

Jesse Jones: Prelude (2019), for solo viola, Op. 73

There is a rich yet difficult-to-describe body of work in the classical canon known as the *Prelude*. These pieces were produced by composers throughout the baroque, romantic, and modern eras and were usually short and aphoristic in nature; they also tended to focus on a single musical texture or idea and acted predominantly as introductions or foils to more substantial forms: the *fugue*, the *allegro*, or the *allemande/saraband/gigue*, etc.

Chopin brilliantly broke the mould with his collection of 24 piano preludes, each of which beautifully and distinctly set the mood for a larger-form composition, but then leave the listener to imagine what (if anything) follows. I believe this special, evanescent quality in Chopin's preludes is what inspired later composers, such as Rachmaninoff, Scriabin, and Debussy to produce their own volumes of preludes.

As a composer, myself, I am attracted to this flexible musical form. I have long wanted to create a collection of short pieces, similar in size and scope to those of Chopin. However, in lieu of composing such a collection for solo piano, and thus pitting myself against the likes of Debussy et al., I decided to focus my creative energies on that dark horse of the string world: the viola.

My prelude is focussed largely on the string-crossing technique known as *bariolage*, where the violist creates a rapid rippling texture with the bow while simultaneously navigating slow-moving harmonic shapes in the fingers and bringing embedded melodies to the fore. This brief yet demanding piece is the first instalment in what I hope will be a larger collection of preludes: a book of short pieces which can stand alone, perhaps as encores, or which can be linked to something else, works that can be grouped together in various orders to form three- or four-part sets (at the performer's discretion), or which can connect two larger compositions.

Here is the recording: