

***Suite for Piano No. 1* (1939)**

1. Waltzling
2. Dirgeling
3. Themes with Variables

John Weinzweig was the first Canadian composer to adopt twelve-tone (serialist) technique after he studied it while at the Eastman School of Music (1937-8). Despite fierce resistance, Weinzweig set about teaching serialism at the Royal Conservatory of Music of Toronto. Around this time, he also began a print campaign in support of serialism in numerous published articles and interviews. In a 1949 article in *The Royal Conservatory of Music Bulletin*, Weinzweig defended the teaching of serialism:

To confine teaching methods in theory to any one musical style, living or dead, is to confuse the student by stifling his creative freedom and by shutting him off from the musical world in which he lives and in which he is going to work. The student should be made aware of the materials of music which are common to all styles. This is the theory-teacher's job. This is how the young musician can come closer to any and all styles, and also how he can form his own style with freedom and without technical resource.

The use of a twelve-tone set in "Dirgeling," the second movement of *Suite for Piano No. 1* makes this the first Canadian serialist composition.

Marked *Allegretto, rubato satirico*, "Waltzling" pairs a repeating left-hand pattern with third intervals in the right hand, whose motivic fragments are gradually expanded. Following a *Presto* middle section, Weinzweig returns to the opening pattern and third-interval melody. "Dirgeling" opens with two diminished seventh chords, but Weinzweig explores the piano's capacity for sympathetic vibrations by instructing the left hand to depress the keys silently. The majority of the movement uses a constant two-voice texture, with a steady quarter note rhythm in the left hand and a dotted eighth-sixteenth note rhythm in the right hand. Square brackets in the score indicate the most important material. "Themes with Variables" opens with a double-octave theme; octaves frequently return throughout the movement, though never with the same pitch content. Throughout the three sections of this movement, the piano explores various registers, textures, and articulations.

Overall, *Suite for Piano No. 1* is not a virtuosic showpiece. However, it requires the performer to explore the nuances of texture, timbre, melody, and rhythm within this solo instrument.

Written by Alexa Woloshyn