

Selected Piano Works by Klaus Pringsheim's Students *at the Tokyo University of the Arts: Analysis, Interpretation & Performance Techniques*

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Abstract

This research article discusses selected piano works by Thai and Japanese composers who studied with Klaus Pringsheim (1883-1972) at the Tokyo University of the Arts in Japan around 1931-37. Pringsheim established the conventional Romantic musical language among his students. A few students, including Prasidh Silapabanleng and Komei Abe, also furthered the idea of integrating vernacular musical language in their compositions. Silapabanleng incorporated Thai traditional melodies in many compositions. Abe also interlaced a koto playing technique in his *Piano Sonatina No.3 in C minor* which required specific musical knowledge and interpretation in order to convey the performance perfectly. This article focuses mainly on harmonic analysis, interpretation and performance techniques of selected piano works to widen one's repertoire for examination and recital.

Keywords: *Musical Interpretation, Klaus Pringsheim, Prasidh Silapabanleng, Komei Abe, Piano Pedagogy*

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Introduction

Klaus Pringsheim (1883-1972), a German composer, was one of the most important professors in music invited to teach music at the Tokyo University of the Arts according to the Westernization Policy in Japan. Pringsheim put great effort in establishing classical music and significantly influenced many composers under his supervision in terms of German Romantic musical language of Gustav Mahler (1860-1911), Richard Strauss (1864-1949), and others. Mahler's compositional ideas are inevitably influential since Pringsheim was his pupil and assistant. Therefore, Mahler's compositional procedure and master works were thoroughly discussed and later casted the framework of composers under Pringsheim's supervision. All students responded well to the Western musical language and enjoyed composing compositions for chamber ensembles and orchestras. Not too many students composed in the area of piano repertoire. However, Prasidh Silapabanleng and Komei Abe composed a few piano compositions and even furthered the idea of integrating vernacular or folk musical language in their compositions. Silapabanleng incorporated Thai traditional melodies while Abe interlaced a koto playing technique in his *Piano Sonatina No.3*. If a pianist can envision additional interpretation and performance techniques which has not been written in the musical score, he can convey the performance with style more perfectly. Selected worked will be mainly discussed on harmonic analysis, interpretation, and performance techniques to widen one's repertoire for examinations and recitals.

Klaus Pringsheim

Pringsheim was a pupil of Mahler and worked as an assistant conductor at the Vienna Court Opera around 1906-07. Later in his career, Pringsheim also directed and conducted many known orchestras, including the Geneva Opera House, the German State Theater in Prague, and the Max Reinhardt Theater in Berlin where he brought out the first Mahler's cycle with the Berlin Philharmonic. From 1931-37, Pringsheim was appointed professor in music, with the recommendation from the German Ministry of Culture, at the Tokyo University of the Arts in Japan. He taught, conducted, and performed with his students and was praised as the most important and inspiring foreign composition teacher in Japan.

For a short period in 1937-38, Pringsheim accepted a position as a music advisor at the Fine Art Departments in Thailand. After leaving a position in Thailand, Pringsheim went back to Japan briefly as a conductor of the US Army Orchestra in Tokyo and taught a few private students. After having a long break in the United States of America, he finally went back to Japan and became a professor in music at the Musashino Music Academy in Tokyo until 1972 (Pringsheim, 1995).

Pringsheim's compositions include symphonies, string quartets, concertos, and other works. His *Siamese Melodies: Suite for Violin and Piano* also incorporates Thai melodies. He also composed a few piano compositions, mostly for students; for example, *21 Short Piano Studies for Beginners* and *36 Kanons for Klavier*.

Pringsheim's Students at the Tokyo University of the Arts

Among Pringsheim's first group of students enrolled at the Tokyo University of the Arts were Hiroshi Wakasugi, Taijiro Iimori, Kozaburo Hirai, Isotaro Sugata, Komei Abe, and a Thai student, Prasidh Silapabanleng. Most of them responded well to

the Western musical language and enjoyed composing instrumental compositions or conducted chamber ensembles and orchestras in Japan (Ishii, 1997). Many composers extended their skills by integrating nationalistic elements like folk melodies or traditional instruments into the compositions too. Silapabanleng (1912-99) a Thai musician and composer who had solid background in Thai classical music transmitted from his father, Luang Praditphairoh, infused Thai traditional melodies in compositions like *Siamese Suite*, *Siang Tian* and a collection of beautiful songs for performances on stage (Silapabanleng, 1999; Srikananda, 2021). Abe (1911-2006) was also a composer who experimented combining Japanese modal melodies with Western Romantic harmony. Moreover, a trace of Mahler's vernacular musical language and bird calls usually found in his symphonies (Judd, 2018) can be also found in Abe's works, particularly *Piano Sonatina No.3 in C minor*.

Prasidh Silapabanleng

Silapabanleng was the first Thai musician who studied Western music outside Thailand and was credited as an important composer who composed with Western musical language and able to transform musical ideas with outstanding approach. Silapabanleng had solid background in Thai classical music transmitted from his father, Luang Praditphairoh (1881-1954), one of the most important Thai classical musicians in Thailand. Silapabanleng had studied violin, piano, and Western music rudiments prior studying with Pringsheim at the Tokyo University of the Arts in Japan. When Silapabanleng graduated in 1938, he went back to Thailand and was engaged as composer and conductor at the Royal Fine Arts Department for 4 years. Later he helped his family found the Phakavali Institute of Dance and Music and composed music for the stage performances. Silapabanleng composed large number of songs and orchestral pieces including *Siamese Suite*, *Damnern Sai for String Quartet* and *Siang Thian*. He also composed a piece for voice and piano and a few arrangements for piano conductor scores. His compositions had been presented in many important occasions, including the performance presided over by King Rama VIII and King Rama IX of Thailand. His compositions had been performed and recorded by notable orchestras both in Thailand and abroad. According to his contribution and improvement in the Western music study in Thailand, he was awarded as National Artist for Performing Art (Composer) in 1998.

Komei Abe

Abe started his first music lessons playing a violin. Later when entering the Tokyo University of the Arts, he studied cello with Heinrich Werkmeister (1883-1936), and composition with Pringsheim. Abe's music repertoire includes symphonies, string quartets, concertos, and a few piano pieces. His piano pieces for children, like sonatinas and short character pieces, are compact and encompass basic piano techniques perfect for piano teaching up to the intermediate level.

Abe composed three *Sonatinas for Children* and published them as a whole set around 1972. Each sonatina has unique character together with influence of German Romantic music. The third sonatina is particularly notable since in the second movement, Abe shows a trace of Japanese music identity and imitation of koto playing techniques.

Analysis, Interpretation and Performance Techniques of Compositions by Silapabanleng

Many songs with Thai traditional melodies Silapabanleng composed had been transcribed for piano by himself and his student, Apsorn Kurmarohita, to perform in many events organized by Sod-Nian Kurmarohita Foundation. All of the songs are in ternary form with conventional Western harmony. The most important idea to perform those arrangements for piano is how a pianist can imitate Thai words and convey them beautifully.

In *Dachanee Chai Lai*, each melodic line must be projected out with tenderness and clarity. Phrases can't be played with straightforward note values seen in the score, but they need to be contoured and flexible. Appoggiaturas in bar 22 and alike need to be played gently and 1 or 2 seconds slower than written.



Figure 1. *Dachanee Chai Lai* (bars 20-25).

Accompaniment line in the left hand in bars 12-13 and 17-18 has to be also projected out since it represents beautiful supportive lines. A pianist can press with a little more weight and sustains the line for its full length (tenuto).



Figure 2. *Dachanee Chai Lai* (bars 12-18).

Pedal is very essential to connect harmonic and melodic lines. A damper pedal can be slightly pressed down at the end of bar 7 and deeper in bar 8. Pedal change can be made after note F in bar 9 for a smooth transition.



Figure 3. *Dachanee Chai Lai* (bars 7-10).

Same interpretation and techniques can be applied in *True Love*. Melody with series of triplet should not be played with blunt or rigid interpretation. On the contrary, the triplets need to be well projected with rubato like singing. The descending triplets in bar 16 can be played slower and slower until the end of the entire phrase in bar 17 where a fermata was added to complete the whole phrase.



Figure 4. *True Love* (bars 13-18).

About pedaling, many arpeggiated bridge passages had been put between melodies; harmonic analysis needed to be examined before making decision for pedal change. When the passage is under the same chord or harmony, pedal can be kept unchanged. For example, pedal can be kept for 2 bars from bar 39 to 40 when arpeggios in D Major ascend to the last note D. However, the pianist must explore the sonority and adjust the depth of the pedal accordingly.



Figure 5. *True Love* (bars 37-40).

Same pedaling idea can also be applied in many sections in a song with beautiful piano accompaniment, *To Daffodils*. The pedal can be held thoroughly for almost 2 bars in bars 54-55. The only thing the pianist should avoid is pedaling too deep and obscure the impressionistic and clear accompanying line in the left hand.



Figure 6. *To Daffodils* (bars 54-55).

Analysis, Interpretation, and Performance Techniques of a Composition by Abe

Abe composed many piano pieces designed as a tool for preliminary and intermediate level. A set of 3 sonatinas is a very good start for musical analysis as well as exercise for technique building. Piano Sonata No.3 contains imitation of Japanese instrument and bird calls considered very innovative at the time.

Piano Sonata No.3 in C minor, I

The 13-minute long sonatina is in 3 movements. The first movement is in C minor and in sonata form. Piano techniques like scalewise passages, repeated notes, and triplets are designed to establish good foundation in piano playing. The first theme starts in C minor and presents members of tonic triad by using arpeggiated melody with repeated chords in the accompaniment.



Figure 7. 1st movement, first theme in C minor (bars 1-4).

A trace of descending Japanese pentatonic scale (intervals like major second, minor third, perfect fifth and minor sixth) in triplets is shown in bars 140-143, bringing the melodic line to tonic note C in bar 144. The coda is back in C minor and involves mostly in the key of C minor which is repeated softly and ends with a pause in bar 155.



Figure 8. Sonata No.3, 1st movement, descending Japanese scale with suggested fingering (bars 140-144).

For interpretation and techniques, the movement, marked with Allegro, is lively and energetic in general. Firm fingertips and clear sound projection must be well perceived. To perform with ease and produce relaxed sonority, a pianist should not stiffen his wrists, but lift nicely after each phrase instead. For phrases with *f* and *ff* dynamics, one can put more weight onto the keyboard and feel the bottom of those keys before lifting off.

When linear chromatic phrases are involved, there are many approaches to analyze and practice. How to visualize the direction of the phrase or the core notes is very important to prepare both movements and fingers ahead of time. A pianist

can make a reduction of complicated phrase regardless note values, study the main melodic notes, and fill in other non-chord tones (Beach, 2016). For example, a long phrase with triplets and accidentals (bars 140-144, shown in Figure 8) can make one consume time in reading and practicing than expected. The pianist should study the chord progression and analyze the chord tones before practicing only the core notes. Optional fingering is also provided, but can be adjusted according to personal preference. A reduction of the RH in the phrase mentioned with same fingering is shown in Figure 9 below (LH can be done likewise).

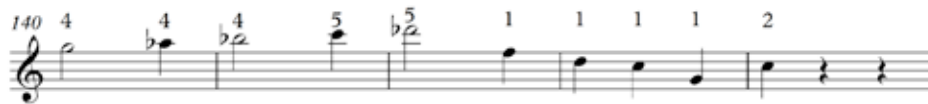


Figure 9. Sonatina No.3, reduction of a chromatic phrase (bars 140-144).

For the second approach, practicing vertical chromatic intervals in bars 67-70 and alike can be executed by pressing notes in each interval together while studying its direction. Accent on the top notes or melodic line and practice until ready to play separately as written in score.



Harmonic intervals of phrases above with same fingerings is shown below.



Figure 10. Sonatina No.3, 1st movement, practicing chromatic intervals by pressing notes together (bars 67-70).

Fingering is very important to perform with ease and precision. In this movement, fingering is typical and doesn't need any special focus. Only one suggestion in a dominant preparation from bar 91 when note G has been added to the lower note of the F octave and repeated for 4 bars is made. A pianist can use fingers 1 and 2 in the right hand as usually executed, but for a pianist with a small hand, he can press both F and G with his thumb. Moreover, in bars 95-96, when intervals with less than octave are written, the pianist can resume using fingers 1 and 2 for F and G. However, if he doesn't want to confuse himself or abruptly change finger positions, he can continue using a thumb for both F and G until bar 96.



Figure 11. Sonatina No.3, optional fingering in a dominant preparation passage (bars 91-96).

Pedaling is also important in order not to inhibit the clear and natural nuance with too much damper pedal. When rests are applied like passages in bars 92-96, damper pedal should be completely up at the same time with hands. In addition, if possible, in bars 93 and 95-96, the damper pedal can be pressed a bit ahead of time to prepare for greater resonance. Suggested pedaling is also shown in Figure 11.

Piano Sonatina No.3 in C minor, II

The second movement, entitled *Song of the Quite Wood*, shows the use of Japanese modal melodies portraying bird calls and serene Japanese wood. Mahler's affection in sound of nature and folk elements (Judd, 2018) shown in his works can be depicted in this movement. Abe also imitates sound of a Japanese stringed instrument, koto, by using arpeggios, articulation like staccato, grace notes or acciaccatura (bars 46-49 and alike), and repeated notes (bars 46-49 and alike). A method of combining traditional instruments and its unique sound with Western compositional technique was first introduced in Japan and became popular around 1920s (Garrett, 1998). Abe was one of the composers who explored and composed according to the method.

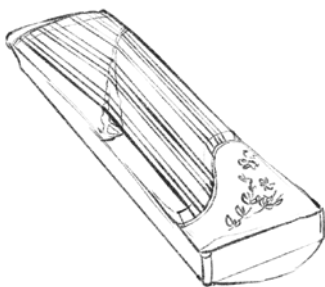


Figure 12. Japanese stringed instrument, Koto. Source: Drawing by Partita Chulapan, February 23, 2022.

In this movement, complicated harmony and use of dissonance can be observed. Non-chord tones like second, flatted fifth, and eleventh notes are added freely to adorn the simple harmonic structure. The movement is in ABA or song form, starting with quiet phrases with members of B-flat Major chord. Harmony changes temporarily to G minor in bar 17 and back to B-flat again in bar 25. Pedal tones in F in bar 31 lead to passage imitating bird calls. Pedal tones have also been presented in reverse in the right hand in the next 5 bars during the imitation of the

bird calls. The bird calls focus on note F; each F is accentuated by usage of triplets, trills, and added acciaccaturas. The bird call section ends with a whole bar rest in bar 40.



Figure 13. Sonatina No.3, 2nd movement, bird calls (bars 34-39).

Idea of repeated notes is also carried on in different registers. Bridge passage with repeated D also merges nicely onto the A section in bar 59 in B-flat Major. So to speak, repeated notes resemble the woodpecker sound, the weak and gentle ones.



Figure 14. Sonatina No.3, repeated woodpecker sound (bars 55-60).

In the second part of the A section from bar 75, more notes have been added for thicker texture. The accompaniment is still in the arpeggiated form. At the end of the movement, V-I progression has been used many times from bar 85 and ends the whole movement in B-flat Major in bar 91. Short “cuckoo” motifs in thirds in the right hand end the movement depicting sound from the quiet wood perfectly.



Figure 15. Sonatina No.3, “cuckoo” motif in the last phrase (bars 87-91).

Relaxing “Lento” movement imitating the koto performance can be executed by focusing on the flowing singing melodic lines from bar 1 to bar 33, right before the bird calls. Consider rubato and ritardando between phrases more than written out in the score to make them more flexible and sectional. For example, at the end of bar 24, a small break which was not written can be made before the return of the first theme in bar 25. Even more time can be taken in bar 30 before approaching the repeated pedal tones in bar 31 and sudden bird calls.



Figure 16. Sonatina No.3, flexible rubato between phrases (bars 29-33).

Same flexible interpretation can also be taken from bars 55-58. Pedal can be pressed throughout the part and re-pedal in bar 59. Italian terms like *accelerando* and *ritardando* are meticulously designated and can be applied with discretion for best performance. Figure 16 also shows possible pedaling in the bridge passage and the A section theme from bar 59.

Piano Sonatina No.3 in C minor, III

The third movement, rondo, is vigorous and perpetual. Offbeat accents, brisk rhythm and chords with added 4th and 7th intervened with rests make the movement even more driving. Compositional techniques shown in the last movement are somewhat advanced than the previous 2 movements; sequences, modes, augmentations, and imitations are found.



Figure 17. Sonatina No.3, 3rd movement, A section, theme in C minor (bars 1-6).

Driving mood by strong and steady pulse is interrupted from time to time by different offbeat accents and rests. Japanese modal melodies have also been exploited throughout the movement. Circle of fifth and sequential conventional composition techniques are also applied. In terms of performance interpretation, straightforward and determined conduct is needed to convey the dynamic character of the last movement. For accented notes in the first phrase and alike, the pianist needs to drop his wrists and fingers firmly, press and lift the wrists a bit in the same manner before pressing notes in the next bar. Too much up-and-down movement in similar phrases will reduce playing speed and ruin connectivity between notes.

Rests should be taken seriously; rigid pulse and precise note value are important to maneuver the whole movement ceaselessly. To press notes precisely in time, a pianist should practice with over-accented movement using metronome to adjust the precise downbeats. Also beware of pressing the eighth notes in bars 69-76 for too long since it will slow down the agitating spirit.



Figure 18. Sonatina No.3, precise note value to be executed for agitating spirit (bars 69-72).

Sudden contrast dynamics like *ff* to *p* or vice versa seen in bars 73-78 must be well observed since the extreme contrast will also enhance the sudden mood change. Complete lift, both hands and pedal, in bar 76 before continuing to the next phrase stating with *p* will separate the 2 phrases and enhance clear perception of the next section.



Figure 19. Sonatina No.3, extreme contrast between phrases (73-78).

For pedaling, barely use the damper pedal for most of the places and, when needed, only half a pedal is preferred. Full pedal can be operated in legato or long phrases like bars 7-12 and alike. Gradual pressing pedal with different depth in one phrase is also possible to increase or decrease the effect of damper pedal. A long phrase from bar 199 to 206 is applicable for the pedaling technique mentioned. In bar 199 marked *ff*, the pianist should press the damper pedal with firm and certain depth and, around bar 205, gradually release the pedal little by little until lift nicely together with both hands in bar 206. In the last 4 bars, from bars 207-210, when dynamic *ff* is put next to *p*, the use of full pedal is needed to enhance the contrast texture and dynamics. Also press the pedal a second before bar 209 to amplify the perfect ending.



Figure 20. Sonatina No.3, pressing pedal ahead of time to enhance nuance in the last phrase (bars 207-210).

Conclusion

Interesting piano repertoire by Pringsheim's students can be brought to light to widen repertoire for examinations and recitals as well as learning materials for musical analysis. A few piano works of Silapabanleng and a sonatina by Abe have been cited about analysis, interpretation, and techniques with musical excerpts. Although the compositions were composed with conventional German Romantic musical harmony, they are remarkable and worth studying because of unique adaptation of folk materials. They need to be executed with awareness in style and flexible interpretation to convey the beauty of the Oriental culture. Interpretation and techniques suggested are essential in establishing fundamental performing skills. Performance technique, body movement, fingering, and pedaling need to be well observed and accomplished for best performance.

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