

## **Sequenza XIII (Chanson) - The Accordion Transfiguration, from Popular Music to Erudite Recognition**

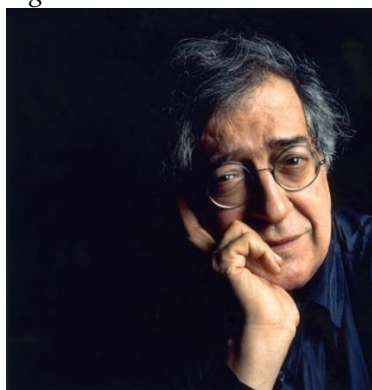
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Luciano Berio, one of the most prolific composers of the 20th century, contributed with an enormous compositional legacy for several instruments and formations, namely through his famous *Sequenze*. These works resulted in a set of virtuous compositions for solo instruments, including idiomatic writing and extended techniques, with the aim of exploring the maximum, mechanical and technical capacities of instruments and instrumentalists, in a period of time that extended from 1958 to 2002. *Sequenza XIII (Chanson)*, for Accordion, appeared in 1995 and reflects the evolution of a multitimbric instrument, whose repertoire ranges from popular to erudite.

### **Sequenza XIII (Chanson) (1995) – Luciano Berio (1925-2003) General Notions about the Composer and the Work**

The *Sequenze*, by Luciano Berio (fig. 1), is a series of works for solo instruments that explore new technical and sound possibilities of instruments. They explore the idiomatic potential of the instruments and exemplify Luciano Berio's approach to composition as a work in progress, an endless process of contributions and elaboration (Centro Studi Luciano Berio, 2009). Gartmann (2007) concludes that these are true works of musical research and, sometimes, portraits of their performers.

*Figure 1. Luciano Berio*



The *Sequenze* present as a starting point the fact that they are constructed through sequences of the harmonic and melodic fields. "The melodic line of this *Chanson* crosses masses of sound, sometimes dense, sometimes rarefied; describes

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unexpected restlessness. This essential and remote motif returns to its physical places, to the instrument's memory, advances the polyphonic hypotheses in which it is first obscured and then re-emerges to clear the shadows, in an enigmatic rondo" (Delaney, 2002).

Written with and for the accordionist Teodoro Anzellotti, *Sequenza XIII* has an approximate duration of 9'30" and, in the 1996 edition of the Universal Edition, is developed in 39 systems (some sections divided into bars). Despite being a chanson, whose compositional root is found in the traditional aspect of the accordion, as the composer describes (Berio, 1996), the work sometimes takes moments of intense virtuosity with fast and sequenced motifs that appear in opposite movement in the field harmonic and with rhythmic delay between the voices.

*Sequenza XIII (Chanson)* is close to a rondo with variations, as suggested by the author (Berio, 1996). It follows a spiral structure: halfway through the fourth system, it resumes the structure from the beginning following a different path (Bochmann, personal communication, 2010).

It consists of 10 thematic entries. The melodic notes E-B-F# are at the base of the main motif and appear throughout the piece in the same descending order that the listener identifies and relates reminiscences from the beginning. The main motif consists of a set of 11 different notes, highlighting the absence of C#, which will only appear in the final exposition of the theme (Gartmann, 2007).

Each thematic entry is never presented in the same way and is associated with a development that takes different directions and leads back to the previously exposed thematic motif. In this respect, Gartmann (2007) had already noticed that no note duration is repeated in the various thematic entries. In the spiral structure, the important impulse of the bass line also stands out, invariably in a chromatic descent from Gb/F# to F, in the appearance of 5 thematic entrances.

The presentation of the initial material emerges through a melody that becomes increasingly dense (increasing notes, chords). In turn, there is an increase in amplitude, intensification of the rhythm, constant stops (rests) in the chords, sometimes culminating in vibratos, dynamics that grow and disappear and an increasingly wider range (3 octaves).

### **Interpretative Analysis of the Work**

Below is a synoptic table (fig. 2) of the 10 thematic entries of *Sequenza XIII (Chanson)*. All entries have the same tempo (quarter note = 66), register (medium – clarinet), ppp dynamics and legato articulation. In the structure of the work, it is also noteworthy that the 10 thematic entries can be divided into long variations (presentation of the entirety of the initial motif) and short variations, which are interspersed.

Figure 2. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (schematic table)

A (theme)	System 1: The theme appears in 2 voices, in 4th and 5th intervals, in a ppp sound. It is presented in a slow tempo of quarter note = 66, molto tranquillo, legato. The end of the theme is announced with a homophonic chord that concludes in vibrato.
A1	System 4: Preparation from F# to F in the bass line. Theme with variations in the bottom line (bass practically reduced to a C pedal note), in the top line (small rhythmic alteration and in the duration of some notes) and in the resting chord (denser and with greater tension caused by the midtones).
A2 (short variation)	System 6: Passage from Gb to F in the lower voice. Theme with variations in the lower line (bass elaborated on the F-C interval), in the upper line (from the 4th note onwards there are rhythmic changes and in the order of the notes in comparison with the initial theme). There is no rest chord.
A3	System 13: In the bass line and in the top line, the opening notes of the theme are fleeting and the entrance of the theme is out of phase. The bass line features variations in tempo of the base notes. In the top row the notes have variations in duration and rhythm. The final resting chord is denser and with greater tension caused by the midtones.
A4 (short variation)	System 21: Gb to F declension in the bass line. The theme begins in the bass line and presents variations in the rhythm and duration of the notes, with emphasis on a prolonged suspension on the C note. In a phased way, a tremolo starts the exposition of the theme in the upper line. In this line, there is a prolonged rest on the 2nd note (B) and variations in the final part of the theme through appoggiatura and use of bellow shake in the chord.
A5 (short variation)	System 23: Presentation of the 3 initial notes of the theme (Mi-B-F#) on the top line, ending the last one in a vibrato. At the same time, the bass line deviates from the theme and presents a disturbing counterpoint.
A6	System 25: Preparing Gb for F in the bass line. Theme with variations in the bottom line, in particular the ending that is presented in a chromatic descent. In the top line, the variations concern a small ornamentation at the end. There is no rest chord.
A7 (short variation)	System 30: Passage from Gb to F in the lower voice. Very short presentation of the theme and displaced between the top and bottom lines. The bass line only takes 2 notes and the top line the first 3 notes of the opening theme.
A8	System 32: Theme with variations in the top line, in terms of rhythmic changes and, from the 6th note onwards, in the position of the notes compared to the initial theme. At the same time, the bass line deviates from the theme and is elaborated on the D-F minor interval. There is no rest chord.
A9	System 38: The end of the work returns to the initial environment, that is, lontano, legato, ppp dynamics. It is an inconclusive and mysterious ending, ending on the 2nd note (B) of the sequence of 3 initial notes (E-B-F#). It presents rhythmic variations and in the position of the notes. The ostinato bass is made up of a cell of 5 pre-defined chords that are repeated.

Regarding the duration of the thematic entries, it is observed that they are presented alternately between long and short variations and in a mirror-like fashion,

in such a way that A4 and A5 are short variations (c), A3 and A6 are long variations (l), and so on (fig. 3).

system	1	4	6	13	21	23	25	30	32	38
number:										
theme entry:	A	A1(l)	A2(c)	A3(l)	A4(c)	A5(c)	A6(l)	A7(c)	A8(l)	A9

Figure 3. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (thematic entries mirror presentation)



Next, the structure of Sequenza XIII (chanson) is presented in more detail and the resources used with the accordion with converter system are highlighted.

In Sequenza XIII (chanson), Luciano Berio presents an initial lyrical motif, in slow tempo, reminiscent of a song (fig. 4). Through the use of appropriate registers and in a legato articulation with a ppp sound, the performer achieves the *lontano*, slow and legato environment intended in the introduction.

Figure 4. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (theme A– initial motive)

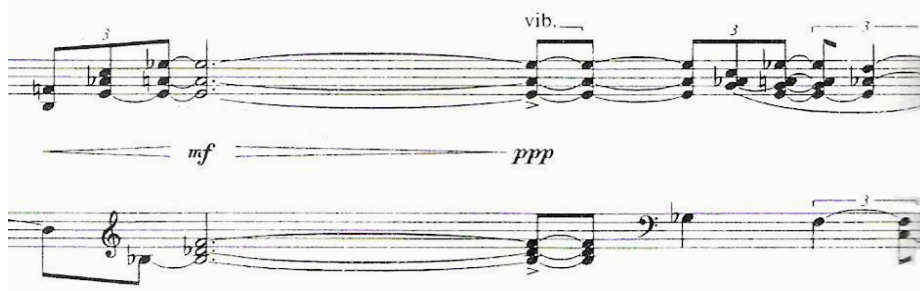


The upper voice evolves around 4th intervals in a descending direction and in the opposite movement in relation to the lower voice. The initial E note that enters the downbeat will be a constant throughout the piece. The initial bass evolves by perfect 5th intervals (F-C, G-D), completing the cycle (A-E, B) at the beginning of system 2.

After a sustained A in the bass and a small half-tone inflection for Ab, the development begins. Here, a polyphonic structure (chords) is presented and all extended chords are concluded with vibratos (fig. 5). The dynamics are contrasting and follow the conclusion of the small sentences in a natural way, closing them in ppp. The presentation of theme A and its development lasts 3 and a half systems.

Halfway through the second system, we approach an increasingly dense structure of the presented material. The bass line resumes intervals of 5th and, in turn, a narrowing of the rhythmic part appears in a kind of acceleration of the text.

Figure 5. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (excerpt from the development after theme A)



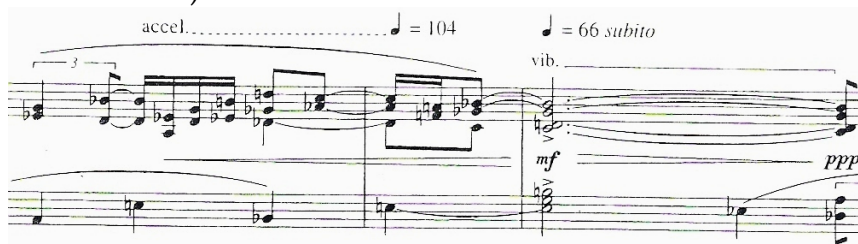
In the third system, there is a sound intensification of the material, which continues up to F# in the bass line. In a kind of chromaticism, the inflection to natural F will give rise, in system 4, to the re-exposure of the initial theme with variations. The presentation of the **A1 theme** ends with a dense resting chord, which resembles a cluster (fig. 6).

Figure 6. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (theme A1)



Then, in the bass line, the rest on the Bb note with inflection for the A note makes the transition to an acceleration of the speech. The development after the A1 theme presents a more hectic pace and also great contrasts in dynamics and tempo, the latter often suddenly (fig. 7). Somehow, the composer takes up again the material already presented, now accelerating the rhythm (the rhythmic figures change from semibreves, half notes and quarter notes to eighth notes and sixteenth notes). The presentation of the A1 theme and its development lasts 2 and a half systems.

Figure 7. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (excerpt from the development after the A1 theme)



The opening theme reappears in system 6, again prepared by an inflection from Gb to F in the bass line. In a short version, the **A2 theme** (fig. 8) makes the transition to the virtuosic part and also to the first use of the converter system (change from free basses to standard basses, indicated by the MII notation).

Figure 8. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (theme A2)



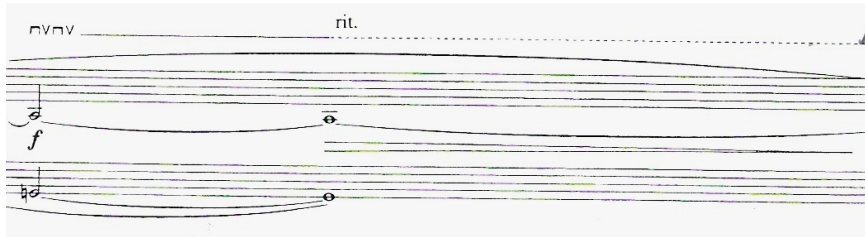
In the development after the A2 theme, the rhythm begins to narrow, a short crossing of voices appears, the use of pre-defined chords in the left hand and the bellow shake technique (in long resting notes) is required and recording if a feeling of acceleration caused by the spindles. The presentation of the A2 theme and its development lasts 7 and a half systems.

In switching to standard basses, seventh chords are alternated with minor and sometimes major chords. In this part, several homorhythmic sequences of fuses appear in fast times, so the synchronization between the two keyboards and the rhythmic precision are fundamental for a greater clarity in the exposition (fig. 9). These motifs are interspersed with a prolonged A-G interval, which is performed in a bellow shake in an attempt to keep the pace fast (fig. 10).

Figure 9. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (excerpt from the development after theme A2)

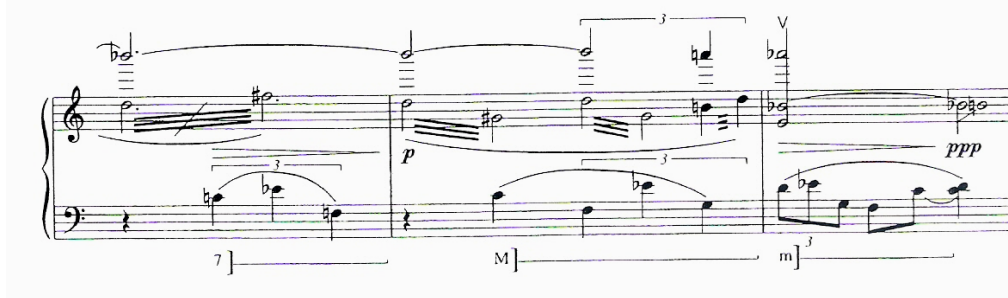


Figure 10. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (bellow shake)



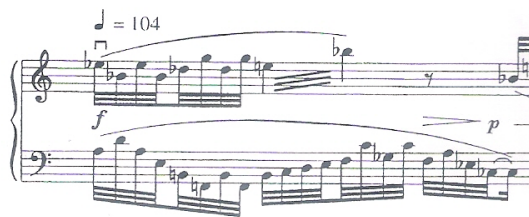
This structure advances to an acute tessitura. The arrival of the high Bb will raise the exposure to a three-dimensional environment, characterized by the simultaneity and melodic continuity of the high note, the sequential motif in the middle voice and the melodic motif realized in the pre-defined chords in the low voice (fig. 11). This plan will culminate in a bass ostinato.

Figure 11. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (three dimensional environments)



Then comes a moment of virtuosity that, in an accelerated tempo, puts the upper and lower lines in counterpoint and in opposite movement (fig. 12). The composer resorts here to changing the converter to free basses (MIII notation) in an attempt to achieve greater clarity in the speech but also to resolve issues related to the range.

Figure 12. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (counterpoint between the voices using the converter system)



In system 13, the theme is taken up again, although in a phased way between the two lines of music and with the initial notes hidden by the ornaments. The A3 theme returns to Chanson's calm and tranquil ambience through a medium register (fig. 13).

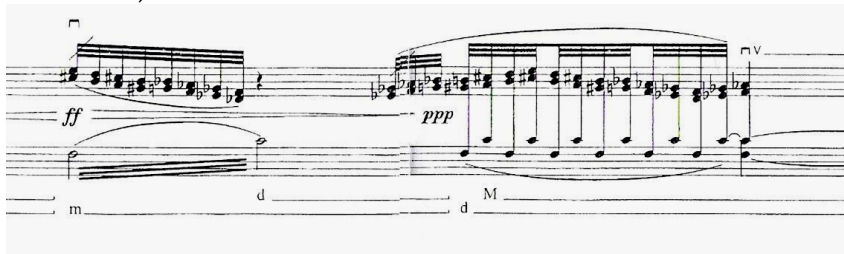


Figure 13. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (theme A3)



In the development, almost the entire bass line is presented in pre-defined chords in the left hand and also with prolonged repeated chord sequences. On the upper line, highlight the movements of thirds in ascending and descending scales. Several tremolos appear on both keyboards, ostinatos, rhythmic games (various motifs from a small group of notes), clusters with a defined interval, radical dynamics (pp, F, silence, fff). Time passes from quarter note = 66 to quarter note = 84. Almost the entire development is performed in a tessitura of reduced amplitude and in a very agitated rhythm, interspersed with unexpected and sudden moments of prolonged rest (fig. 14). The presentation of the A3 theme and its development lasts 8 and a half systems.

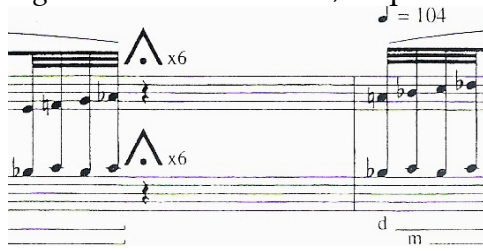
Figure 14. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (excerpt from the development after theme A3)



An ostinato bass will give rise to a kind of rhythmic game between the pre-defined chords (Ab minor and Bb diminished), while the upper voice articulates its speech in accelerando and around cyclical movements that produce small scales. These scales will later be doubled by third intervals in frantic ascending and descending movements always in legato. Sometimes, there is a rest in voiced chords or in moments of silence, before resuming new scales in thirds (fig. 15).



Figure 15. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (long rest)



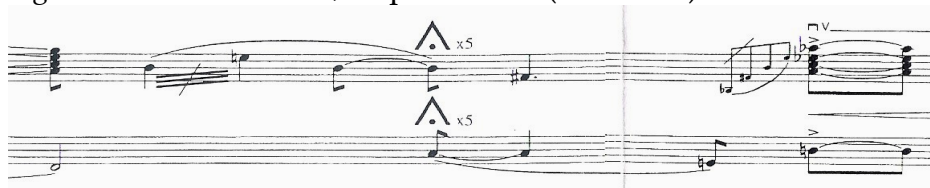
The change of the converter to free basses (MIII notation) brings a new virtuosic moment, through the execution of a fast-moving ostinato bass in counterpoint with the upper voice, which appears in chords and clusters with a defined interval (fig. 16).

Figure 16. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (ostinato bass in counterpoint with chords and clusters in the upper voice)



Afterwards, there is a resumption of the work's initial calm, albeit with certain hints of agitation. In system 21, there is a return to the initial motif, prepared by a chromatic descent from Solb to F in the bass line. The **A4 theme** is presented by the bottom line and, in an offset way, by the top line. It constitutes a short variation, where the tremolo in the top line and the prolonged rest of the voices in the B-C interval stand out (fig. 17).

Figure 17. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (theme A4)



The dynamic in crescendo at the end of the theme makes the passage to the development, which corresponds to the climax of the work. In an agitated speech (quarter note = 84), in *fff* sonority and fast notes (*fusas*), several figurations in the form of arpeggios present continuity information that is crossed by the two keyboards (fig. 18). This accentuated dialogue between the voices is characterized by a strong complementarity. Presentation of the A4 theme and its development lasts 2 and a half systems.

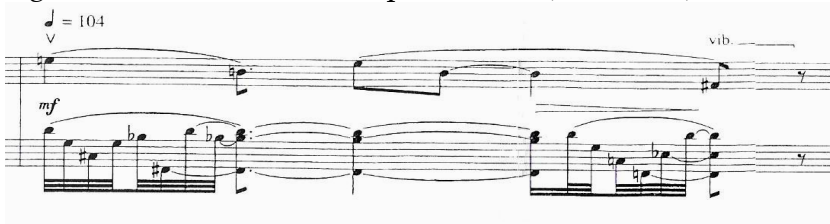
Figure 18. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (excerpt from the development after theme A4 - climax of the work)



In order to highlight the climax of the work and balance the sonority between the two keyboards, the composer opts for the master register in the bass line and the oboe register (he adds a higher 8th) in the high line.

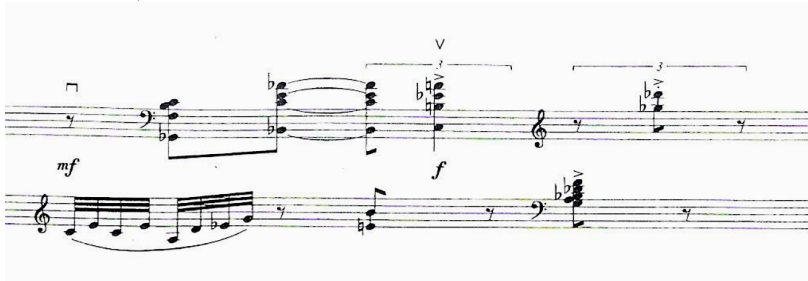
In system 23, the counterpoint presented in the bass line remains unchanged but the upper voice returns again to its origins, presenting the 3 initial notes of the theme. The **A5 theme** is a short variation (fig. 19).

Figure 19. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (theme A5)



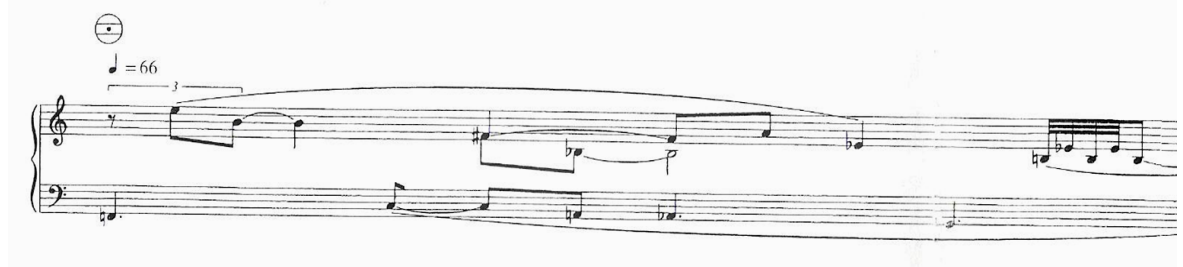
After the presentation of the climax in the previous section, a short development alternates moments of silence with clusters and chords that are repeated sparsely in imitation. The sound play between the chords of the lower voice and the cluster of the upper voice, with accented notes or played in staccato, along with the alternation of strong dynamics and piano, reveals the intention of echo (fig. 20). The presentation of the A5 theme and its development lasts 2 systems.

Figure 20. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (excerpt from the development after theme A5)



At the end of the development there is again an inflection from Gb to F in the bass line, with the consequent appearance of the **A6 theme** in system 25 (fig. 21). The chromatic and ornamental variations complete the exposition of this theme.

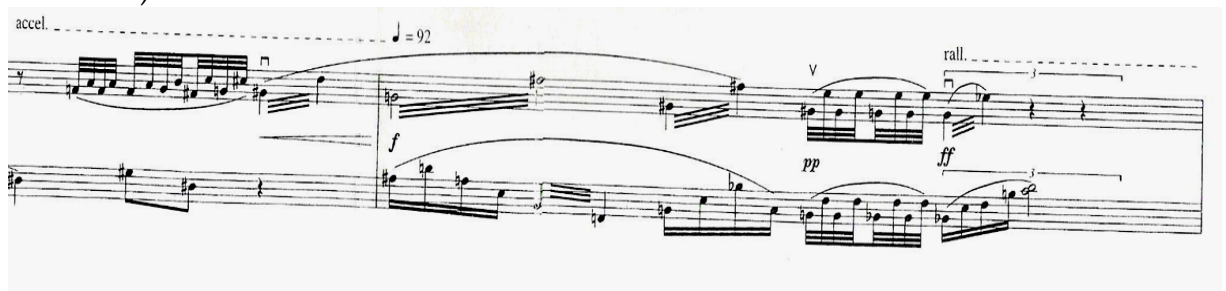
Figure 21. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (theme A6)



The development that follows is rhythmically disconcerted and in tighter, more continuous counterpoint without long periods of breathing. With great contrasts in tempo (66, 84, 92, 104) and dynamics (from ppp to fff), sometimes suddenly, the development makes use of tremolos on both keyboards and the use of pre-defined chords. The presentation of the **A6 theme** and its development lasts 5 and a half systems.

There is a constant focus on previously exposed motifs (in the development after theme A2), which now appear in a kind of revival of the listener's memory for its existence. The lower voice sometimes takes precedence over the upper voice, which will focus its musical discourse on small motifs filled with tremulous ones. Fast-moving sequential motifs also appear in the upper voice, in counterpoint with the lower voice (fig. 22). At this point, activating the converter for free bass contributes to a greater distinction between high and low ranges and also allows a greater perception of melodic speech.

Figure 22. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (excerpt from the development after theme A6)

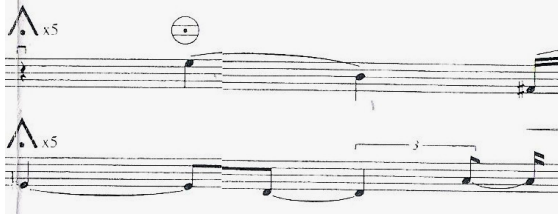


Then, the speech speeds up, the roles between the voices are reversed and the bottom line with the standard basses activated presents a short period of accompaniment of the top line.

The final development notes prepare the presentation of the theme again: the E-B notes in the upper voice are accompanied by the Gb note in the lower voice,

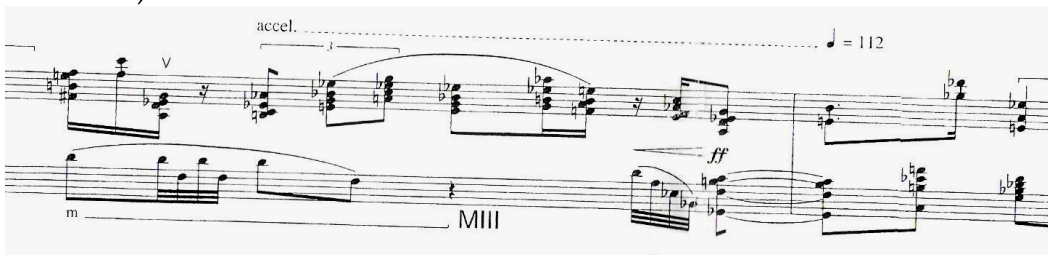
which will decline to F. In a short version, out of step with the initial theme, in system 30 the **theme A7** is now presented (fig. 23).

Figure 23. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (theme A7)



In the development, a polyphonic structure (chords) is presented and the resource alternating between pre-defined chords and free basses is required (fig. 24). The tempo accelerates to a quarter note = 112 and various rhythmic triplets are played between the two keyboards, combining different rhythms simultaneously. The bass line focuses on drawing pre-defined D minor and F minor chords. The presentation of the A7 theme and its development lasts 2 systems.

Figure 24. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (excerpt from the development after theme A7)



The composer again uses material exposed in previous sections (in the development after the A2 theme), but now in a denser form. The sequence of chords intensifies, sometimes appearing some clusters in the speech.

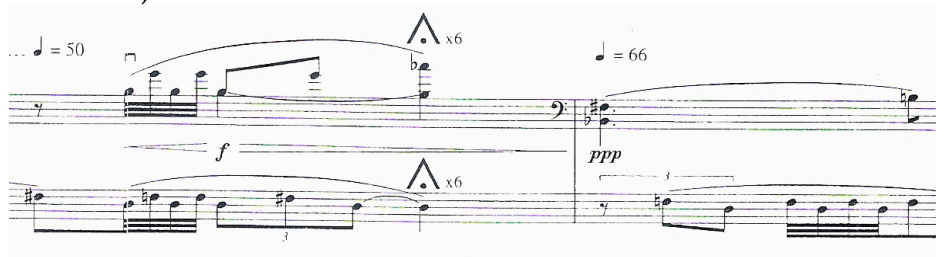
In system 32, the rhythmic play in the lower voice with the pre-defined chords D minor and F minor is maintained and counterpoints the initial theme in the upper voice, presented in long notes (fig. 25). The **A8 theme** will rest in the interval of the ninth (G-Ab) supported by the note D in the bass.

Figure 25. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (theme A8)



In the development, the alternation between free and standard basses is maintained, the material is presented with great amplitude in the tessitura (through the use of registers and the great extension of the keyboards), the rest is interspersed in prolonged notes and the rhythmic agitation disappears extinguishing progressively (fig. 26). The end of development is marked by a trill combined with an ostinato. The presentation of the A8 theme and its development lasts 6 and a half systems.

Figure 26. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (excerpt from the development after theme A8)



The rhythmic game in the lower voice is resumed, with the pre-defined chords D minor and F minor and also oscillating with F minor and A minor. Simultaneously, the upper voice unfolds in the initial motif, now presenting the first four notes (E, B, F#, Bb) in a kind of ending that is guessed by the dynamics in crescendo and by the opening of the medium register in the instrument. The beginning of the theme begins to appear more frequently, in a kind of stretto to a voice that takes us to the end of the work.

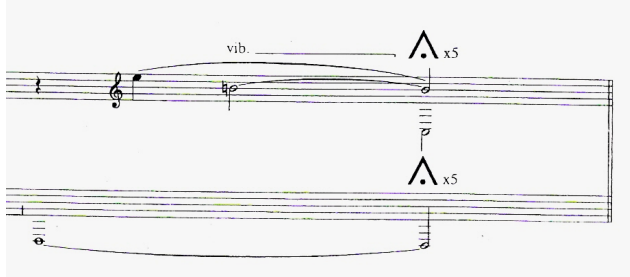
The last two systems present a final return to the origins. A predefined 5-chord ostinato bass, recognizable from previous sections (in the development after the A2 theme), is fed in a kind of Coda by small remnants of the initial theme in the upper voice (E, B). **Theme A9** appears in system 38 (fig. 27).

Figure 27. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (theme A9)



The final motif, in pp and in a prolonged rest on the B note in the upper voice (2nd note of the E-B-F# motif), leaves us with an inconclusive and mysterious ending (fig. 28). It leaves open something that could remain in the listener's head in constant boiling, in a kind of uncertain destiny.



**Figure 28.** Luciano Berio, *Sequenza XIII* (final exposition)

Next, an analysis is presented of some aspects that stand out in *Sequenza XIII* (Chanson) in terms of the use of various resources available in the accordion with converter system.

### **Conclusions - The Interpreter's Point of View**

From the point of view of the performer and the use of the accordion with a converter, the constant transition / alternation between the standard basses and the basses released by the action of the converter should be highlighted. For this purpose, the composer used the notation MII - standard basses (fig. 29) and MIII - free basses (fig. 30). Perhaps, of the composers studied in this chapter of the PhD programme, Luciano Berio is the composer who achieves the best symbiosis between these two systems. The pre-established combination of major, minor, dominant seventh and diminished chords provide moments of great sonic richness, creating a dense mass effect that at the intended speed is only possible with standard basses. In turn, the free bass system provides greater clarity in the speech, also allowing several octaves to be covered on the left-hand keyboard. The use of these two systems is associated, in the context of the work, with the passage of the accordion from traditional music to classical music. In fact, the musical text composed by the composer Luciano Berio transports us between traditional music environments, perhaps inspired by the French chanson, and the classical music environments inspired by Webern, Schonberg, Boulez and Stockhausen. This language that seeks modernity and new forms of expression transfigures the capabilities of the instrument (accordion) and the instrumentalist in reaching new interpretation challenges.

Figure 29. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (recourse to standard bass)

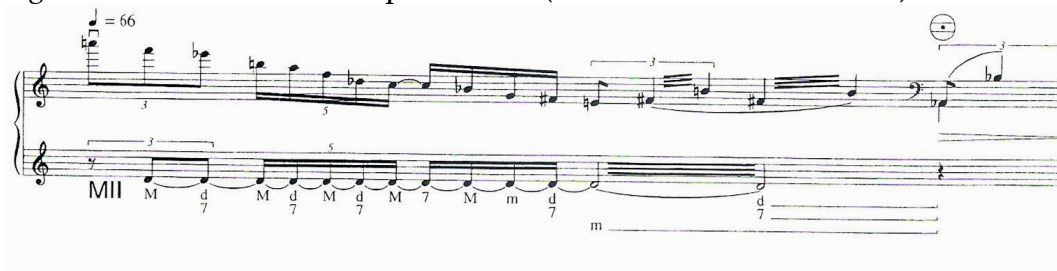
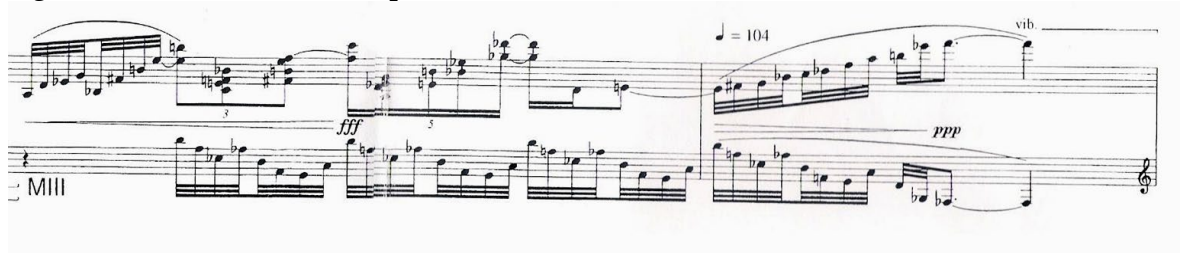


Figure 30. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (recourse to Free Bass)

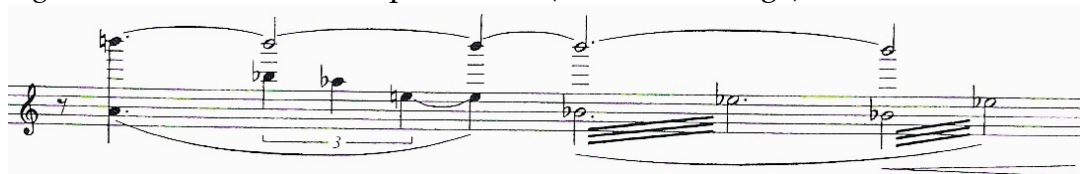


With regard to the use of registers, Luciano Berio uses only the middle registers in the upper voice (clarinet, violin) in the hope of obtaining a clear language and conveying tranquillity in the exhibition. He occasionally resorts to the combination of the high register (oboe) in order to obtain some sparkle in his speech. The isolated use of the tremolo/musette register near the end of the work, together with the use of standard basses, seems intentional on the part of the composer, who intends to recall the popular roots of the instrument. Gartmann (2007) refers that, despite all the complexity, the rhythm present in the work is more reminiscent of the pulsations of light music and that the final systems of the piece create a synthesis of the two musical worlds of the accordion (light and classical).

As for the bass line, it usually appears through a single voice recording, the master recording being used only at the height of the work (system 21), not only to give sound body to this section but also to make the speech perfectly perceptible and audible, in relation to the material exposed in the upper voice.

Gartmann (2007) refers that the work presents harmonic intervals and chords that are only possible to play on the accordion, as on the right-hand keyboard it is possible to play up to three octaves (fig. 31).

Figure 31. Luciano Berio, Sequenza XIII (two-octave range)





Finally, Luciano Berio's *Sequenza XIII* presents innovations and challenges for accordion technique and challenges the limits and capabilities of instrumentalists, currently being recognized as a reference work in current programs at Universities and Higher Education Institutions.

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