. 1 in C Major, Op. 10, no.1** (Andante maestoso, $\frac{1}{4}=66-76$)

One of the preludes to receive Chasins’s endorsement, this piece bears a dedication to Robert and Madeline Simon. This was probably Robert A. Simon, the author and critic. Simon was listed as an instructor in radio technique at the Juilliard Summer School and he was prominent in the New York literary scene. Since this was about the time that Chasins became interested in broadcasting, it seems likely that this is the Robert Simon in question. ²

The first prelude employs an elaborate organ toccata figuration complete with long sustained pedal tones and written over three staves reminiscent of works by Pachelbel.

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The result is that a mere twenty-four measures are spread out over six pages. The form is in three parts that comprise successive variations of the same material (A, A', A'') followed by a five-bar coda that winds to a quiet close. Wanting to explore the piano in its fullness, Chasins begins by specifically calling for use of the sostenuto pedal - the performer is directed to press down the c and g on the lowest staff silently and catch them in the middle pedal.

**Prelude No. 2 in A minor, Op. 10, no. 2** *(Moderato, $J=104-120$)*

Dedicated to Mary Louise Curtis Bok, founder and president of the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, this is another prelude that Chasins was willing to claim. A study in rapid chords, this piece is not really melodic but figural. Instead of following a sustained melody, the interest here is in the contour created by the rising and falling chords.
This prelude is a two-part form with the second part being a truncated return of the opening over a sustained pedal punctuated by left-hand crossings:

Prominent throughout is the motive of an ascending melodic second followed by a third

which is sometimes inverted when the line is falling. The piece ends on the tonic with an added sixth.
**Prelude No. 3 in E minor**, Op. 10, no.3 (Vivo e marcato, $\text{\textbullet}=144-160$)

This piece employs a toccata-like figuration with sharp off-beat accents. It is a two-part form with a seven-measure coda. The figuration remains consistent throughout and is grouped into a rhythmic motive of three (see Ex. 1.5).

Ex. 1.5 - Op. 10, no. 3

Chasins explores four keys in the short span of three pages. Prelude no. 3 requires a more than comfortable reach of an octave—since many of the octaves are filled in with thirds. The dedicatee of this prelude is pianist Frank Sheridan, a Mason & Hamlin artist and former assistant to Ernest Hutcheson (Chasins’s composition teacher).
**Prelude No. 4 in G Major, Op. 10, no. 4** (Lento, $\frac{j}{=80-92}$)

Subtitled “Lullaby” this piece is dedicated to painter and sculptor, Edith Bry Benjamin, and was endorsed by Chasins. Personally, I find this endorsement puzzling because I find this to be one of the weakest of the whole set.

It consists of slowly moving chords over a monotonous bass in broken octaves.

The form comprises a two-measure introduction followed by the A section (mm. 3-23), the B section (mm. 24-31), and a five-measure coda, which is needed to find a satisfactory close. The B section begins with the same material as the A section, only this time in the dominant, and culminates in
a sequence (down by step) of the same melodic material found in measure eight.

Ex. 1.7 –Op. 10, no. 4: downward sequence

Prelude No. 5 in D Major, Op. 10, no. 5 (Alla marcia; giocoso $\frac{\text{d}}{\text{m}} = 76-84$)

This piece is dedicated to George Gershwin whose own famous set of three preludes was published in 1927. Although it is unclear how well Chasins knew Gershwin, he (Chasins) has taken a cue from his colleague in the use of some jazz-inspired harmonies in this good-natured little march. Another of the ten preludes to receive Chasins’s seal of approval, this is a simple continuous binary form.
Prelude No. 6 in B minor, Op. 10, no. 6  (Con moto \( \frac{\text{d}}{\text{m}} =116-128 \))

This is also a simple, continuous binary and the first prelude where there is a significant change in the figuration. The opening begins with the following theme over an inverted Alberti figure that spans an eleventh.
At the start of the B section, the theme is stated in augmentation over a rolling triplet figure.

Both accompaniment patterns fill in the spaces between melodic phrases with descending half-step motives (see circled notes in the Exx. 1.9 & 1.10)

The prelude ends with ponderous, insistent B pedal at the extreme low end of the keyboard. This prelude was dedicated to Elizabeth Chasins, Abram’s mother, and was one of the favored pieces in the set.
Prelude No. 7 in F-sharp minor, Op. 11, no.1 (Vivacissimo $\frac{4}{4} = 152-168$)

Dedicated to the famous Russian pianist and conductor, Benno Moiseiwitch (1890-1963), one of the many pianists who programmed Chasins’s famous set of *Three Chinese Pieces*, this virtuoso study in light, gossamer, right-hand passage work is the only prelude in Opus 11 that Chasins was willing to claim. The following example shows that right-hand figuration which retains a consistent shape throughout the piece.

Ex. 1.11 – Op. 11, no. 1

The primary melodic interest (double-stemmed notes) is hidden among the sprawling eighth-note motion in the left hand, which retains a rhythmic pattern that alternates between $3+2+2+1$ and $3+3+2$ (see A and B respectively in Ex 1.11).

The form of this little piece shows Chasins’s penchant for lopsided binary forms. The A section is over twice as long as the B section which has
the feeling of an arrival or return (of the opening material) but quickly evaporates.

**Prelude no. 8 in A Major**, Op. 11, no. 2  (Lento \( \frac{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{" =69-76}})}}}}{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{}}}}}}}} \))

Number eight is another of the Preludes to suggest an organ texture, the right hand figure presents an expanding interval pattern (2\text{nd}-8\text{th}) that moves up by step through section A then down again through section B.

**Ex. 1.12 – Op. 11, no. 2**
The result of this pattern is the suggestion of two independent lines that move away from each other.

The left hand is in two tiers: a chordal melody in the tenor/alto range and long pedal tones. The final chord makes use of an added second and sixth, another of Chasins’s favorite devices:

Ex. 1.13 – Op.11, no. 2 – final chord

Prelude No. 9 in E Major, Op.11, no. 2  (Andante \( \text{\text{=72-80}} \))

This is another of the uneven binary forms. As with the others, there is a sense of return but the return is short and quickly leads to the end of the piece. With some of Chasins’s lopsided binary and ternary forms the sense of return that one feels in the last section often is just a delayed resolution to the tonic. Chasins frequently avoids references to the tonic for some time in the middle of a piece thus heightening the tension and the sense of return. This piece begins with a motive that Chasins inverts in measure twenty:
The dedicatee of this piece is the pianist, author, educator, and Isidore Philipp pupil, Henry Bellamann. (Readers may be familiar with his most famous work, the novel *King’s Row*, which spawned the 1942 film starring Ronald Reagan.)

**Prelude No. 10 in C-sharp minor**, Op. 11, no. 4  (Allegro \( \text{\textendash} 132-144)\)

Dedicated to Ernest Urchs, former vice-president of Steinway & Sons, here again is another example of the truncated return. In this case, the return is a mere three measures, followed by a two-measure codetta. Although, very much like the other binary forms, convincing arguments for a one-part form can be made here since the return is so short.
**Prelude No. 11 in G-sharp minor**, Op. 11, no. 5 (Vivace, $\downarrow = 138-152$)

Dedicated to the composer’s sister, Ethel (who gave Abram the nickname “Babe”), this is one of the only true ABA works in the set. Here we have a return in which the A section is repeated in its entirety with only minor changes.

**Prelude No. 12 in B Major**, Op. 11, no. 6 (Presto, $\downarrow = 138-152$)

Dedicated to the pianist, author and former President of Juilliard, Ernest Hutcheson, with whom Abram studied piano and composition, this piece is characterized by an elaborate cascading seven-note figure that consistently follows this contour:

**Ex. 1.16 – Op.11, no.6**

It seems obvious that the greatest interest in this piece lies in the figuration. The melody is rather undistinguished and comprises the following two themes:
This piece is in ternary form with an extended B section that is itself in two parts. The B section varies the texture by adding sustained bass chords which again suggests an organ/orchestral texture. Also, the B section moves through the quite distant keys of E minor and E-flat Major. The last section is another short return whose function is to bring the piece to a satisfactory close.

**Prelude No. 13 in G-flat Major**, Op. 12, no.1  (Allegro con moto \( \text{=88-100} \))

Dedicated to the great pianist and composer of impossible etudes, Leopold Godowsky, this is a virtuoso study in extended right-hand figuration and hemiola. The A section in 6/8 presents an asymmetrical figure of 4 + 2 with the melody notes falling on the second and fourth sixteenth notes.
This section consists of two four-measure phrases and an extended six-measure phrase that leads to the B section. At B the right hand falls into a typical 3/4 pattern while the left hand stays in 6/8.
This section accelerates steadily to the return of A, which is much like the first A section but with a slightly different close. However, A' is as long as the first a section (14 measures) which makes this piece seem perhaps a bit more balanced than some of the others.

**Prelude No. 14 in E-Flat minor**, Op. 12, no. 2  (Andante espressivo \( \frac{76}{84} \))

This was one of Chasins’s favorite compositions. He chose this work to be the title theme for *Piano Pointers*, his first radio show. It was also the subject of an article by his wife, Constance Keene, in the Master Class section of *Keyboard Classics Magazine*\(^3\) in which she suggests fingerings and addresses questions of phrasing and interpretation.

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\(^3\) Keene, Constance. "Master Class: Abram Chasins's Prelude Op. 12, No. 2" *Keyboard Classics*, (vol. 8, No. 4) July/August 1988, 36.
This three-part prelude, in which the resemblance to Rachmaninoff (who, according to Takasawa, was said to admire this piece)\(^4\) is remarkable, was dedicated to Boris Fulda, one of the figures in Chasins’s life on which no information seems to be available. The printing of the score in Keyboard Classics incorporates a slight change in the ending that Chasins suggested some years after the original composition.

Ex. 1.20 – Op. 12, no.2: A-original/B-revision

![Ex. 1.20 – Op. 12, no.2: A-original/B-revision](image)

Since this piece was so important to the composer, and is such an excellent example of his best work, it is included in its entirety in Appendix II.

**Prelude No. 15 in B-flat minor**, Op. 12, no. 3 (Presto \(\text{♩}=168-208\))

Dedicated to the Polish-born pianist and former Juilliard faculty member, Ignace Hilsberg, this is a dark, brooding two-part form. Part two amplifies part one by moving the constant sixteenth-note motion into both hands.

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In measures 23-26 Chasins shows his talent for building tension. Here we find that every measure begins with a prominent octave F in the bass. These are held throughout the passage with the sostenuto pedal. In spite of all that goes on around the F’s, the result is a dramatic prolongation of the dominant that increases in intensity before finally resolving to the tonic in measure 27.

**Prelude No. 16 in D-Flat Major**, Op. 12, No. 4  (Andante \( \frac{\text{d}}{\text{m}} =126-138 \))

Dedicated to composer and arranger, Leo Russotto, this piece carries the designation, pastorale. The form seems to be binary with each part beginning with the same material. Part 1 ends with transitional material that leads to the return of the opening after which it winds down to a quiet close. Chasins again uses a prominent prolongation of the dominant (over 8 measures) to increase the tension before the piece ends. This was not one of the preludes to receive the composer’s endorsement.

**Prelude No. 17 in A-flat Major**, Op.12, No.5  (Moderato con fuoco \( \frac{\text{d}}{\text{m}} =88-96 \))

This piece is dedicated to the Ukrainian composer and pianist Mischa Levitzki and was endorsed by Chasins. Here, the concept of prolongation is most dramatic. The first fourteen measures, by virtue of the prominent E-flat pedal tone, seem to be one long prolongation of the dominant. A truly satisfying tonic isn’t reached until near the very end of the piece (measure 25). In measures 22 and 23 there is a momentary shift up a half step which
serves to heighten the tension produced by all of those measures of dominant. The left hand is a study in sweeping arpeggio figures.

Ex 1.23 – Prelude 17 -opening
Prelude No. 18 in F minor, Op. 12, No. 6 (Allegro con grazia \( \frac{\text{j.}}{\text{=}96-108} \))

This piece sports one of the most unusual features in all of Chasins’s work: two time signatures. The right hand is in a rolling 6/8 that falls clearly into the usual pattern of 3+3, while the left hand is in 3/4 time with a stressed second beat.

Ex 1.24 – Prelude No. 18 - opening

A three-part form with a short return, this piece maintains a rather plain harmonic rhythm of one chord change per bar. The interest is carried by the variety of chromatic passing tones in the right hand. This piece was dedicated to the great pianist Dame Myra Hess and is one of Chasins’s picks. It is unclear whether Chasins actually knew her or merely intended this piece as a tribute.
**Prelude No. 19 in C minor**, Op. 13, No.1  (Vivace  \( \text{\textit{\textbf{\LARGE{}}}} = 132-144 \))

This piece is in three parts. Parts A and A’ are characterized by an insistent tonic left-hand pedal on beats two and three. The right hand comprises a melody that falls into four sequences of the same material. Chasins then takes a part of the A theme and uses 14 repetitions of it to build the whole B section. The final cadence is not quite as strong as it could be because of the delayed resolution in the left hand (Ex. 1.26). Because the third of the chord is on the strongest beat while the root (tonic) is on a weak beat, the cadence lacks much of the power it might have. Chasins counted this piece among those he was willing to claim and dedicated it to George Fischer, (possibly a member of the famous music publishing family).
Ex. 1.25 – Prelude No. 19 - opening

Vivace  \( \text{\textit{martellato}} \)  \( j = 132-144 \)
Ex. 1.26 – Prelude No. 19 – final cadence

Prelude No. 20 in E-flat Major, Op. 13, No. 2 (Vivo con brio \( \frac{d}{=} = 80-88 \))

Dedicated to the distinguished American pianist Marvin Maazel, this is a virtuoso study for left-hand passagework and right-hand octaves. Although the piece is in 6/8 Chasins produces, in some passages, the effect of two against three by double-stemming the left-hand accompaniment thus:

Ex. 1.27 – Op. 13, no. 2: opening
This piece is hard work for the left hand. It might be a refreshing alternative to Chopin’s “Revolutionary” Etude or some of the left-hand studies of Czerny.

**Prelude no. 21 in B-flat Major**, Op. 13, No. 3 (Tempo giusto $\frac{1}{4} = 84$)

Subtitled Chorale and dedicated to his composition teacher, Rubin Goldmark, Chasins fills this piece with little ironies. This part-writing exercise is full of what any good theory teacher would call mistakes (parallelisms, direct octaves and fifths, etc.). The tempo indication and meter combination is a curious one, which makes this the shortest of all of the preludes (a mere forty seconds playing time).
Ex. 1.28 – Op. 13, no. 3: complete

To Rubin Goldmark

No. 21 - PRELUDE in B-flat Major
(Chorale)

ABRAM CHASINS
Op. 13, No. 3

Tempo giusto \( \frac{d}{\text{8}} = 84 \)
Prelude No. 22 in G minor, Op. 13, No.4 (Lento, grave \( \text{=}92-100 \))

This short three-part piece is dedicated to Chasins’s mentor, the pianist and inventor, Josef Hoffman. But the spectre of Rachmaninoff is just under the surface. Hoffman was a great interpreter of Rachmaninoff’s music. Himself a great pianist, Rachmaninoff nevertheless considered Hoffman to be the best.

The outer sections are a ponderous and slightly sinister funeral dirge characterized by occasional snare rolls. The middle section is a study of two against three in octaves. Hoffman was notorious as a serious, brooding character (as was Rachmaninoff) and this piece may be intended as a portrait of his imposing personality.

Example 1.29 - Funeral March mm. 28 to end
**Prelude No. 23 in D minor**, Op. 13, No. 5  (Andante \( \text{\textdagger} = 92-100 \))

In two parts (AB), this prelude makes considerable use of two against three (a favorite device of Chasins). The left hand, in three, provides the harmonic underpinnings with some double stemmed counter-melodic lines. Part A ends quite naturally on the dominant. Part B begins with the same material that opens the work but takes a different turn and provides the melodic climax of the piece. The ending abandons the two over three and closes quietly on a tonic chord with a sharp third and an added sharp seventh. This piece is dedicated to Martha Lorber, a dancer of some renown, who appeared in the Ziegfield Follies of 1922 and 1924.
Prelude No. 24 in F Major, Op. 13, No. 6  (Largo, con mesta \( \underline{\text{\textdollar}} \text{=}76-84\))

Although it ends rather loudly, number twenty-four is really an anti-climax. This prelude seems to stand apart from the rest of the set, as a final commentary on the preceding action. It is characterized by one of Chasin's favorite devices, the pedal tone. Although the melody calls to mind sweeping gestures, they seem to be static – not really producing a sense of motion to any one climax. The effect is that of an absent-minded musing on the whole set and is perhaps a bit disappointing to those who may remember the sense of inevitable climax in the final preludes of Chopin and Rachmaninoff. This final piece is dedicated to Muriel Kerr, Canadian-American pianist and former faculty member at the Juilliard School and the Thorton School of Music at the University of Southern California.

Chasins’s Preludes are eclectic and draw on many influences: Rachmaninoff, Chopin, Gershwin, et al. The result is that no one composer can be said to have an overwhelming influence on Chasins’s writing. Chasins was a very well-informed musician, a veritable sponge. Throughout these pieces, he seems to be starting with the various styles he absorbed and working towards his own original rendering of that style. His success, in that regard, is a matter for speculation. As was noted earlier, it is because these preludes seem to show Chasins gifts as a composer in their formative stages, that he later disapproved of many of them. His later works, though few in number, seem to benefit from the experiments of the Preludes.
Narrative: Remembrance of Things Past, composed in 1947-48, is Chasins’s largest single-movement piece for piano. A success with pianists and critics alike, Narrative was chosen by Rudolf Serkin to be the representative American work on his 1962 world tour. Takesawa\(^5\) states that Artur Rubinstein also toured with this work. And Chasins introduced it to Vladimir Horowitz, although it is not clear whether he actually performed it. Narrative was also chosen by Sir Yehudi Menuhin to be a feature work on the 1981 Twenty-fifth Anniversary Concert of the Gstaad Festival (played by Constance Keene). In an article for the American Spectator the critic Pitts Sanborn wrote: “Narrative is Chasins’s finest achievement. It is a magnificent and impressive contribution to piano literature; and he (Chasins) need not have written anything else to secure a permanent place in music.”\(^6\)

The long dramatic narrative of this piece was described by Chasins as follows:

The introduction is meant to suggest a narrator relating a highly personal experience. As the story unfolds, romantic and dramatic events reveal themselves vividly. At the end, the narrator again becomes the objective observer and seems to be saying, “and that’s how it was.”\(^7\)


\(^7\) Ibid., p.15.
In form and dramatic content, it resembles the Ballades of Chopin (and to a lesser degree, Liszt). The introduction (mm. 1-29) presents a gently flowing theme that sets the stage for what follows but does not participate in the bulk of the action:

**Ex. 1.31 – Narrative: opening theme**

The introduction itself is in three parts: theme, interpolation and extension, theme. The second statement of the theme is followed by two measures of simple octave E’s that anticipate the first pitch of the second theme. Section A presents the main thematic idea that ties the whole piece together. The theme starts with an agitated, brooding C-sharp Minor idea that is developed over the next 27 measures and arrives at a climax in measure 67.
After that comes the first contrasting episode (Section B), a sardonic, little march, then a misterioso transition to a varied repeat of the first agitato theme. Chasins used accents in the first few measures of this repeat (mm. 102-104) to highlight the melody, which is hidden among the rocking eighth notes.
Eventually this episode ends with the repeated octave E’s that signaled the end of the introduction.

The second contrasting episode in 2/2 is much slower, quieter and more introspective. The shape of the melody here somewhat mirrors the first agitato section by its use of a recurring descending third followed by an ascending second. See example below.

Ex. 1.34 – second contrasting episode
After 24 measures, the motion returns to a faster 6/8 and the material from the opening agitato comes back in a different key. The first statement appears to hover around C-sharp minor, while this return appears to start in D minor and moves through a loose association with F minor and leads to the sardonic march which is now up a forth (B-flat Minor).

One last agitato theme follows. This time it is a bit more fragmented, emphasizing the following figure: 🟥 musica. This leads to a triumphant C Major transformation of the agitato theme which signals the beginning of the coda. The coda marks the return of the theme of the introduction and brings the piece to a close with the repeated E’s that closed the introduction. This time they are supported by an arpeggiated C Major harmony.
CHAPTER TWO

Other Selected Works for Solo Piano

In 1925, Chasins completed a set of three pieces that he originally
titled, “Keyboard Karikatures, Op. 6 (Set I)” This set was dedicated to his
beloved aunt, Vera Faronoff. Each piece was given an individual title that
was apparently to evoke a mental image of its namesake [Rachmaninoff,
Godowsky, and Bachaus (an alternative spelling of Backhaus that Chasins
prefers), respectively]. The musical purposes of this set can best be
explained in the Foreword by Henry Bellamann:

The search for a title for this group of sketches revealed a
gap in English nomenclature. There seems to be no word
midway between ‘portrait’ and ‘caricature,’ although the
composer recognizes that a ‘caricature’ may range from
delicately accentuated interpretations to burlesque
exaggerations. It is evident at first glance that these piano
pieces are not of the latter order of grotesques; but the
composer does not wish them to be read as ‘portraits’ since
that would connote a too ambitious assumption of the
manner of the subjects.

We are rather to imagine a pianist improvising after a
contemplation of these masters in an expression of his
reaction to them, utilizing their manner only to pay homage
to their greatness. Each composition is quite simply a jeu
d’esprit in which a sense of humor combines with a
respectful appreciation. The result is a not too broad
exaggeration of Rachmaninoff’s lowering moods, of
Godowsky’s zealous contrapuntal pencil, and Bachaus’s
superb disdain of technical difficulties. If in addition they
prove to be compositions interesting and amusing in
themselves, the composer, like his colleagues of pen and
Indeed, these pieces do effectively evoke images of the three subjects; but in spite of the foreword, Chasins later changed both the title of the set and of the individual pieces. Later editions refer to them as “Three Pieces” while the movements are called Nocturne in G Minor, Valse in A, and Etude in C-Sharp Minor, respectively. This change could suggest that Chasins wasn’t comfortable with the programmatic aspect of these pieces (which is unlikely, given the nature of his other works) or that he simply never got around to writing a second set (this author has not been able to find even a passing reference to a Set II).

“Rachmaninoff” contains no exact quotations from its subject, but is full of gestures that call to mind various works from his oeuvre (especially the Op. 23 Preludes). It begins with an A section somewhat reminiscent of the middle of Rachmaninoff’s Prelude, Op. 23, No. 5 in G Minor comprising two phrases and characterized by long, sweeping gestures. Like the Op. 23, No. 5 of Rachmaninoff we have the sweeping gestures and the melody that begins on an upbeat:

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The B section seems to be a four-part form itself. It begins with material that seems to develop the gesture that opens the piece—a descending three-note motive (Ex. 2.3 m.17ff). There follows a small
transition that highlights the counterpoint of the inner voices. Chasins uses the “third-hand” technique (emphasizing voices in the thumb) to great effect throughout this piece. (Ex. 2.3 mm. 25ff)

Then follows a section that immediately calls to mind gestures like those found in Rachmaninoff’s B-flat Major Prelude (Op. 23, no. 2). Compare the effect of Chasins’s alternating octaves with those of Rachmaninoff (Ex. 2.4). After that we move to a series of sonorous octave chords that exploit the far reaches of the keyboard followed by more alternating octaves and a return of the A section, which concludes with material that suggests one of the many evaporative endings of Rachmaninoff (see Op.23, No.5 and Op. 5).
Ex. 2.3 – Op. 6, no.1: middle section (compare to Ex. 3.4)
The second piece in this set, originally entitled “Godowsky” suggests in its densely contrapuntal texture the often mind-boggling complexity of Godowsky’s piano writing. To be sure that the performer is fully aware of the multi-voiced texture, Chasins resorts to highlighting the parts with dotted lines. Throughout, Chasins does a fine job of emulating the ebb and flow of Godowsky’s music where phrases are of varying lengths and often elide, where countermelodies emerge out of nowhere, and where chromatic harmonies merge in a bewildering array of contrapuntal lines.

The last piece in this set is Chasins’s impression of the artistry of Wilhelm Bachaus (1884-1969). Throughout his long career, Bachaus was not ever known as a showman. Still, his technical prowess remains undisputed. Bachaus (also spelled Backhaus) was known to be a great
believer in practicing scales, exercises and etudes, so it seems fitting that Chasins would choose to remember him through an etude in double notes and octaves. The dark and tempestuous nature of this piece in C-sharp minor seems to recall what most of Bachaus’s acquaintances agree was his brooding, Germanic character.

Probably the most well-known of Chasins’s compositions are the Three Chinese Pieces, which were originally published separately in 1925 and 1926. Shanghai Tragedy was listed as Opus 7 while Rush Hour in Hong Kong and Flirtation in a Chinese Garden were numbers 1 and 2 of Opus 5. Whether or not the opus numbers are an indication of the order of composition, the 1990 reissue of the three by the International Piano Archives at Maryland (a reprint of a revised edition dated 1973) lists them in the order of Opus 7, Opus 5, no.2 and Opus 5, no.1.

According to Chasins, these pieces have "an extraordinary and absolutely unpredictable history."9 Upon their release, they became an immediate and resounding success, and were played by nearly every important pianist of the time (Hofmann, Godowsky, Cherkassky, Levitski, et al.). And according to the composer they were written with "all the authority of one who had never been near the Orient."10

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"Shanghai Tragedy" portrays the city on the threshold of a sinister event."11 Inspired in part by John Colton's play, *The Shanghai Gesture*, in which Chasins's dedicatee Florence Reed, was starring on Broadway in 1926, this piece moves inexorably (through the use of constant eighths and sixteenths) toward the culmination of a violent emotional disaster. The tune (Ex. 2.5) is repeated in various guises, although it always retains its original structure. Chasins changes the texture through the use of different kinds of tremolo figures and measured trills. The dramatic effect of the piece is that of an arch beginning quietly, moving to a climax at page 5 (mm. 46-53) and quietly fading away as the dust settles. It ends with a final statement of the theme in augmentation.

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Flirtation in a Chinese Garden interprets an up-to-date “Oriental coquetry.” The fluttering opening is like an artfully waved fan. The mid-section quotes the first two measures of a popular tune: as the enamoured swain vaults the garden gate wearing one of those old-fashioned Chinese bowlers, the modern Chinese girl inquires sarcastically, "Where did you get that hat?" The close flutters as coquettishly as the opening, suggesting that this dalliance will not be the last."^{12} Where Did You Get that Hat? was a tune by Joseph J. Sullivan that was popular in the early years of the last century.

^{12} Ibid.
Chasins paraphrases the refrain of this song in the middle section of this three-part form.

Ex. 2.6 – Where Did You Get that Hat?—Joseph M. Sullivan
Ex. 2.7 – Flirtation in a Chinese Garden: middle section

Flirtation is written for the white keys only. It should be noted here that Chasins’s evocation of the Orient lacks the subtlety of that of more famous composers such as Debussy. Chasins achieves his end through the overt use of the fourth – a mannerism that can evoke some of the more irritating traits of cinematic Chinoiserie. Fortunately, however, Chasins’s
pieces exude an air of genuine affection, which makes up for this small defect.

The “third – hand” technique, which Chasins used to great effect in many of his pieces is present here as well. Throughout, the left-hand thumb is employed in a tenor countermelody without which the right hand tune would seem rather dull. After a very brief coda, Chasins ends on what he terms a "Chinese Amen,“¹³ which despite the quartal trappings is basically a perfect authentic cadence. This piece was dedicated to the pianist Harry Kaufmann, with whom Chasins had often played recitals of music for two pianos before his marriage to Constance Keene.

The last of the Chinese Pieces is Rush Hour in Hong Kong, which according to the composer, "describes that madness at midday on Kat Street. Countless people are rushing around ceaselessly. Coolies whiz past, pulling bewildered passengers on their rickshaws dodging automobiles. Everyone is jabbering, gesticulating and running, running, running.”¹⁴ By far the most difficult of the three, this piece was dedicated to the virtuoso pianist, David Saperton, a Curtis colleague of Chasins and teacher to many leading virtuosi, including, Jorge Bolet.

Rush Hour is in two sections A-A1. Each section is divided into two subsections, one featuring scalar passages, while the other features alternating chords. Chasins later transcribed this piece for two pianos.

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¹³ Ibid.
¹⁴ Ibid.
The 1920s were a fertile period in Chasins’s compositional career. In addition to the works already mentioned, he completed a set of four humorous pieces called *The Master Class* which he “affectionately dedicated” to Ernest Hutcheson, his former piano and composition teacher. According to a foreword, presumably by Chasins, “This set portrays four reproductions of students in a piano Master Class; the composer’s idea is to bring out not only musical peculiarities but personalities as well.”15

The first piece in this set, “Precocity” subtitled, “The Wondering Infant and his Automatic Fingers,” “…portrays the typical wonder child whose years are fewer than his Aeolian Hall recitals and who cannot quite figure out what it is *all about*.”16 It is in three sections. Part A comprises a rather bland running right-hand figure in E minor. Part B cuts the prevailing motion in half and begins with a figure that inverts the arch shape that dominates part A. Part A returns and the piece ends with a fifteen-measure coda that again reminds one of the evaporative endings of Rachmaninoff. Expression marks of all kinds are used sparingly—the focus is entirely on the absent-minded wanderings of the prodigy.

The second movement is called “Dualism” and is subtitled “The Fervent Miss and her Intermittent Giggles.” Here, Chasins paints a portrait of a young lady “whose mature pianism belies her age and its symptoms.”17 The giggles are represented by a series of dissonant chords at the beginning

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16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
and end of the piece, and call to mind the mimicking of animal sounds by Saint-Säens.

**Ex. 2.8 - Dualism**

In between the giggles is a tri-part form that begins with a stormy turbulence dominated by a stock figure that was employed by such widely varied composers as Gershwin (*Rhapsody in Blue*) and Franck (Prelude, Choral and Fugue).
Ex. 2.9 – Prelude, Chorale and Fugue - César Franck (mm. 210-212)

Ex. 2.10 – Rhapsody in Blue – George Gershwin (mm. 178-179)

The middle section, by contrast, is much more lyrical. The final section replays much of the material of the first part but ends with an inversion of the prevailing figure, followed by one more bout of giggles.

Ex. 2.11 – Dualism, concluding giggles

Throughout there is a feeling of the ‘exotique’ that Chasins ascribes to the piece which follows.
The third piece in this set, “Passionate Austerity (Procession)”

“portrays the very frigid young lady with a tell-tale tendency towards ‘exotique’ compositions.” 18 This piece was later remade into a composition for orchestra that Chasins then arranged for two pianos. This new incarnation, called Parade, in which the musical aims are quite different, is discussed in the next chapter.

Here, Chasins evokes a procession through the use of a persistent marching quarter-note motion in the left hand, while in the right hand the procession gradually increases in intensity. This is yet another three-part form. Part A is essentially melodic, while part B is figural. Part B comprises a constant triplet motion that eventually leads to a fusion of both triplet figure and opening melody.

**Ex. 2.12 – *Passionate Austerity*, opening**

18 Ibid.
The final piece in this set “Gradus ad Palais Royal” contains affectionate references to both Muzio Clementi (the author of the ubiquitous *Gradus ad Parnassum*) and George Gershwin, to whom the work is dedicated. Chasins’s aim was to portray “a technical whiz who finds jazz tunes her most distracting influence in the pursuit of the daily scale and octave.” Throughout his piece the whiz-kid cannot help but add blue notes to her finger exercises. Gershwin’s presence can be felt here through figures that mimic (at least in overall shape) those found in *Rhapsody in Blue*.

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19 Ibid.
Ex. 2.14 – Gradus ad Palais Royal: echo of Gershwin
CHAPTER THREE

Selected Works for Two Pianos

*Parade* for two pianos is a literal transcription of the orchestral tone poem of the same title, which in turn was a revision of *Passionate Austerity* from *The Masterclass*. In its new incarnation, this piece takes on a much more sinister air which reflects Chasins "instinctive fear"\(^\text{20}\) of parades. He comments:

> Behind the shining banners I saw spilled blood; behind all the brassiness and noise I only saw fruitless death. I was also apprehensive of the lowest common denominator of any mob and how it could be turned into a brutal atavistic account.\(^\text{21}\)

Also:

> To me . . . a parade has never been an exhilarating spectacle, but rather a depressing one.\(^\text{22}\)

Chasins submitted the orchestral version of *Parade* to the famed conductor Arturo Toscanini. Toscanini took a liking to the piece, but thought that it


was too short to program alone. He suggested that Chasins orchestrate the three *Chinese Pieces* and Chasins responded with a new version of *Flirtation in a Chinese Garden*. Both pieces were performed by the New York Philharmonic in April 1931. This was the first time that Toscanini conducted any work by a contemporary American composer. Both pieces were a tremendous success and were later performed by many major orchestras.

*Parade* could almost be called a study in thematic transformation when compared to the earlier *Passionate Austerity*. Although they use the same thematic materials, the impact (and indeed the musical aim) of each is vastly different:

In *Passionate Austerity* (subtitled Procession) Chasins is just that, austere. The grand procession seems to go nowhere as though the participants were marching around in the same room. Although it contains the same basic musical elements as *Parade*, there is much less build-up of tension, partly because of the shorter introduction and transition material (Exx. 3.1 and 3.2). Notice how the introduction of *Parade* exploits the very lowest register of the piano: a device that implies uneasy anticipation, perhaps suggesting the bass drums of the marching band. The octave A’s (a prolongation of the dominant) grow ever more insistent as the Parade draws closer, finally resolving to the tonic when the parade is upon us. Rather than one continuous crescendo throughout the piece, Chasins gives us a picture of the different elements of the parade passing by.
Each crescendo followed by a sudden drop in dynamics suggests another group of participants drawing closer and then moving away.
Ex. 3.1 – Parade: Introduction

Alla marcia, ben ritmato ($q = 126$)

Piano I

Alla marcia, ben ritmato ($q = 126$)

Piano II

Piano I

Piano II

4

1 (L.H)

1 (L.H)

2

2

3

3

4

4

5

5

6

6

7

7

8

8

9

9

Piano II

PP (like drums)

PP
Of particular interest to this author was the discovery in the International Piano Archives at Maryland of Chasins's own performance copy of the score in which are many performance suggestions and revisions. These revisions were never published and are described for the first time here. Throughout the score are indications for trumpets, horns, etc. meant to call to mind the orchestral version of Parade while performing on the piano. At other places in the score he adds accents and dynamic indications (mm. 22-23 subito/mm. 106ff.) and still others he adjusts the pedaling indications (mm81-82). The biggest change by far is a cut of 41 measures (mm. 110-151). Why Chasins chose to make this cut is unclear, and the piece seems to work well with or without the cut. The performers might make this decision based on programming time.
One of only three original works for two pianos by Chasins, *Period Suite* was composed in 1948. According to the small preface, this work was completed after “The composer . . . made an extensive study of the styles and ornamentation of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This work contains many of the features of these periods, written from a contemporary viewpoint of harmony and sonority.”

David Hall in his notes to the Chasins/Keene recording writes, “While the formal features of Baroque music are clearly evident, the harmonic textures eschew the modal-diatonic manner common to many 20th-century evocations of music in ‘ye olden style.’ Chasins’s chromatic textures are in effect an extension in mid-century terms of those used by the 17th-and 18th-century masters and in no way derive from the 19th century romantics.”

Hall’s statement seems to me to be a bit misleading. Chasins’s overall compositional style owes a great deal to the nineteenth century and *Period Suite* is no exception. The extension of chromatic textures that Hall mentions would not have been possible without a thorough understanding of late nineteenth century harmonic practice.

In 1931, during a concert tour of England and the continent, Chasins crossed paths with Sir Donald Francis Tovey, the renowned musicologist and author. Chasins was so taken by Tovey that he canceled a great portion

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of the tour to stay in England and study with Tovey, who encouraged him in
his research into 17th and 18th century music. It was presumably this
experience that led to the composition of Period Suite. Chasins dedicated
this work to Benjamin Buttenwieser, a New York investment banker,
president of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies and a trustee of
Columbia University and the New York Philharmonic.

How extensive Chasins’s studies were is questionable. One must
remember that in the 1930s, research into Baroque performance practice
was still in its infancy. How much someone like Chasins, who studied with
Tovey for only three weeks, and who had never done any such work prior to
this experience, could uncover remains sketchy. Indeed, Period Suite does
contain some features of Baroque music, but it hardly seems to be the
result of the “extensive study” referred to in the preface of the work.

Period Suite is in six movements: Prelude, Bourée, Pavane, Rigaudon,
Sarabande, and Fugue. The first movement is in two parts (simple,
continuous binary) with the second part being easily divided in half. As with
many of Chasins’s compositions a feeling of balance is achieved by the
superimposition of sonata logic.

Part one, which begins in G minor and concludes in B-flat Major,
consists of seven four-bar units. The fourth, being in the middle and
seemingly the high point, creates an overall arch shape. There appears to be
two distinguishable theme groups in this section. The first starts with the
following material:
Ex. 3.3 – *Period Suite*: Prelude, first theme, mm. 1-5

while the second begins thus:
The recognition of the theme groups is an important element in the underlying sonata logic since both themes occur near the end in what could be seen as a small recapitulation.

Part two begins with a small echo of the opening theme, but quickly dissolves into free material that in some cases seems to clearly develop the themes from part one. At measure forty-nine, an emphatic return of the opening material seems to win the case for sonata logic. This recapitulation is quite small (14 mm) but that does not seem to alter the sense of balance that it provides. Both of the theme groups mentioned above make their appearance and the section winds its way to a convincing G minor cadence.

This movement is connected to Baroque style in that it uses the binary structure in which both sections are repeated. Chasins also seems to suggest an earlier style through ornamentation (trills, accented and unaccented appoggiaturas, and slides). It should be noted here that Chasins prefers to write out the ornaments rather than using symbols.
The second movement, Bourée, retains the baroque features of a quick duple meter with a single upbeat. It is again a simple continuous binary with repeats, however in this case Chasins supplies a first and second ending to each part. Here we begin in B-flat but the second phrase seems to move up to B major with a prominent F-sharp seventh. At the end of these four measures Chasins bends back down to cadence as expected in F major.
Ex. 3.5 – *Period Suite*: Bourée, opening, mm. 1-10

Allegretto grazioso (\( \text{\textit{d} = 84} \)) (2 to the bar)

Piano I

Allegretto grazioso (\( \text{\textit{d} = 84} \))

Piano II

Part two uses the same technique of moving up a half step and then settling back just in time to produce a conclusive tonic cadence. Ornaments
in this movement include trills (upper neighbor and main note), accented and unaccented appoggiaturas, escape tones and turns.

For the third movement Chasins chose to include a Pavane. Originally a slow, processional type of dance from the area around Padua, the pavane reached its apex with the English virginalists: Byrd, Bull, Gibbons, et al. It was later revived in the work of Saint-Saëns, Ravel, Vaughan-Williams and others.

Although Chasins dispenses with the key signature, the movement remains centered in G minor. It is in two parts—each comprising two phrases. Part one is made of two statements of the same phrase that is divided in the middle so that when part two is repeated we hear the opening phrase again.

Although a perfectly symmetrical form, this unusual placement of the repeat hides the symmetry, making the form seem more organic. As the following example shows, the cadence is somewhat unusual. Each ending starts with a dominant chord that would lead one to believe a perfect authentic cadence is imminent, but Chasins instead makes his way to a final chord of F-sharp major. The result is an ending that is somewhat ambiguous (but still far less so than one might expect).
The atmosphere that Chasins creates here is one of poignancy and bittersweetness. Although this movement is much shorter, there is a kinship, at least in overall mood, to the famous *Pavane pour une infante défunte* of Maurice Ravel. Indeed, any mention of neo-baroque elements in the twentieth century, especially when applied to keyboard music, inevitably invites comparison with the music of Ravel. It seems clear that Chasins must have been, at the very least, familiar with Ravel’s work.

The next movement is Chasins’s interpretation of a rigaudon. He retains the sprightly two-step feel of the Provençal dance and sprinkles it with mordents, inverted mordents, trills, and turns. The form and the key scheme both deserve attention. The movement begins with an A section (played twice) in D Major. Part B moves to B major then cadences in E Major. The next section resembles B enough to be called B1. It starts in B
Major and moves again to E Major. Finally we move back to the A section (without repeats) and our tonic key of D Major.

As with much of Chasins’s music, there is developmental procedure at work here, which is much more than just mere counterpoint. Chasins takes thematic material varies it, turns it upside down, and presents it in different keys or registers, etc. It again seems to suggest the presence of some sort of underlying sonata logic.

Following the rigaudon is a sarabande. Curiously, Chasins’s conception of the sarabande has relatively little to do with the historical models. According to Willi Apel, the sarabande usually has the following salient characteristics:

1) It is in slow triple meter and dignified in style.
2) It usually has no upbeat (at the beginning).
3) It frequently has an accent or prolonged tone on the second beat.
4) Most phrases have feminine endings.²⁵

Chasins’s sarabande retains only characteristic number one. It begins with an anacrusis. Throughout the rhythmic stress is on beat one and cadences are exclusively on strong beats (although they do often elide into the next phrase which makes them somewhat less conclusive).

This movement is in three parts. The first A section presents the melody, which comprises prominent trills and turns, in Piano I. The B section works to a climax in measures 35-42 at the end of which a dominant pedal tone, which lasts to the end of the piece, is introduced.

Although the harmony over the pedal is quite complex, the effect produced through the prolongation of V is of a very large authentic cadence. The build-up of tension is remarkable. And the final tonic chord, weakened as it is by the addition of a 6\textsuperscript{th} and a delay in moving to root position, is really most conclusive.
At some points in the last movement, it is hard to say exactly how many voices the fugue has. Because of the varying thickness of textures, it
is sometimes difficult to know where one voice ends and another begins. However, since the first exposition clearly presents four subject entries, this analysis will assume four voices. The plan of the fugue is as follows:

- **Exposition I:** mm. 1-10
- **Episode I:** mm. 11-16
- **Exposition II:** mm. 17-20
- **Episode II:** mm. 21-27
- **Exposition III:** mm. 28-31
- **Episode III:** mm. 32-39
- **Concluding exposition:** mm. 40-end.

Throughout this fugue there are few places in which, at least some part of the subject is not present. According to Douglass Greene, in strict fugal analysis, the definition of an episode usually precludes the appearance of material related to the subject or at the very least, its opening motive. But for purposes of this analysis, an exposition will be defined as having at least one complete subject statement, while episodes may or may not include material related to the subject (including the opening motive).

The first exposition begins with an energetic two-measure subject in piano I. A tonal answer follows in piano II.

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The third entry of the subject in measure six is nearly the same as the first entry, with some minor alterations. The fourth and second entries are the same except for some octave doublings in number four.

The first episode begins with a descending four-note figure that (subconsciously, at least) recalls the opening of the Rigaudon.
In measures fifteen and sixteen (Episode 1), the right hand of piano II highlights the following motives from the subject

A short second exposition begins in measure seventeen, where the left hand of piano one has a subject statement that although the notes are changed, is at least rhythmically complete.

Episode two does contain subject motives and combines them in a clearest example of stretto to be found in the piece.
Exposition three (mm. 28-31) contains two complete subject statements—both in the left hand of piano I. The final episode produces a remarkable build-up of tension that finally explodes in the concluding exposition with piano I playing the subject in octaves while piano II provides a thick chordal underpinning. Chasins achieves the effect of augmentation by greatly slowing the tempo here. Aside from that, and the earlier mention of stretto, Chasins does not employ any other learned devices.
Ex. 3.11 – *Period Suite*: Fugue, conclusion, mm. 39 – 42

Ex. 3.11 – *Period Suite*: Fugue, conclusion, mm. 39 – 42
Surely one of the most well-known pieces in the orchestral repertory is the sparkling set of waltzes, *On the Beautiful Blue Danube*, Op. 314 of Johann Strauss II. Such was the popularity of this work that several composers set out to transcribe it for every possible medium. One of the most successful of these transcriptions was the setting for solo piano by Adolf Schulz-Evler (1852-1905). Schulz-Evler’s transcription was (and still is) so popular, that Chasins decided in 1925 that he would make a paraphrase of it for two pianos.

When one examines the score by Schulz-Evler, it is easy to see that dividing it up for two pianos would be rather easy, since the texture of the original is so thick (and thus very difficult to play). However Chasins does make some changes. The following analysis focuses on a comparison of the Schulz-Evler and Chasins versions, since the Chasins version is a transcription of a transcription. The Strauss original will be referred to only when absolutely necessary. A comparison of all three is beyond the scope of this paper.

Chasins dispenses with the florid first half of the introduction of the original and starts his version with the 23 measure Tempo di Valse section that introduces Waltz no. 1. In the first waltz, he keeps the overall dimensions the same but omits one repeat. Piano I has the melody while piano II plays the accompanying counterpoint.
Ex. 3.12 – Waltz one

Ex. 3.13 – Waltz Two
In waltz no. 2 Schulz-Evler retains the original three-part form of the Strauss original, while Chasins repeats part A and chooses to ignore part C. Waltz no. 3 keeps the same dimensions as the original. Piano II takes over the melody.

Waltzes 4 and 5 are where Chasins makes the most changes. In no. 4, he constructs a new transition to the return of the first waltz which includes just four measures of waltz 5 (which is altogether absent but for these four measures). Throughout, he adds additional layers of counterpoint.

Both versions end with a reprise of Waltz no. 1 followed by a coda. The coda of the Chasins version keeps the first 28 measures of Schulz-Evler followed by some original material by Chasins and closes with a virtuoso octave passage that although not exactly like Schulz-Evler is very similar in effect.
One of the questions that inevitably surfaces is “Why write a transcription of a transcription?” Although the Schulz-Evler Blue Danube is a shining example of the transcriber’s art, there are several advantages to the Chasins version. First, it is much easier to play than the original. Despite its popularity with the listening public, only a handful of pianists have ever played the Schulz-Evler, simply because so few are willing or able to navigate the tortuous contrapuntal lines and thick, chromatic harmonies. Second, the Chasins version allows for more doubling of the melody thus
enabling it to project further. And third, two pianists can better highlight the counterpoint and voicing.

Without ever having found any comments by Chasins on the act of transcribing, it seems obvious from a study of his works that he fits firmly into the tradition of the pianist/transcriber that reached its summit in the nineteenth century with Franz Liszt, continued in the early in the 20th century with the work of Ferrucio Busoni, Sergei Rachmaninoff and Leopold Godowsky and is preserved to this day in the works of pianists like John Bayless and Earl Wild. Chasins reveled in the many possibilities of the piano. Like the others mentioned above he unashamedly pushed the pianist’s art to its limit.

Since its very beginnings, Georges Bizet’s Carmen has been a favorite of transcribers for every medium. Bizet’s gift for melody, apparent at nearly every moment in this tragic Opéra-Comique, makes it a natural choice for Chasins, who found it hard to resist a good tune. Chasins published his Carmen Fantasy in 1937 and dedicated it jointly to Vera Brodsky (Lawrence), pianist and musicologist (who is a leading authority on the works of Scott Joplin), and pianist/composer, Harold Triggs. The result of Chasins’s meeting with Bizet was far more than a simple transcription. Chasins chose the tunes for his Carmen Fantasy carefully and developed them thoroughly (often in inventive combinations).
For the discussion of the *Carmen Fantasy*, I will refer to the thematic guide from the BBC Opera Guides.\textsuperscript{27} Of the thirty-five distinct themes identified in the BBC Guide, Chasins chose to use only nine, five of which are directly connected to the title character. These are perhaps the most memorable of the lot, but he curiously ignored the ubiquitous Toreador song.

Ex. 3.15 – Themes from *Carmen* (according to BBC Opera Guide)

\textbf{Prelude A & B}

\textit{Allegro giocoso}

\begin{music}
\begin{fleqn}
\begin{align*}
A & \quad \begin{aligned}
\uparrow & \quad \text{ff} \\
\end{aligned} \\
\end{align*}
\end{fleqn}
\end{music}

\begin{music}
\begin{fleqn}
\begin{align*}
B & \quad \begin{aligned}
\uparrow & \quad \text{ff} \\
\end{aligned} \\
\end{align*}
\end{fleqn}
\end{music}

\textbf{Carmen’s Fate}

\textit{Andante moderato}

\begin{music}
\begin{fleqn}
\begin{align*}
\end{align*}
\end{fleqn}
\end{music}

\begin{music}
\begin{fleqn}
\begin{align*}
\end{align*}
\end{fleqn}
\end{music}

March of the Urchins

Allegretto moderato

Habanera

Allegretto, quasi andantino

L’amour est un oiseau rebelle Que nul ne peut apprivoiser.

Seguidilla

Allegretto

Près des remparts de Séville,

Chanson Boheme

Andantino quasi Allegretto/bien rythme

P Les triangles des sistros untaient
The fantasy begins with a twenty-one measure introduction that in the first eight measures alternates snippets of the B theme from the Gypsy Song of Act II with the March of the Street Urchins in from Act I. Also present in the introduction are small sections of Jose's Chanson from Act II and the Fate motive.

In Section A (mm 22-95) the Prelude themes A and B predominate. Measures 22-40 are really transition material in which Chasins develops theme A over a prolonged dominant pedal in piano II, once again, showing Chasins’s talent for such procedures. At measure 40 we finally reach a clear statement of theme A (in the original key of A Major) in which piano I carries the melody. At measure 60 Chasins combines simultaneous statements of Prelude Theme B (piano I) with the March of the Street Urchins (piano II).

Measures 68-77 return to Prelude B, which leads to a restatement of Prelude A that ends the first section of the work (Section A). In Section B,
Chasins explores many other themes. In measures 105-177 the third Entr’acte predominates but is interrupted by some transitional material that appears to develop both the Prelude and Fate motives.

At measure 178, Chasins uses the tune from Près des remparts de Séville, the Seguidilla from act I which leads to a very dramatic statement of the first fate motive (curiously marked Andante *visionario*) that leads to the famous Habanera (L’amour est un oiseau rebelle - mm 204) which is the last theme of Section B.

Section C begins at measure 220 and amounts to a short return (a favorite device of Chasins) that focuses again on the A & B themes of Prelude. Chasins switches back and forth between segments of the two themes in measures 238-241 just before the transition to the Coda.

The Coda introduces a new theme, not yet heard: the Gypsy Song from Act II which leads to one last small piece of the Prelude A theme that ends the work.

It seems clear to this author that this Fantasy was composed after a great deal of thought and study. Chasin’s takes these well-known themes and combines them in new, inventive combinations, demonstrating his considerable gift for development and contrapuntal procedures. This author has had the pleasure of performing this work several times and has found it to be a solid favorite with audiences and a refreshing addition to the two-piano repertoire.
The one transcription in which Chasins stays closest to the prototype is his setting of Stänchen, Op. 17, No. 2 by Richard Strauss, published in 1938 by J. Fischer and Brothers. The Strauss original is a song for voice and piano on a text by Adolf Friedrich Graf von Schack (1815-1894). This piece shows Chasins at his most subdued. Here Chasins maintains the exact dimensions of the original, resulting in his most literal adaptation.

Schack's poem is full of light imagery and calls to mind visions of elves, wind, and brook. Herein lies the chief difficulty with Chasins's adaptation: Chasins challenges the pianists to capture the light, elfin qualities of the original, in spite of the greatly augmented texture for two pianos. This is handled largely by octave displacement of the melody—The higher register lightens the texture somewhat. Although the Strauss piano part is very difficult, Chasins uses the two piano medium to introduce added layers of counterpoint.
CONCLUSION

As stated before, it is clear from a study of the works of Abram Chasins that his music could be somewhat uneven in quality. Some are highly derivative and frankly, somewhat dull, while others are quite original and inspired, and are important and refreshing additions to the repertoire of American piano music of the twentieth century. Although Abram Chasins is remembered by many as a performer, author and broadcaster, few are aware of his compositional talents. This is partially due to the fact that as a composer, Chasins could be cripplingly self-effasive. As he got older, he seemed to think less and less of his music. He also abandoned composition completely, while still relatively young, to pursue other interests, which led to much of his music languishing in obscurity. It is my hope that this document and others like it will lead to further exploration of one of the best kept secrets in American music.

Chasins’s compositions deserve a place in the piano repertoire and should not be consigned to oblivion. Many would make attractive teaching pieces for those teachers who are looking for fresh alternatives to the standard repertoire. As for this author, if time permits I would like to lend a hand in the creation of new editions of Chasins’s works. I certainly will be programming them in future recitals and will encourage students and colleagues to do likewise.
It is this author’s opinion that young researchers and indeed the musical community as a whole, would be better served by exploring the forgotten corners of the library for viable research topics. Much that can be said about the great canon has already been said. Further studies of Chopin, Schumann, Brahms, et al. while important, do not seem as vital as saving intelligently crafted works from the dustbin.
APPENDIX I

Abram Chasins: Works for Piano

Concerti:


"Piano Concerto No.2 in F-sharp Minor." Score (full orchestra version and piano reduction version), n.d. Abram Chasins Collection, the International Piano Archives at Maryland, the University of Maryland at College Park, College Park, Maryland.

Piano Solo:


The Twenty-Four Preludes


Two Pianos Four Hands:

_The Blue Danube Waltzes_, adapted from Adolf Schulz-Evler's _By the Beautiful Danube_. New York: J. Fischer & Bro., 1926.

_Artist's Life (Künstlerleben)._ New York: J. Fischer & Bro., 1933.

_Rush Hour in Hong Kong._ New York: J. Fischer & Bro., c1934.


_Carmen Fantasy: On Themes by Georges Bizet._


_Melody (Second Ballet) from_ Orpheus by Christoph W. Gluck, transcribed by Abram Chasins. New York: Carl Fischer, 1939.


_Fledermaus Fantasy: On Themes by Johann Strauss._

APPENDIX II

Prelude in No. 14 in E-flat, Op.12, no. 2

Abram Chasins
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