

# *CHOPIN'S LOST LOVE*

Narrative Pedagogy and the Fantaisie-Impromptu, op. 66

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Narrative analysis emerged as a discipline in the early twentieth-century and was used as an analysis tool in various fields of research. Narrative pedagogy is being explored in areas such as nursing and engineering by way of narrative pedagogy. Ironside defines narrative pedagogy as “a research based on interpretive phenomenological pedagogy that gathers teachers and students into converging conversations wherein new possibilities for practice and education can be envisioned.”<sup>1</sup> By applying narrative pedagogy, teachers are moving beyond strategies emphasizing cognitive gain and skill acquisition that are so predominant in conventional pedagogies which may inadvertently lead students to believe that they are prepared for practice if they know what the teacher tells them to know.

This paper explores the use and value of narrative pedagogy in teaching music, specifically in the teaching of piano. A two-fold narrative analysis of Chopin's *Fantaisie-impromptu op. 66*, employing techniques prescribed by both Byron Almén and Edward Cone, will be used to explore the value of narrative pedagogy in helping students go deeper into the music they are studying. Through scholarship and personal experience, this paper will try to add insight into ways of approaching narrative to help piano students find alternative connections to piano literature and achieve greater understanding of how to use narrative to enhance performance practices. As music is explored through narrative, a new language develops, one that connects potential stories that composers and compositions may hold beyond the ink on the paper and shaping extraordinary pedagogy within music education.

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<sup>1</sup> Pamela M. Ironside, "Using Narrative Pedagogy: Learning and Practicing Interpretive Thinking," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 55, no. 4 (2006): 479.

## INTRODUCTION

The composer and teacher Wilson Coker, following certain semiologists, distinguishes between two types of meaning in narrative: congeneric and extrageneric.<sup>2</sup> Byron Almén's 1992 dissertation "*Narrative Archetypes in Music: A Semiotic Approach*" employs an extrageneric approach to narrative analysis. His discovery of three books, Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Ero Tarasti's *A Theory of Musical Semiotics* (1994), and James Jakób Liszka's *The Semiotic of Myth* (1989), led Almén to his advancement in musical narrativity.<sup>3</sup> Each of these authors, on topics of literary narrative and semiotics, provide pieces of the puzzle that build the foundation for narrativity to be used in the analysis of both tonal and post-tonal composition. Frye's book introduces his four *mythoi*, romance, tragedy, irony, and comedy, from the archetype concept first coined by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung. Frye's *mythoi* represents important patterns of narrative motion. Tarasti's book, among other things, speaks to his application of the notion of 'modality' to music which accounts for the encoding of human values into musical discourse. Finally, Liszka speaks to the concept of narrative as 'transvaluation' which describes the change in markedness and rank within a cultural hierarchy over time.<sup>4</sup> Almén's sibling model, rather than a conventional descendent model, "posits an indirect relationship between musical and literary narrative as distinct media sharing a common

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<sup>2</sup> Wilson Coker, *Music & Meaning; a Theoretical Introduction to Musical Aesthetics* (New York: Free Press, 1972), 61.

<sup>3</sup> Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), ix.

<sup>4</sup> Almén, 2008, ix.

conceptual foundation.”<sup>5</sup> Within the art of music lie indeterminate events from which a dramatic narrative can be established in music.

The composer and musical theorist Edward Cone, using scholarship from semiologists on Hermeneutics states, “Extrageneric meaning can be explained only in terms of congeneric.”<sup>6</sup> Cone continues suggesting that, “Congeneric analysis depends on purely musical relationships including the significance that each part of a composition possesses through its connections with other parts of the composition and the significance that inheres in the composition as a whole through its employment of a recognizable sonic vocabulary organized in an appropriate manner.”<sup>7</sup> It is through the salient music elements of a composition that we find, if possible, dramatic narrative.

Through these two different concepts of narrative analysis, pedagogical insight can be sought to provide a rich landscape from which to draw elements that can assist in performance practice. Narrative is a uniquely human activity that has guided learning since ancient times. When students are asked to tell a story, they are engaging in “meaning making,” reflecting on what they know and examining their assumptions.<sup>8</sup> Within a narrative, a student can develop a larger picture of a composition and composer, allowing the student to break habits of cognitive and technical learning to address a composition for what it is; a piece of art.

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<sup>5</sup> Almén, 2008, 13.

<sup>6</sup> Edward T. Cone, "Schubert's Promissory Note: An Exercise in Musical Hermeneutics," *19th-Century Music* 5, no. 3 (1982): 235. doi:10.2307/746462.

<sup>7</sup> Cone, 1982, 234.

<sup>8</sup> Priscilla K. Gazarian, "Digital Stories: Incorporating Narrative Pedagogy." *Journal of Nursing Education* 49, no. 5 (2010): 287.

As a teacher of piano for 20 years, the concept of narrative pedagogy is an intriguing concept. I have found myself relying on cognitive and technical skills to teach, as well as perform, piano literature in the past and my recent introduction into narrative has proposed a significant framework from which teaching piano could be enhanced. The following is an analysis of Chopin's *Fantaisie-impromptu op. 66* combining both congeneric and extrageneric narrative analysis. I will conclude this essay with thoughts on the importance such an analysis provides me as a teacher as well as a performer.

## **ANALYSIS**

*Fantaisie-Impromptu op. 66*, composed in 1834, is one of Chopin's widely known and performed solo piano pieces although he did not publish it in his lifetime. Its narrative is one of furious impetuosity and extraordinary beauty. This piece was presumably written for Baroness d'Estes when Chopin was only 24 years of age. An important piece of information that presents a possible back story which gives the following narrative traction outside of this authors' own interpretation.

The *Fantaisie-Impromptu* is built on two distinct textures: the A texture which consists of sixteenth-note patterns in perpetual motion, and a homophonic B texture, dominated with a beautiful theme. This is followed by the return of the A texture ending with a coda. The beginning 2 measures present an octave G#, which is the V of the key of the piece, C-sharp minor {fig. 1}. It is the calm before the storm, the deep breath before the plunge, the beginning of something urgent. This G# is the protagonist of the piece, the transgression of order, which in this analysis is the tonic key of C#. The accompaniment figure in the L.H. starting in measure

3 sets up the impending storm reaching from the bottom register of the piano like thunder played at *forte* {fig. 1}. It then diminishes into the first of two themes that make up the A section. Theme I {Fig. 2} finds the protagonist (which will be referred to as a male representing the composer) trapped in his own thoughts as a voice which is not clearly audible and buried in unrest. The dynamic marking of *piano* further reinforces this feeling along with the polyrhythm of 4 against 3 established between hands. Turmoil is represented through the minor key and furious sixteenth-note drive. The melody, reminiscent of a voice in 2 four-measure phrases, tries to reach out from this turmoil. The contour moves up, down, up, down and then propels up to the tessitura of the phrase only to fall back down. It is in the second reiteration of theme I, m. 10 {fig. 3a & b} that a slight alteration occurs at that point of departure. Instead of the half step movement that occurs on every other sounding of this motif, the composer changes to a whole step. This shift to A# is used to move tonicization from C# minor to G# minor. It is also the catalyst for Section B that will be referred to later in the analysis. This tonicization of G# minor is also used as the pivot, minor iii chord, for the modulation to E major starting in m. 13 {fig. 4}.

It is in the entrance of theme II (m. 13) that our protagonist reveals the reason for his turmoil...the love of another. Theme II is nestled within the same perpetual motion as theme I but the accent marks on the strong beats in mm. 13-14 {fig. 5} represent the protagonists voice reaching out from the turmoil; an optimistic one represented by the switch to the relative major and the change in dynamic to *forte*. The protagonist appears out of the unrest to communicate his attempts to reach or proclaim his true love. The accents move to the 2<sup>nd</sup> subdivided sixteenth-note of the strong beats in mm. 17-20 {fig. 6} with the dynamic marking of

*piano*, representing the echo of this statement. The accent stays on the 2<sup>nd</sup> subdivided sixteenth-note, but the dynamics slowly rise with an upward melodic movement that represents the gasp of the protagonists desire to find love, in a descending chromatic figure {fig. 7}, which ends on G# on beat 4 of m. 24 before returning to the restatement of theme I. It is as if the protagonist has landed right back where he started. The return of theme I places the protagonist back in that feeling of urgent desire attempting to proclaim his love after attempting to do so at the conclusion of theme II.

Theme I is stated exactly the same as it was previously but then moves into the dramatic final measures {fig. 8} before arriving at the B section. Measures 35-36 contain a descending chromatic scale starting on the highest note reached in the piece up to this point, a G#. It hits the bottom in m. 37 with a big landing on the V (G#) with the dynamic indication of *fortissimo* before jumping up one octave higher and coming back down the piano in furious broken and inverted chordal figures outlining a C# harmony. Order is presented in a harrowing decent during this four-measure passage that gives the end of the A section an inescapable feeling of anxiety and exuberance that the moment has arrived, when a prolonged dominant section is reached, that the goal has been reached. And just like that, pure joy arrives with the B section.

Before moving on to the B section, attention must be placed on the congeneric elements that have fueled the drama up to this point in the piece. Chopin's choice to begin the piece with an open G# octave is deliberate. It acts as a key to a map, unlocking all elements that follow. First, it is the dominant of the piece which is in C# minor. He incorporates this G# at the start of both themes in the A section as well as the tumultuous final six measures of this section. In each theme, the G# is used over very different palettes. In theme I, it is the

dominant over the grinding rotational C# minor harmony in the L.H. In theme II, it is the third scale degree of the modulation to E major. In the closing six measures, it is placed over an A<sup>7</sup>, which comes out of nowhere with a marking of *forte* adding tension to an already tense descending chromatic figure. The composer, with the use G# throughout the piece, gives way to a narrative in connection with its use in a theoretical standpoint. Two important points outside of the G# is the use of A# in m. 10 {fig. 3} and the 3-note motion of theme II in m. 13 {fig. 4}. The addition of the A# not only serves as a transitional element for modulation, it is the voice of love crying out in the turmoil, as well as the motif found in theme II, which is brought to full fruition in the B section.

The B section starts with a similar accompaniment pattern as was seen at the beginning of the piece and is presented here in the parallel key of Db Major (C# major enharmonically written). The flowing Db chord outline in the left hand at the outset of this section, at a bit of a slower tempo marked *largo*, provides a majestic backdrop for the introduction of the remarkably beautiful melody that follows {fig. 9}. This melody encapsulates the very essence of love that the protagonist has been struggling to express up until this moment, perfectly outlining the harmony that is laid out underneath it. It is here that the realization of the major second of Ab (G#) to Bb (A#) that peaked out of the turmoil in the A section is revealed {Fig. 3}. It starts this theme and is used once again 3 measures later. It is in this theme as well that the material from theme II in the A section {fig. 3} is fully realized with the step wise movement in m. 45 {fig.9}. These two elements culminate into the full exclamation of love that is the suggested narrative of this piece.



Again, the use of Ab (G#) to start this theme places impact on the importance of the note throughout this piece, here used as the dominant of now Db major (C# major). The rhythm here is still polyrhythmic but in a 3 against 2 instead of the first section's 4 against 3 ratio which settles the conversation down. It opens up the backdrop for this expressive voice, marked *cantabile*, which indeed sings. 'Let me count the ways' describes the pattern that unfolds in this section. This wonderful theme is repeated four times throughout the section and developed slightly each time it is played through dynamics and variation in performance. The protagonist is professing his love in as many ways as he can, but this love professed is ultimately the same represented by the similarity in the melodic contour of each of the restatements. This section ends with a *ritardando* in m. 80 on the V chord as if the story is over and love has triumphed, but this is not to be. Chopin chooses to end the B section with an Ab<sup>7</sup>/Db harmony in the L.H. while also incorporating a *ritardando*. This measure {fig. 10} encapsulates the entire struggle of the piece pitting transgression against order by anchoring transgression of Ab (G#) against the bass foundation of order which, in the tragedy archetype of this piece, is Db (C#).

The return of the A section is an abrupt awakening out of the love story and back into the turbulence. It brings the protagonist right back to the beginning of the journey as if he has been forced to fight with the same vigor to reach that perfect moment again back in C-Sharp minor and the perpetual motion of unrest. This return of the A section unfolds exactly like the first presentation of this material but is marked *presto*, as opposed to the *allegro agitato* marking at the beginning of the piece, which brings more uneasiness to the struggle. When this section comes to a close however, love is not to be, only more angst with the presentation of the coda.

The coda {fig. 11} breaks from the polyrhythm that has been present for the entire piece. Here, the marking is *molto agitato* and is played in a more even 4:2 meter. The protagonist is in his last throws of agony as he reaches out for the love that has eluded him. The phrases here are marked again with the use of G# in the R.H. as a pivot, or anchor, from which the thematic material is presented around it. The use of the descending 3-note pattern found in the theme from Section B is present {fig. 11}. Along with the thematic material, this section is supported by the same harmony found at the end of the B section, G#<sup>7</sup>/C# (Ab<sup>7</sup>/Db), adding to the turmoil {fig. 11}. The texture is dense, with the L.H. in the lower register bringing back an almost thunderous sound. This eight-measure deluge of angst and desperation is broken by an ostinato pattern in the R.H for two measures {fig. 12}. As was presented in the first two measures of the piece, this represents another deep breath before the plunge, only this time the destination has changed. Instead of frantically searching for this love, he only reminisces the feeling of love, expressed in the statement of the theme from the B section which is played in the bass clef only once {fig. 13}. It is as if the protagonist knows that this was a love not meant to be. The lower register gives the theme a haunting feeling as if the protagonist is both sad and happy that he experienced this feeling of love at all. What is interesting is the choice to support the first note of this theme with the underlying C#. This adds weight to the assertion that this is but a reminiscing, for order has anchored itself underneath the transgression of the G# led theme. The final two measure brings a peace to the story with a suspended resolution into the final chord. A beautiful C-sharp major chord that fully establishes the order, a love that was not to be, over the transgression of the G#, the protagonist of the story. This establishes the tragedy archetype used in Almén's narrative analysis: Love lost.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

How does the preceding analysis function in pedagogy? How can such an analysis be used to help construct better practice and performing skills? Maus suggests that,

Instrumental music consists of a series of events, and the easiest anthropomorphism is to treat those events as behavior, as actions. Once one begins thinking of musical sounds as actions, rather than just events, the notion of plot or narrative is close at hand. Stories are primarily about human actions, and the storyteller's integration of events into a plot reflects the need to understand actions by placing them in a temporally extended content.<sup>9</sup>

I choose to talk about this piece for two reasons. The first is that I played this piece at my senior recital in April of 2018, fulfilling my requirements for my BM in Sacred Music. I had not yet heard or studied narrative analysis at the time of the performance. After studying, and even writing, on the subject of narrative analysis, I began to see some areas from which my performance habits could greatly improve with the use of this tool. Second, as a teacher of well over 200 piano students during the last 20 years of teaching, I felt that this newly discovered analytical technique could possibly benefit future students.

The analysis of Chopin's *Fantaisie-impromptu op. 66*, for the purpose of this essay, was my personal analysis - the way I perceived the narrative of this piece through its musical actions as well as its dramatic ones. It provided me with insight that I would have been able to use in my performance of this piece. In preparing this piece for performance, I was very much wrapped up in the cognitive (memorization) and technical (it is a very challenging piece technically) aspects of learning and practicing. Even though I was aware of the traditional theory behind the construction of the piece, some of the findings in my narrative analysis

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<sup>9</sup> Fred E. Maus, "Music as Narrative," *Indiana Theory Review*, Vol. 12 (1991): 7, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/stable/24045349>.

would have proven highly effective in the performance of this piece. The idea of the G# as a protagonist and how such a protagonist functioned throughout the piece poses different avenues of performance. Just the realization of the subtle nuance that the A# in m. 10 {fig. 3} had in relationship to the B section is the hidden gem in the piece. Using narrative to make concrete connections in the practice of memorization is also a valuable part of narrative pedagogy. Using the unfolding drama, both on the congeneric and extrageneric level, provides a more real-world option from which to employ memorization.

As a teacher, introducing the concept of narrative to students would offer them the ability to embrace piano literature outside of the notes on the page. Barrett states, "Research suggests that through their early music-making, including their work as singers and song-makers, [students] are engaged in creating narratives in and of their worlds, narratives through which they create understandings of their worlds."<sup>10</sup> Clarke supposes that, "A listener's sense of meaning in music is powerfully bound up with his/her experience of being subjectively engaged or alienated by music."<sup>11</sup> If a listener has a strong emotional reaction, whether positive or negative, he or she is more likely to consider the piece as musically worthwhile.<sup>12</sup> All this suggests that narrative pedagogy offers a platform from which a larger picture of piano literature can be realized. Of course, not all piano literature can be looked at through the lens of narrativity, but much of the canon of piano literature, I believe, carries within it a narrative

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<sup>10</sup> Margaret S. Barrett, "Attending to 'culture in the Small': A Narrative Analysis of the Role of Play, Thought and Music in Young Children's World-making," *Research Studies in Music Education* 38, no. 1 (2016): 41. doi:10.1177/1321103X15603557.

<sup>11</sup> Eric F. Clarke, *Ways of Listening: An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 90.

<sup>12</sup> Sarah Stout Miller, "The Social Network: Narrative Theory as a Vehicle for Musical Performance." PhD diss., (University of Kansas, Missouri, 2015), 9.

that when unlocked, opens up extraordinary possibilities in connecting students to the music they study, practice and perform. Maus borrows words from the theorist Schenker quoting,

“In the art of music, as in life, motion toward the goal encounters obstacles, reverses, disappointments, and involves great distances, detours, expansions, interpolations, and, in short, retardations of all kinds. Therein lies the source of all artistic delaying, from which the creative mind can derive content that is ever new. Thus, we hear in the middleground and foreground an almost dramatic course of events.”<sup>13</sup>

As a fundamental form of music-making, narratives can be significant sites for individual learning. In this way, a person's sense of self is embedded in the narrative construction.<sup>14</sup>

Taking advantage of this as a teacher and performer is of paramount importance in my performance of music as well as to each of my future students' understanding of music and their individuality through a musical paradigm.

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<sup>13</sup>Fred Everett Maus, "Music As Narrative," *Indiana Theory Review* 12 (1991): 4, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/stable/24045349>.

<sup>14</sup>Ivor F. Goodson, and Scherto R. Gill, "Learning and Narrative Pedagogy." *Counterpoints* 386 (2011): 114, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/stable/42981367>.

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[https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/19438/Miller\\_ku\\_0099D\\_13983\\_DATA\\_1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/19438/Miller_ku_0099D_13983_DATA_1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

**FIGURES**

Fig. 1 – The beginning of Chopin's op. 66 (mm. 1-4).



Fig. 2 – Theme I of Section A in its entirety (mm. 5-12).



Fig. 3 – The motif from measure 10 showing change to whole step.

Fig. 4 – Theme II, Section A (mm. 13-24).





Fig. 5 - Mm. 13-14, Theme II showing the accents.



Fig. 6 – Mm. 17-18, Theme II showing switch of accent placement.



Fig. 7 – Descending chromatic figure in mm. 19-24.

The image displays a musical score for Chopin's Great Love, Op. 66, measures 35-40. The score is written for piano in G major, 4/4 time. The first system shows measures 35-36, which are highlighted by a blue rectangle. A blue arrow points to a low G# note in measure 35. The second system shows measures 37-40, with a blue arrow pointing to a low G# note in measure 37. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *ff*, and *rit.*, and tempo markings such as *Largo.* and *pesante.*. The score is written in G major, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The time signature is 4/4. The score is written for piano, with a blue rectangle highlighting measures 35-36 and a blue arrow pointing to a low G# note in measure 35. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *ff*, and *rit.*, and tempo markings such as *Largo.* and *pesante.*. The score is written in G major, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The time signature is 4/4. The score is written for piano, with a blue rectangle highlighting measures 35-36 and a blue arrow pointing to a low G# note in measure 35.

Fig. 8 – Measures 35-40 of Op. 66. Measure 35-36 are indicated by the rectangle. The low note G# is indicated by arrow.

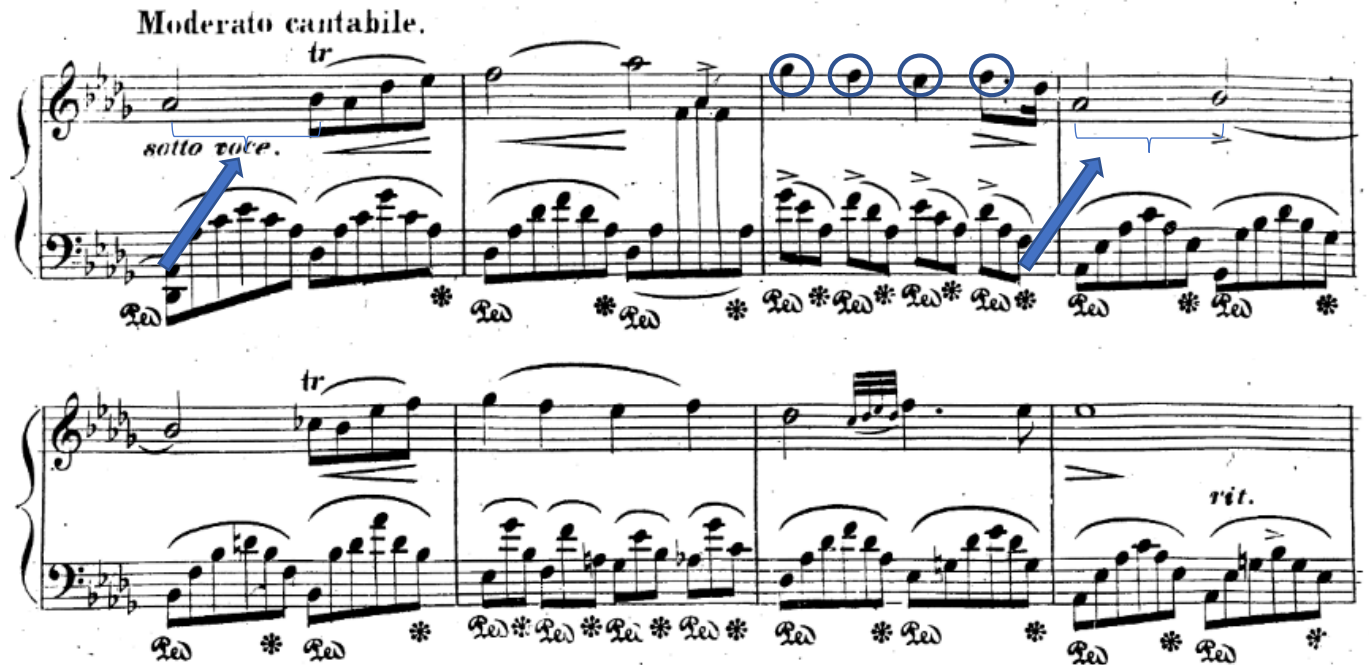


Fig. 9 – The B Section, op. 66, mm. 43-50. This illustrates the use of the major second. The circles indicate the connection to Theme II in Section A (See fig. 4).



Fig. 10 – Measure 82, the final measure of the B section, illustrating the  $A\flat^7/Db$ .



Fig. 11 – Beginning of Coda at m. 119. Squares indicate the use of  $G\sharp$  as a pivot or anchor. The circles indicate the 3-note motif from Section B (See fig.9 as well). Brackets indicate melodic material, referenced from m. 82 (See. Fig. 10).



Fig. 12 – Coda Ostinato at mm. 127-128.

Figure 13 shows the final statement of the theme from the B Section in the bass clef, measures 129-132. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The right hand continues the eighth-note pattern from Figure 12. The left hand plays a single G3 note in measure 129, followed by rests in measures 130-131, and a final G3 note in measure 132. The dynamic is *pp* (pianissimo). The word "do." is written above the first measure. The phrase "il canto marcato." is written above the final measure. A blue arrow points from the first measure of Figure 13 to the first measure of Figure 12. A blue box highlights the final measure of Figure 13, which contains a double bar line and a repeat sign.

Fig. 13 – The Final statement of the theme from the B Section in the bass clef.