Alexander Jemnitz

Cello Sonata Op. 31

(1931, rev. 1933, published in 1940)

Analysis

Cello Sonata, Op. 31 (1931/1933a)

The first version of the Cello Solo Sonata, in which Alexander Jemnitz transformed the Gamba Solo Sonata[1] into the Cello Solo Sonata was completed on December 7,1931. In addition to re-orchestrating the work, Jemnitz lengthened the first two movements, shortened the finale, slowed down a few tempo markings, and made the piece more idiomatic for the cello. The next revision, referred to as 1933a,[2] took place in March 1933, when Jemnitz wrote a new third movement. Jemnitz composed a new version (1933b) after a long discussion with Emmanuel Feuermann on March 28, 1933; Vilmos Palotai premiered the piece in Budapest on April 1. This version was published by Rózsavölgyi and Co. in August 1940. Jemnitz noticeably altered the themes of the first two movements and made these movements longer; however, the finale was truncated and was edited with less noticeable changes.

Since Jemnitz achieved the best balance in terms of form and melodic invention in the 1933a version, the analysis is centered around this version. The 1931/1933a label is used in the case of the first two movements since these movements are virtually identical in the first two versions. The focal point of the analysis is 1933a; the Gamba Sonata, Op. 24 and the 1931 version are laid out as working drafts; and the published, 1933b version as a departure.

Movement 1 (1931/1933a)

The form of the first movement exhibits a compositional technique called developing variation. Developing variation is a term which was first defined by Jemnitz's teacher, Arnold Schönberg, although this compositional technique has been around since Beethoven and was used most extensively in German Romanticism, most prominently by Johannes Brahms. Traditional forms, such as sonata and rondo forms can be observed in this movement, since there are several points of strong return to the opening material in mm. 25, 41, 62 and 77. (Figures 1-6).

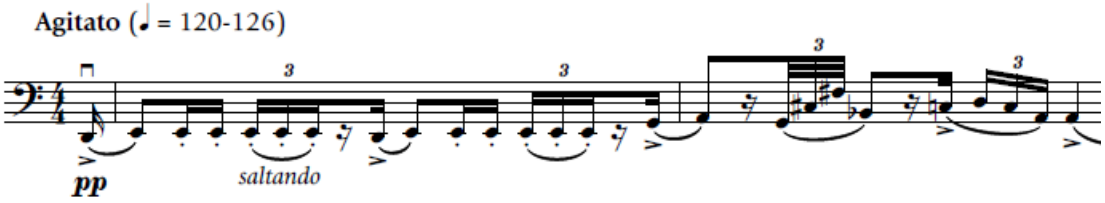

Figure 1. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata, I, mm. 1-2 (main theme, phrase 1)

[1] Sonata for Solo Viola de Gamba, Op.24, composed in 1924.
[2] The 1933a and 1933b labels are given by the authors of this article.

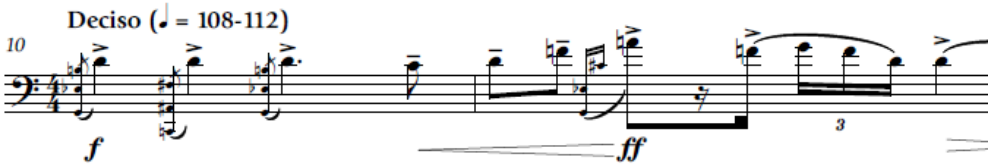

Figure 2. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata, I, mm. 10-11 (main theme, phrase 2)

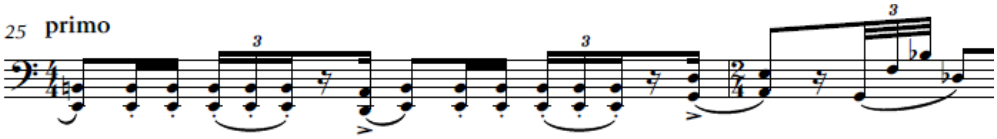

Figure 3. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata, I, mm. 25-26

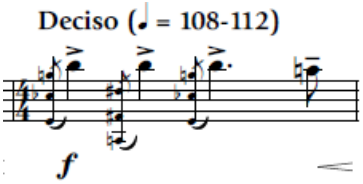

Figure 4. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata, I, m. 41

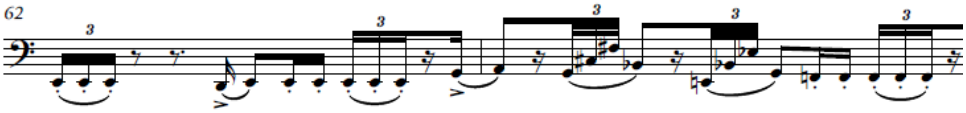

Figure 5. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata, I, mm. 62-63

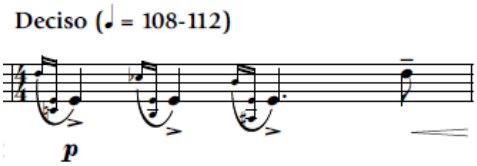

Figure 6. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata, I, m. 77

The sonata layout provides a palindrome of the movement:

Exposition – mm. 1-24 (24 measures)
Development 1 – mm. 25-40 (16 measures)
False Recapitulation – mm. 41-45 (5 measures)
Development 2 – mm. 46-61 (16 measures)
Recapitulation – mm. 62-86 (25 measures)

The elements of the movement in detail are:

A – mm. 1-16
B – mm. 17-24
A’ – mm. 25-33
B’ –mm. 34-37

A” – mm. 38-40
A – mm. 41-45
A” – mm. 45-56
Retransition – mm. 56-61
A – mm. 62-68
A”’ – mm. 69-72
B” – mm. 73-76
A”” – mm. 76-86

However, a clear delineation can be observed within the framework of the sonata form between the first thematic group (mm. 1-24) and the second thematic group (mm. 17-24). The first thematic group was arguably inspired by Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring (see Figure 7).[3]

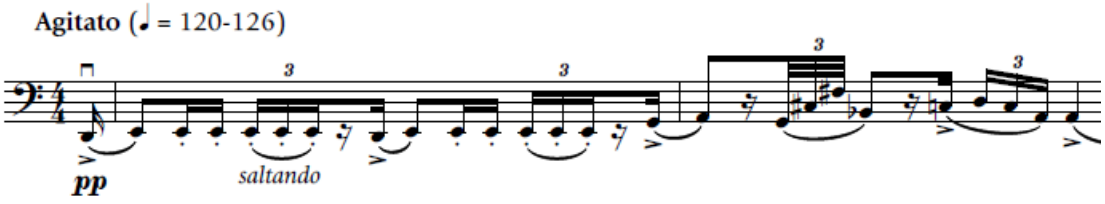

Figure 7a. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata, I, mm. 1-2

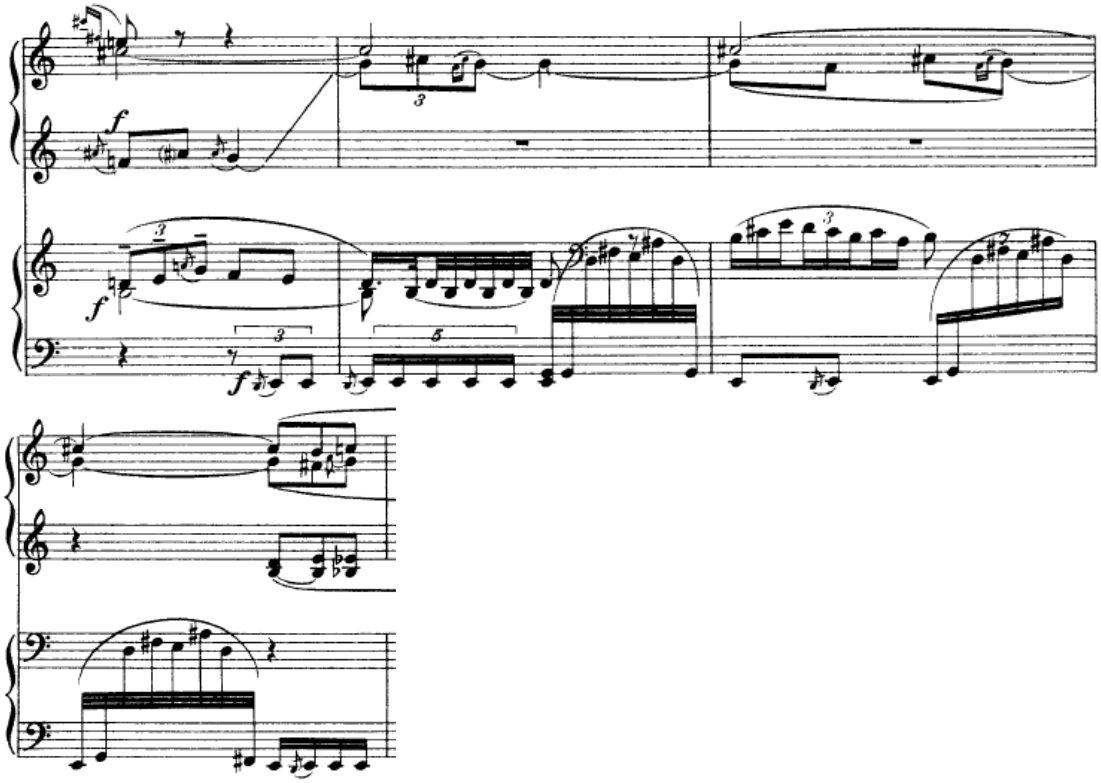

Figure 7b. Stravinsky, The Rite of Spring, Part I, mm. 28-31

[3] Jemnitz, an acclaimed music critic in Hungary and abroad, had access to many Stravinsky premieres and he was very fond of Stravinsky’s music.

The first false recapitulation occurs at m. 25, akin to the opening movement of Brahms's Fourth Symphony. This truncated false recapitulation can be viewed as a part of the development section. The development section is divided into two parts, which is resulted by Jemnitz presenting a literal restatement of mm. 10-11 in mm. 41-42, but unlike in m.10, Jemnitz continues developing the music this time; mm. 41-45 represents a brief hiatus between the material presented in mm. 40 and 46. The retransition in mm. 56-61 serves as a strong set up for the real recapitulation. Although the recapitulation brings a much-wanted resolve, Jemnitz continues to develop a portion of the first thematic material hereto undeveloped in mm. 69-72. The secondary thematic material is inserted in mm. 73-76, after which the movement closes with the first thematic material.

The melodic material in the opening movement is predominantly D pentatonic, with accompaniment figures that are best analyzed as pitch class sets. One of the best-known Hungarian pieces that features D pentatonic is Zoltán Kodaly's Duo, Op. 7 for Violin and Cello. Curiously, Maurits Frank and Nicco Amar (from the Amar Quartet) were the first ones to champion this piece. Kodály's music has a perceptible influence on the Cello Solo Sonata Op. 31, despite their life-long animosity and ideological differences. The pentatonic set tends to alternate between D E G A C (mm. 1-4, 15-16) and D E F G C (mm. 10-14). Accompaniment figures, on the other hand, are comprised of closely related tetrachords 0147 (mm. 2, 8, 12), 0347 (mm. 5-6), 0258 (mm. 5, 26), etc. The use of such tetrachords resembles the freely atonal style of pre-1920s Arnold Schönberg, namely the 3 Piano Pieces, Op. 11 and 6 Piano Pieces, Op.19, and the song cycle Das Buch der hängenden Gärten, Op. 15.

The primary motive in the opening movement is a rising major second with a march-like rhythm and a ricochet triplet. This motive is used extensively throughout the movement, and when harmonized, it is done so primarily in fourths and fifths. As this sonata was originally composed for solo viola da gamba (the bass viol, to be more specific), an abundance of fourths (outer strings of the bass viol) and thirds (inner two strings of the bass viol) can be found throughout the piece. The perfect fourth interval plays a major role in the development section (see Figure 8).

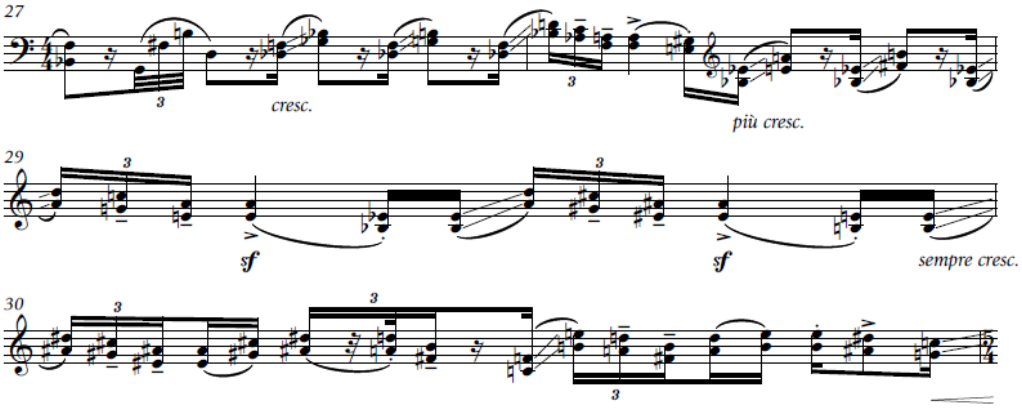

Figure 8. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata, I, mm. 27-30

The fourth is not the most ideal interval to be played on the cello, especially in such abundance, however, it is idiomatic on the bass viol due to its tuning. As Jemnitz noted in his diary in July 1924, after Maurits Frank played the bass viol for him, "it is a practical instrument, and it is tuned

more modern than the boring cello tuning with its fifths."[4] The fourth is known to have an amazing potential, since it is richer sounding than the fifth and the octave, and purer sounding than the third or the sixth. Interestingly though, the fourths in the opening movement are more idiomatic to play on the cello than the thirds.

Unlike in the Gamba Sonata where Jemnitz notates chords in a blocked fashion, he generally notates chords with grace notes in the Cello Solo Sonata (see Figure 9). This can be explained by Jemnitz requiring cellists to play the chords with a more horizontal approach to match the chord playing of a bass viol player. Cello bridges and bows are arched differently from the bass viol, which makes the cello more powerful but less flexible.

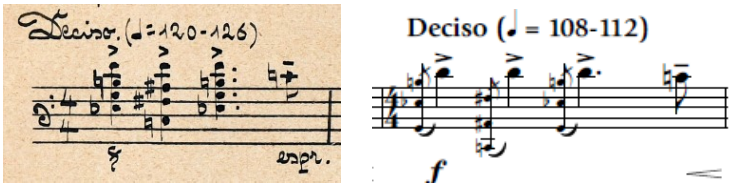

Figure 9. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata, I, m. 41 (compared to the Gamba Sonata manuscript)

In general, tempos are on the brisk side in the opening movement. These tempo markings caused major contention for superstar cellist, Emmanuel Feuermann. In a letter to Jemnitz in December 1932, Feuerman wrote, "I find the Sonata way too long. But most of all, I believe you demand too much from the cello. At times I find it impossible that any performer could achieve what you ask for as a composer. By the way: are your metronome markings correct?" Feuermann's input is most likely behind Jemnitz reducing his tempo markings drastically, in some cases as much as 50 beats per minute in the published version (see Figures 10 and 11). Curiously, some of the tempos of the 1931 version were marked already slower than in its predecessor, the Gamba Sonata.

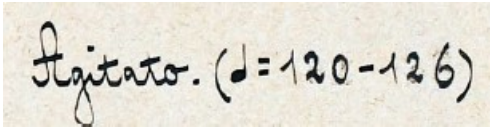

Figure 10a. Jemnitz, Gamba and Cello Sonata (1931/1933), I, m. 1

Figure 10b. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata (1940), I, m. 1

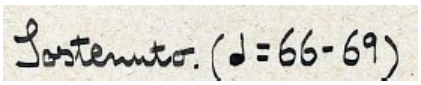

Figure 11a. Jemnitz, Gamba Sonata, I, m. 16

[4] Frank inspired Jemnitz to compose the Gamba Sonata on the evening of July 27, 1924, and his playing convinced Jemnitz to compose for the then rather unknown instrument.

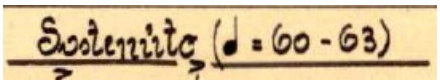

Figure 11b. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata (1931/1933a), I, m. 16

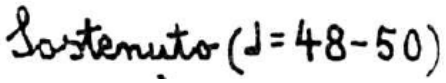

Figure 11c. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata (1933b), I, m. 15

Movement 2 (1931/1933a)

The form of the second movement is similar to the first movement's: a sonata form with developing variations, however this time Jemnitz omits the development section.

The first theme (mm. 1-16) is a plaintive melody in Phrygian mode with a periodic phrase structure of 8+8. Using Phrygian mode can be attributed to the influence of two composers close to Jemnitz: his teacher in Leipzig, Max Reger[5] and Paul Hindemith, whose quartet, the Amar quartet premiered Jemnitz's String Trio. Paul Hindemith (1895-1963) applies the Phrygian mode at cadence points in the second and fourth movements (see Figure 12) of his Cello Sonata Op.25, No. 3 written in 1922 for Maurits Frank.

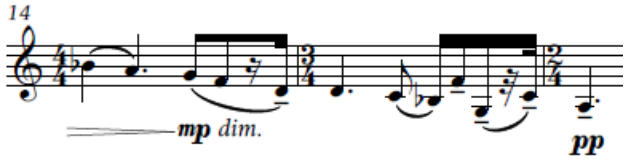

Figure 12a. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata (1931/1933a), II, mm. 14-16

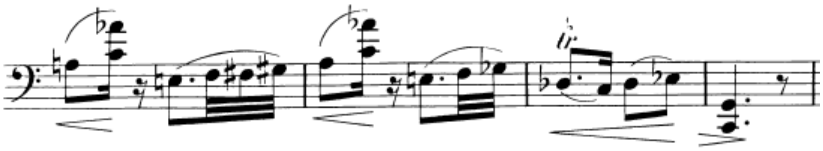
Figure 12b. Hindemith, Cello Sonata, Op. 25, No. 3, II, mm. 6-9

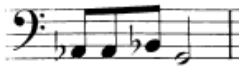
Figure 12c. Hindemith, Cello Sonata, Op. 25, No. 3, IV, m. 3

[5] Max Reger (1873-1916) uses the Phrygian mode in one of his most iconic organ works, the Symphonische Fantasie und Fuge, Op.57, written in 1901.

The second theme (mm. 17-34) is a variation on the second theme of the first movement, however this time Jemnitz develops it even further. The theme is harmonized in fourths just as in the first movement and it is quite chromatic, in contrast to the opening theme. The second theme of the second movement is an 18-measure phrase, with a 4+8+6 phrase structure, with internal repetitions. In the 1933a version, (more precisely in the manuscript found in Luigi Silva's estate), Jemnitz crossed out five measures (mm. 21-22, and mm. 32-34), which was probably driven by Jemnitz's search for balance. This truncation makes the second theme a 13-measure phrase (4+6+3).

The two themes are intertwined in the recapitulation; mm. 35-65 mainly use the first theme with brief interjections of the second theme. The beginning of the recapitulation is harmonized by open strings and visited by chromatic alterations. As the first theme develops, Jemnitz adds undulations to the long notes (i.e. mm. 49, 55, 58, 63, and 64; see Figure 13).

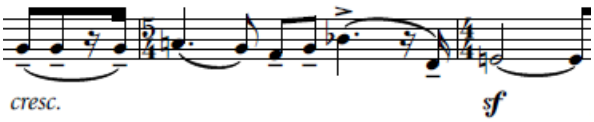

Figure 13a. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata (1931/1933), II, mm. 10-12

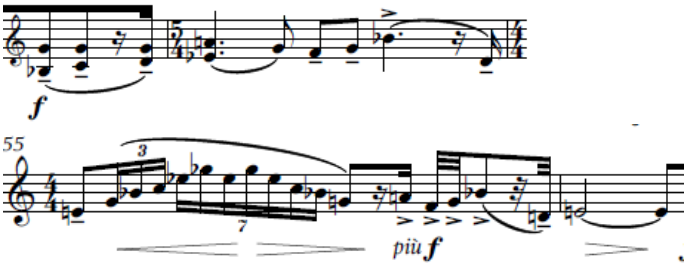

Figure 13b. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata (1931/1933), II, mm. 54-56

There is a clear but truncated return of the second theme at mm. 66-70, and a continuation of the plaintive melody until the end (mm. 71-84). The section in mm. 66-70 is a fifth lower than their earlier counterpart in mm. 17-20. The movement ends with G-flat – F – D, much like the first movement, except the first movement has a G-natural instead of the G-flat. (see Figure 14)

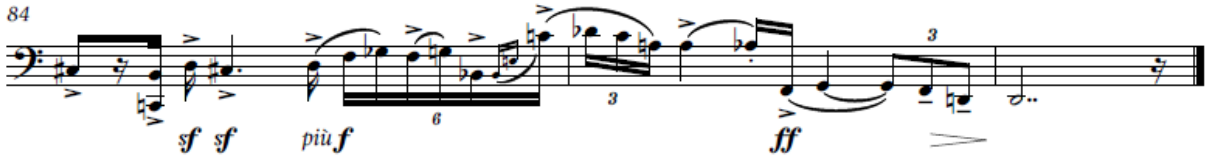

Figure 14a. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata (1931/1933), I, mm. 84-86

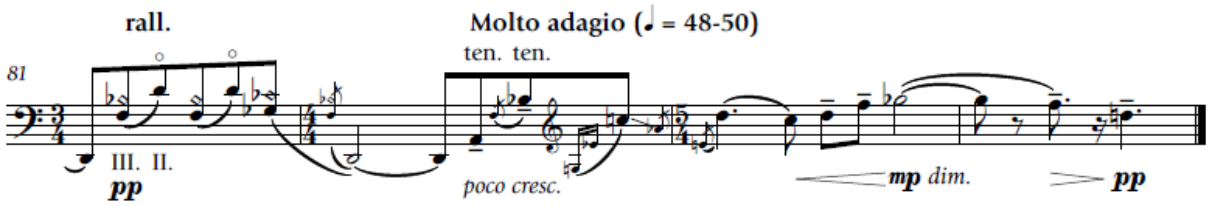

Figure 14b. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata (1931/1933), II, mm. 81-84.

The themes in the second movement are fluid, which can be attributed to the everchanging meter. These irregular meters create asymmetric phrases which build themselves into larger cohesive groups. This "musical prose," another Schönberg innovation, creates music closer to the human speech, since it is not confined to a regular meter.

Movement 3 (1933a)

The Finale of the 1933a version was composed in March 1933 and presents a traditional form: the sonata rondo form.

A – mm. 1-23
B – mm. 24-49
A – mm. 50-73
C (development) – mm. 74-99
B – mm. 100-121 (fifth higher than the above B)
A – mm. 122-153
First movement return – mm. 154-157
AB (combined) – mm. 157-190

This new third movement includes a brand-new thematic material unrelated to the 1931 finale or the finale of the original Gamba Sonata. Jemnitz infuses a fugal element as well as invertible counterpoint in the 1933a finale, arguably inspired by the Prelude from J. S. Bach's Cello Suite No. 5. The 6-note motive of the movement is developed in a similar fashion to Bach's 5-note motive. Jemnitz using invertible counterpoint between the first 2 notes and then the subsequent 4 is identical to Bach's treatment using invertible counterpoint between the first 2 notes and the subsequent 3 notes (see Figure 15)

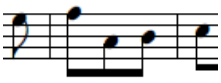
Figure 15a. Bach, Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011, Prelude, mm. 27-29

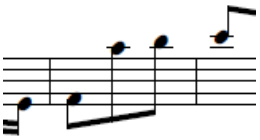
Figure 15b. Bach, Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011, Prelude, mm. 149-151

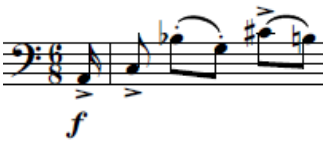

Figure 15c. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata (1933), III, m. 1

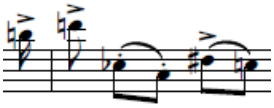

Figure 15d. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata (1933), III, m. 60

Each section of the finale is punctuated by a tempo change and/or a pizzicato motive that starts on a tritone glissando. Another feature of this movement is the extensive use of grace notes, which can sound like early bow changes, acting as obstacles for the performer and preventing them from executing the finale in the intended tempo. The use of pedal points can be observed in mm. 6-7, 28-37, 100-109, and 164-168. The second half of this movement has a pull towards D, creating the impression of a D tonal center, especially with the extensive use of the D pedal point as well as matching it by ending the movement in D.

Movement 3 (1931)

The finale of the 1931 version is roughly based on the Gamba Sonata finale.[6] Since this movement was not as adaptable as the other two movements, Jemnitz ended up transposing it by a third in most cases. Majoring on the interval second, it is by far the most dissonant movement compared to the other two movements. The stemming (Figure 16) creates the impression that Jemnitz wanted a two-instrument piece to be played on the bass viol or cello. This stemming is another example of Kodály's influence, this technique was used in his Sonata for Cello Solo Op. 8 (1915). Maurits Frank and Vilmos Palotai were the two pivotal figures in the creation of Jemnitz's Solo Sonata, as well as the first champions of the Kodály Solo Sonata.

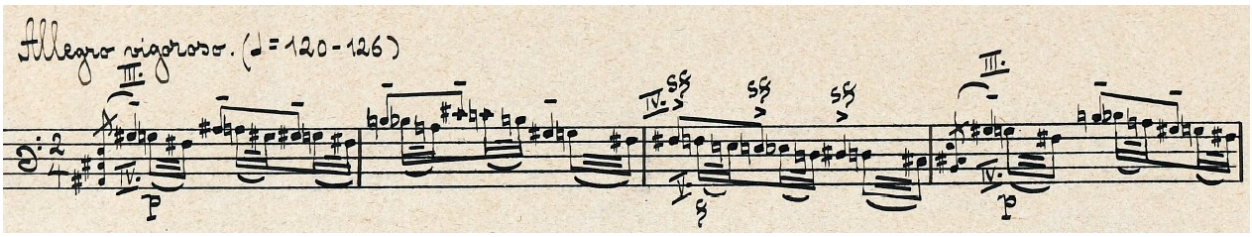

Figure 16a. Jemnitz, Gamba Sonata, III, mm. 1-4

[6] After the 1931 finale was replaced by the new, 1933a finale, it was reused in the Violin Sonata, Op 37 (1935) a fifth higher, to accommodate the range of the violin. The Violin Sonata was published by Rózsavölgyi and Co. on the same day as the Cello Sonata.

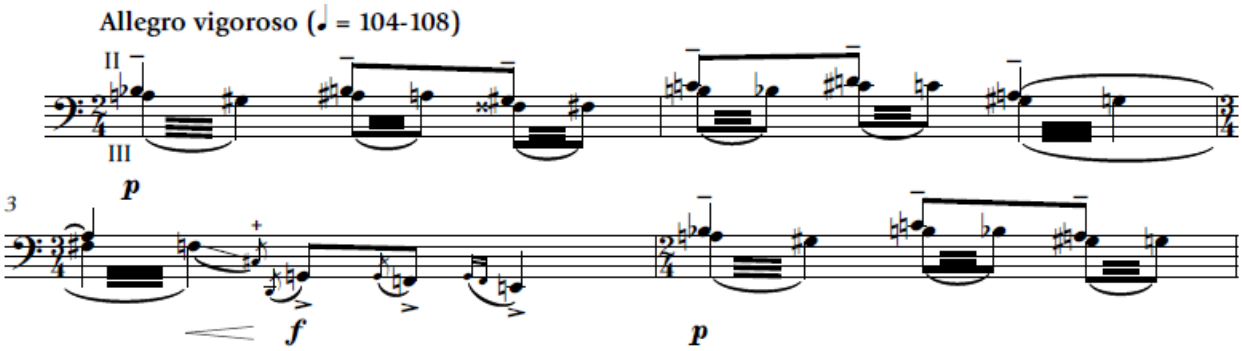

Figure 16b. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata (1931), III, mm. 1-4

The form of the 1931 version finale is theme and variations. This is also the form of the Gamba Sonata finale, continuing the concept of the developing variations seen throughout this work.

Theme – mm. 1-36
Var. 1 – mm. 37-68
Var. 2 – mm. 69-78
Var. 3 – mm. 79-97
Interlude (recapitulation of mvt. I) – mm. 98-100
Var. 4 – mm. 101-118
Var. 5 – mm. 119-125
Var. 6 – mm. 126-143
Var. 7 – mm. 144-155

The progression of the variations is traditional, with regards to tempo and surface rhythm. The theme is in two parts: mm. 1-6 and mm. 7-16, which then repeats in mm. 17-24 and mm. 25-36, respectively. Var. 1 is faster in surface rhythm and contrapuntal in stemming (see Figure 16).

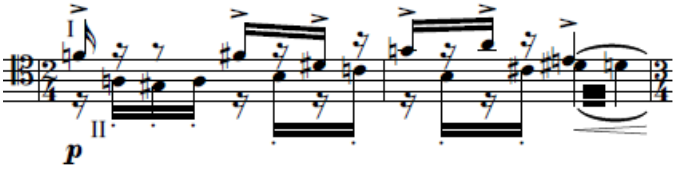

Figure 16. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata (1931), III, mm. 37-38

Var. 2 has a faster tempo marking and the time signature changes from simple duple to compound duple (see Figure 18).

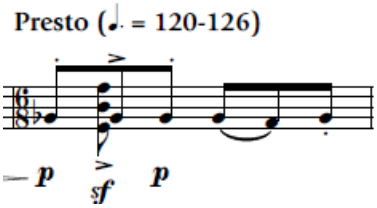

Figure 18. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata (1931), III, m. 69

Var. 3 is the first slow variation, using a curious tempo marking in mm. 79 and mm. 81: "Tardo," where the eighth note equals 36-100. This tempo range is most likely a mistake, and the 36 needs to be 96, consistent with Jemnitz's four-beat-per-minute tempo range throughout the work. *Tardo* means "late" in Italian, which is an antonym of *presto*, meaning "early." Var. 3 is also the first variation to use both parts of the theme. The second theme of the first movement recapitulates in mm. 98-100 as a short interlude. Var. 4 is back in a fast, compound duple meter. Var. 5 is the shortest variation, only seven measures long in simple duple meter. Var. 6 resumes the compound duple drive, and finally finishing with Var. 7, which serves as a coda, ending on a low D.

Viola da gamba Sonata, Op. 24 (1924)

The Gamba Sonata, Op. 24 served as the groundwork for the Cello Sonata, Op. 31, hence it is important to take a brief look at the construction of this concise work. As stated above, the bass viol is a stringed instrument tuned in thirds and fourths in the following manner: D_2 G_2 C_3 E_3 A_3 D_4. One can immediately see that the use of thirds and fourth would be as idiomatic on the bass viol as the use of fifth would be on the cello.

Movements 1 and 2

The form of the first movement is an incomplete sonata form; however, the second movement completes the sonata form with the presentation of the second theme recapitulation. A sonata form that transcends multiple movements is not new to Jemnitz and has strong roots in the Romantic Era in the piano concertos of Franz Liszt, Cello Concerto No. 1 and Piano Concerto No. 4 of Camille Saint-Saëns, Konzertstück by Ernst von Dohnanyi, just to mention a few. Antonín Dvořák and Max Bruch leave their violin concertos opening movements without a second theme recapitulation. Looking at the form from the vantage point of the Jemnitz's first two movements results in the following diagram:

Mvt. 1
Exposition – mm. 1-22 (22 measures)
Development 1 – mm. 23-38 (16 measures)
False Recapitulation – mm. 39-43 (5 measures)
Development 2 – mm. 44-51 (8 measures)
Recapitulation 1 – mm. 52-70 (19 measures)
Mvt. 2
New Theme – mm. 1-16 (16 measures)
Recapitulation 2 – mm. 17-24 (8 measures)
New Theme' – mm. 25-43 (19 measures)
Recapitulation 2' – mm. 44-47 (4 measures)
Coda – mm. 48-61 (14 measures)

If analyzed separately, the second movement is a sonata without development (sonatina form), as previously seen in the 1931/1933a versions. The following diagrams demonstrate the forms of the first two movements.

Mvt. 1
Exposition – mm. 1-22 (22 measures)
Development 1 – mm. 23-38 (16 measures)
False Recapitulation – mm. 39-43 (5 measures)
Development 2 – mm. 44-51 (8 measures)
Incomplete Recapitulation – mm. 52-70 (19 measures)

Mvt. 2
Exposition – mm. 1-24 (24 measures)
Recapitulation – mm. 25-47 (23 measures)
Coda – mm. 48-61 (14 measures)

With regards to the thematic material, the Gamba Sonata is virtually the same as the 1931 version of the Cello Sonata. There is a greater use of harmonics (both natural and artificial) in the Gamba Sonata. The frets on the bass viol would cause all of the glissandos to be perceived with all of the chromatic pitches in between the notes unlike on the cello, where glissandos are a gentle glide.

Movement 3

The finale of the Gamba Sonata is a theme with 9 variations and 2 interludes that use first movement material. The theme is diatonic in C# Dorian, as opposed to being chromatic in the Cello Sonata (1931). However, it is also accompanied by trills in seconds. The purity of the theme follows the use of modes and pentatonicism in the previous movements. Its purity is, perhaps, inspired by Stravinsky's use of Russian peasant melodies. The theme of this finale is particularly Russian sounding.

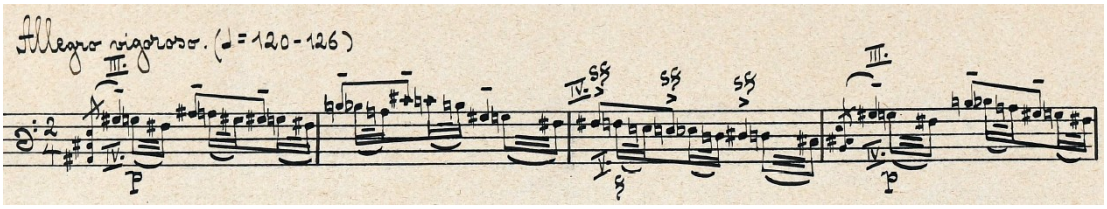

Figure 19a. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata (1931), III, mm. 1-4

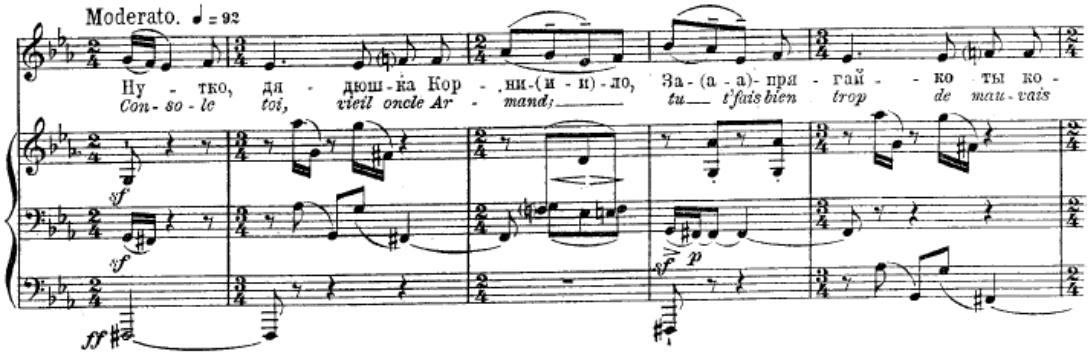

Figure 19b. Stravisnky, Pribaoutki, Kornilo, mm. 1-4

Stravinsky's Kornilo from Pribaoutki (Figure 19) presents a diatonic theme accompanied by second. The melodies and harmonies in Rite of Spring and parts of Petrushka are constructed in the same manner, thus, the Stravinsky influence is seen on Jemnitz in the Gamba Sonata.

The form of the finale is similar to the 1931 version of the Cello Sonata, but it has some notable differences. The Gamba Sonata has 9 variations, 2 more than the Cello Sonata. The Gamba sonata also has an extra interlude from the first movement, and the layout of the variations resembles a sonata form. The Cello Sonata finale does not resemble sonata form. The following chart breaks the variations down into a three-part sonata form.

Exposition:
Theme – mm. 1-13
Var. 1 – mm. 14-27
Var. 2 – mm. 28-33
Interlude (recapitulation of mvt. I) – mm. 34-37
Var. 3 – mm. 38-52

Development:
Var. 4 – mm. 53-67

Recapitulation:
Var. 5 – mm. 68-90
Var. 6 – mm. 91-96
Interlude (recapitulation of mvt. I) – mm. 97-100
Var. 7 – mm. 101-112
Var. 8 – mm. 113-145
Var. 9 – mm. 146-159

The theme and var. 1 serve as the first thematic group, which comes back in var. 5. Var. 2 and the interlude serve as the secondary thematic group, which returns in var. 6 and the latter interlude. Var. 3 serves as an extended closing theme (or third theme group, as often observed in the Romantic Era). The material from var. 3 returns in var. 8 a fifth lower. Var. 9 serves as the coda.

Cello Sonata, Op. 31 (1933b)

After speaking to Emanuel Feuermann on March 28, 1933, Jemnitz went back to revising the Cello Sonata. A bird's eye view might not reveal many changes. The rhythms were left mostly intact. The first two movement we elongated, while the finale truncated. However, upon a closer look, Jemnitz made thousands, most of which change the character of the work.

Usually revisions tighten up the form or make a work concise, like in the case of the Sibelius Violin Concerto. Sometimes composers completely rewrite a part of a movement because a critic deems a melody or form unsuccessful, like in the case of Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet Overture, or the first movement of Symphony No. 2; both of these works have enough material left completely intact to make them recognizable. Tcaikovsky's revisions contain

themes that are brand new and fresh. However, Jemnitz puts the proverbial new wine into old wineskins with his 1933b revision; new pitch collections into old rhythmic patterns. This simply does not work.

Movement 1

The first major change from the previous versions is in m. 1 of the piece. In the previous versions the Sonata opened with two iterations of an ascending major second, giving the movement a feeling of suspense. The 1933b version opens with a minor third followed by chromaticism (see Figure 20). Instead of a pentatonic/modal sound, the movement now has a major/minor dichotomy.

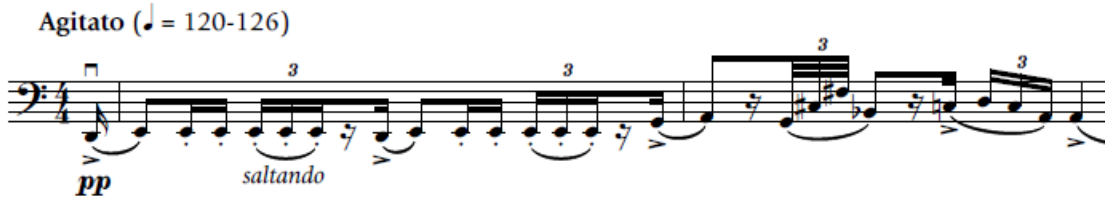

Figure 20a. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata (1931/1933b), I, mm. 1-2

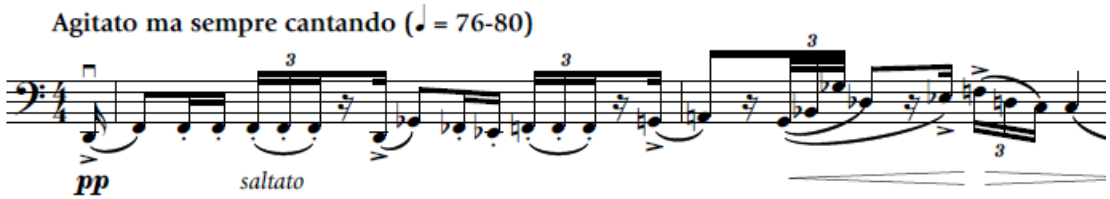

Figure 20b. Jemnitz, Cello Sonata, I, mm. 1-2

This opening gesture, upon which the entire first movement is based, contains 25 notes; Jemnitz changed 19 of those notes. While the 1931/1933a theme is pentatonic throughout the movement, the revised theme is chromatic. This facet distorts the simplicity of the original idea.

The first two measures are representative of the kind of changes Jemnitz made in the 1933b version. While most of the pitches and tempos were changed, the unique rhythms remain mostly true to the earlier versions.

The movement still retains the sonata form:

Exposition – mm. 1-26 (26 measures)
Development 1 – mm. 27-48 (22 measures)
False Recapitulation – mm. 49-54 (6 measures)
Development 2 – mm. 55-72 (18 measures)
Recapitulation – mm. 73-98 (26 measures)

This chart shows that Jemnitz paid attention to the balance of the movement when he rewrote it.

From the technical point of view, Jemnitz made mm. 39-45 playable than its 1931/1933a counterpart. The change was mainly in slowing down the surface rhythm. Overall, the first movements in both 1931/1933a and 1933b versions are compatible with regards to technical difficulty, although, learning the 1933b version is like learning a different composition.

Movement 2

The second movement of the 1933b does not have as many noticeable differences. Namely, mm. 1-16 were made more chromatic, instead of using the simple Phrygian mode of the 1933a version. Again, Jemnitz plays with a major/minor idea, first with D major/minor (mm. 1 and 14) and then A major/minor (m. 16).

The form, again, is a sonata form without development:

First theme – mm. 1-17
Second theme – mm. 18-36 (borrowed from the first movement)
First theme – mm. 37-70 (with fragmentary interjections of the second theme)
Second theme – mm. 71-74
Coda – mm. 74-89

With regards to form, Jemnitz follows the same procedure as the 1931/1933a version.

Movement 3

Since Jemnitz had just produced a brand-new finale to the 1933a version, perhaps he did not feel the need to overhaul the new composition. The most noticeable change appears in the elaboration of the pizzicato episodes, and a few tempo changes (mm. 19, 62, 148).

The form remains a rondo:

A – mm. 1-25
B – mm. 26-51
A – mm. 52-68
C (development) – mm. 69-91
B – mm. 92-131 (fifth higher than the above B)
First movement return – mm. 132-136
A – mm. 137-152

The differences in the section lengths are marginal. Jemnitz cut the return of A before the first movement return, and placed it after. This is the most conspicuous change to the form.

Conclusion

As demonstrated above, Jemnitz reaches the desired balance in melodic invention and form in the 1933a version. The Gamba Sonata has beautifully-crafted melodies and form, but, in its purest form, would not transfer well to the cello. In the 1931 version, Jemnitz expands the

form and makes the first two movements idiomatic for the cello, but the finale is not quite idiomatic yet. In the 1933a version, Jemnitz retains the first two movements of the 1931 version, but writes a new finale with cello technique in mind. While the form in the 1933b is still balanced, the pitch content of the first movement changes the pathos of the entire work. The second movement loses its simplicity through chromatization, but the finale achieves a greater balance through truncation.