

Fantasy and Transformation: A Summary of Dissertation Recitals

by

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ABSTRACT

Three dissertation recitals were performed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts (Music: Piano Performance) at the University of Michigan. The composers presented on the three programs explored the depths of their creative imagination, producing works of sublime creativity and inspiration.

The first recital included Franz Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasie*, Op. 15, a work based on his song by the same title; Lili Boulanger's *Trois Morceaux*, a set of miniature tableaux illustrating the brilliant imagination of a young composer; and Robert Schumann's *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12, an example of programmatic music born out of his love of literature. The performance took place in Britton Recital Hall on December 10, 2017.

The lecture recital consisted of selections from Olivier Messiaen's *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*. Messiaen's compositional language was discussed along with various compositional techniques and innovations. The lecture also included excerpts from an interview with French pianist, Michel Béroff, who worked on the piece with Messiaen and was one of the first pianists to perform the complete work. Following the lecture portion of the program was a performance of the following movements: I. *Regard du Père*, X. *Regard de l'Esprit de joie*, XI.

Première communion de la Vierge, and XV. *Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jesus*. The lecture recital took place in Stamps Auditorium on January 27, 2018.

The third dissertation recital included the theme of fantasy with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Fantasy in C minor, K. 475; an example of Mozart's skillfulness as an improviser; Frédéric Chopin's Barcarolle; Alexander Scriabin's Piano Sonata no. 4, a work representative of his new tendencies towards musical mysticism; and Johannes Brahms' 7 Fantasies, Op. 116. The final recital took place in Stamps Auditorium on March 29, 2018.

RECITAL 1 PROGRAM

Fantasie in C major, D. 760 (“Wanderer”) (1822)
Allegro con fuoco ma non troppo
Adagio
Presto
Allegro

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)

Trois Morceaux (1914)
D’un vieux jardin
D’un jardin clair
Cortège

Lili Boulanger
(1893-1918)

Fantasiestücke, op. 12 (1837)
Des Abends
Aufschwung
Warum?
Grillen
In der Nacht
Fabel
Traumes Wirren
Ende vom Lied

Robert Schumann
(1810-1856)

RECITAL 1 PROGRAM NOTES

Wanderer Fantasie in C minor, D. 760 (1822)

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

A pianistic *tour de force*, Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasie* has earned its place in the piano repertoire as one of the most artistically effective and technically challenging pieces. Schubert, deeming it too difficult to play, himself, declared in frustration "The devil may play it, for I cannot!"¹ Schubert's natural affinity for symphonic sonorities seems to have given Liszt, who became fascinated with the work, the impetus to transcribe the work for piano and orchestra in 1851. The work's most defining, and compositionally significant characteristic is the unprecedented centrality of "thematic transformation" as the primary tool in developing the music, a technique which Liszt would later employ for his Piano Sonata in B minor.

The genesis of the *Wanderer Fantasie* is in Schubert's lied. The title of the work, which was applied to it later by Liszt, derives from Schubert's well-known song, "Der Wanderer," composed in 1816. The song is quoted in the second movement, serving as the original basis of the entire work. Set to a text by Schmidt von Lübeck, "Der Wanderer" paints a portrait of a young man lost in the depths of melancholia, feeling like a stranger everywhere he goes. He sings about feelings of loneliness, rejection, and the meaninglessness of life, all characteristics of the extremes to which romanticism was taken in this period. The most surprising aspect of the quoted melody is how its character contrasts with the expressions of joy and triumph that dominate the rest of the piece.

¹ Hollingsworth, 2008.

The four-movement structure of the work is modeled after the multi-movement sonata format. But Schubert then breaks away from this tradition by melding the movements together and transforming the song's initial thematic and rhythmic motto throughout the work. The piece opens with a jubilant theme in C major that becomes the subject of perpetual variation. The constant reiteration of the theme makes the head motif instantly recognizable in the following movements. The second theme, more lyrical but still invoking the rhythmic motto, is in the key of E-flat major, a chromatic mediant relationship to the tonic of C major. The movement ends with the rhythmic motto gradually slowing down and transitioning seamlessly into the *Adagio*. In the even-more distant key of C-sharp major, the *Adagio* is a "theme and variations" movement based on just two phrases from the "Wanderer" song. The original theme is simple, and hauntingly beautiful, but it is Schubert's imaginative textures and colors of its variations that make this movement remarkable. In the third movement, the rhythmic motto is transformed into a triple meter Scherzo in A-flat major, the chromatic submediant of the C major home key. The trio section is based on the second theme of the first movement, and it provides a moment of relief before the virtuosic frenzy that ensues without a break with the arrival of the Fugue. A rarity in Schubert's work, the Fugue, back in C major, builds on texture and tension while becoming increasingly virtuosic. Here, too, the fugue subject is derived from the core rhythmic motto. The relentless sequences and variations of the theme drive the piece to its triumphant conclusion.

Trois Morceaux Pour Piano (1914)

Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)

Lili Boulanger's prodigious talent was discovered at a young age by Gabriel Fauré, a family friend, and later one of her teachers. Her musical education began when she followed her

older sister, Nadia Boulanger, who later became a renowned composition teacher, to study at the Paris Conservatoire. She enjoyed strong support and guidance in her compositional pursuits, the kind rarely afforded to female composers at the time. In 1913, Lili completed *Faust et Hélène*, a large-scale cantata that would earn her the coveted *Prix de Rome* in composition. At the age of 18, she became the first female composer to win the prize.

Following the success at the *Prix de Rome*, Lili stayed at the Villa Medici, as part of the prize. One of the works composed during her stay was the *Trois morceaux pour piano*. These short pieces are charming and meticulously crafted musical moments. Her serious composition background is evident in her masterful use of harmony and texture. The first piece “D’un jardin clair” (“Of a Bright Garden”) is based on a single melodic line whose fragments appear throughout the piece. The parallel fourths and fifths create the unmistakably French sound world, with the serene accompaniment of the melody evocative of Satie, an episode of calm and contemplation.² The second piece, “D’un vieux jardin” (“Of an Old Garden”) is another musical episode closely related in style. The elegant melody of the opening measures becomes intertwined in fuller harmonic textures, leading into a series of cascading intervals of fourths that spans every register. The third piece “Cortège” (“Procession” or “March”) is a solo piano transcription of a violin and piano duo, written in the same year. The piece, less than two minutes long, is a cheerful and energetic musical episode. Lili gives this piece a positive meaning to the word “cortège,” ending the *morceaux* with a jubilant celebration.

Lili Boulanger, at the peak of her creativity and promise, tragically died at the young age of 24. Composer Henry Baraud wrote: “The oeuvre of Lili Boulanger is a monument realized. It is not simply the promise of great work to come, but the achievement of an exquisite body of work

² Typaldos, 1994.

by a composer of accomplished style, firmly rooted in a classicism which owes nothing to a School but solely to the natural perception which stems from a penetrating intelligence and talent.”³

Fantasiestücke, Op. 12 (1837)

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

For Schumann, the creative process began with writing. From an early age, he kept a private diary with his thoughts and moods. Additionally, there are vast amounts of letters and correspondences from Schumann to his friends and family members. An avid reader, Schumann was particularly affected by the theme of the *doppelgänger*, a characteristic idea of the Romantic era, made popular by the author, Jean Paul. In *Die Flegeljahre*, twin brothers Walt and Vult exhibit their polar opposite personalities in their pursuit of Wina.⁴ The dynamic between the deceptive and flamboyant Walt, versus the honest and sensitive Vult, left a profound impression on Schumann, a young composer yearning for creative inspiration. Here is born Schumann’s idea for his own alter egos, Florestan and Eusebius, two men symbolizing his extroverted and introverted sides, respectively.

Inspired by E. T. A. Hofmann’s *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier*, Schumann’s *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12 is a set of eight character pieces, each one a musical embodiment of either Florestan or Eusebius. The opening movement, “Des Abends” (“In the Evening”) demonstrates Schumann’s mastery of the miniature form. Short in length, it is a representation of Eusebius and his dreamy mood as a gentle melody ebbs and flows like tiny waves on a lakeshore, eventually returning to stillness. This is broken abruptly with

³ Mario de Bonaventura, 1979.

⁴ Taruskin, 2005.

“Aufschwung,” (“Soaring”) the musical embodiment of Florestan—full of passion, symbolizing his excesses. In “Warum?” Eusebius innocently reflects on the storminess of the previous movement. Florestan is back to his portentous ways in the jovial “Grillen” (“Whims”). The fifth movement, titled “In der Nacht,” divides the set into two books. It was Schumann’s favorite piece, in which he merges the two characters for the first time. It alternates between passion and serenity. In “Fabel” (“Fable”), Schumann brings the two characters together again, with each one interrupting the other in their storytelling. “Traumes Wirren” (“Dream’s Confusions”) is a virtuosic whirlwind that stops occasionally to take a breath. Schumann closes the set with “Ende vom Lied,” a piece that scholar David Ewen calls, “a combination of wedding bells and funeral bells.” In a letter to Clara, Robert Schumann writes about the piece, “At the time, I thought: well in the end it all resolves itself into a jolly wedding. But at the close, my painful anxiety about you returned.”⁵

⁵ David Ewen, 1965.

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RECITAL 2 PROGRAM

MESSIAEN: SYMBOLISM AND TRANSFORMATION

Lecture

Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus (1944)

I. Regard du Père

X. Regard de l'Esprit de joie

XI. Première communion de la Vierge

XV. Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus

Olivier Messiaen
(1908-1992)

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RECITAL 3 PROGRAM

Fantasy in C minor, K. 475 (1785)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

Barcarolle in F-sharp Major, op. 60 (1846)

Frédéric Chopin
(1810-1849)

Piano Sonata no. 4 in F-sharp Major, Op. 30 (1903)

Alexander Scriabin
(1872-1915)

7 Fantasies, op. 116 (1892)

Capriccio in D Minor: Presto energico

Intermezzo in A Minor: Andante

Capriccio in G Minor: Allegro passionato

Intermezzo in E Major: Adagio

Intermezzo in E Minor: Andante con grazia ed intimissimo sentiment

Intermezzo in E Major: Andantino teneramente

Capriccio in D Minor: Allegro agitato

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

RECITAL 3 PROGRAM NOTES

Fantasy in C minor, K. 475 (1785)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

The C minor Fantasy was composed during a particularly successful period in Vienna, where Mozart had developed a reputation as a great composer and pianist. His improvisation skills were especially noted for their ingenuity and brilliance during his performances at various Viennese salons. The Fantasy, paired with the Sonata in C major, K. 457 written the previous year, were jointly published. It is not clear whether Mozart meant for the two works to be performed together, with the Fantasy serving as the slow, improvisatory prelude to the Sonata, but many pianists have performed the Fantasy alone.

The Fantasy is structured into six sections, alternating free writing with strict binary forms. The opening *Adagio* melody in unison is in the dark key of C minor. The opening measures set the tone of harmonic ambiguity with an almost immediate deviation from the tonal center into remote key areas, sinking farther and farther away from the home key. A cadenza-like episode leads to a beautiful lyrical melody with a simple accompaniment in D major, a section in rounded binary form. The stormy *Allegro* section shocks the listener with jarring tremolos in the right hand. A sense of impending doom is soon relieved by another lyrical melody, now in F major and with frequent modal and tonal shifts. Following another elaborate cadenza-like episode, cadencing on the dominant, the playful *Andantino* section settles on the key of B-flat major. This light-hearted section is tonally and thematically stable, much like the previous D major episode. Again, we are presented with a rounded binary form, but this time with written out and varied repeats. This section could easily stand alone as a movement in a larger work. It

too, soon gives way to high drama with orchestral-like tremolos, shifts of orchestration, and perpetual modulations until the opening *Adagio* returns. Even more expressive in this final statement are the shifts in moods and dynamics. The restlessness and drama of C minor are heightened with the sweeping scale up to the final C minor chord. In such highly dramatic, dark and brooding music, Mozart foreshadows much of what Beethoven was to do later. Indeed, the minor key compositions of Mozart had a profound influence on Beethoven's later development.

Barcarolle in F-sharp Major, Op. 60 (1846)

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)

One of Chopin's most beloved compositions, the Barcarolle is a masterpiece of Romantic expression and an example of Chopin's mastery of unconventional form.¹ Written in 1845, Chopin's Barcarolle came at a time when the genre was becoming increasingly popular. One of Mendelssohn's songs without words, which Chopin was familiar with and gave to his students to study, is titled "Venezianisches Gondellied," meant to evoke in music the famous Venetian boats. Another well-known work from this period that was inspired by gondola songs is Liszt's *Venezia e Napoli*. Strophic in form, gondola songs are characterized by their gently rocking accompaniment in flowing triplets that evoke the motion of water under the boat. In the Barcarolle, Chopin takes the folk-like genre and turns it into a musical and compositional jewel.

Particularly noteworthy in this work is Chopin's thematic treatment of the two main melodies. He rarely states an idea the same way twice. He always introduces a subtle change when the idea reappears, whether it is adding a slight ornamental variation or deepening the harmonic complexity.² Following an opening gesture over a dominant pedal, the tender melody in thirds, marked *cantabile*, emerges out of silence. This primary melody, accompanied by the

¹ Rink, 1988.

² Cone, 1968.

oscillating figures in the left hand, is a beautiful moment of musical poetry. The steady, lilting rhythm of the accompaniment provides a canvas for the lyrical melody, always subtly varied, through shimmering waves of water. Following a brief development, the melody returns with double trills and a fuller emotional intensity. A somewhat static transition brings about the second main melody in the key of A major. This second melody closely follows the contour of the accompaniment, giving the music an even stronger sense of swaying back and forth. The melody gains in intensity with a harmonically fuller restatement in a higher register. The transition back to the first melody is a moment of truly sublime inspiration. Over the dominant of the home key and marked *dolce sfogato*, a free melody unfolds. The almost improvisatory feeling of phrases and the iridescent sparkle of the high register transports the listener into another dimension, evoking the many hours Chopin spent listening to *bel canto* opera. The principal melody is restated in its most dramatic form yet with double trills and chords in the right hand, and the left hand accompaniment now in octaves. Soon the second melody is restated in the same way, continuing to build in intensity and climaxing in the coda. After a powerful moment of emotional culmination, the music begins to slowly subside in energy, finally giving way to gentle ripples before triumphantly cadencing in a dominant-tonic progression.

Piano Sonata No. 4 in F-sharp Major, Op. 30 (1903) Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915)

Following the resignation from his teaching position at the Moscow Conservatory in 1903, Scriabin's newly acquired artistic freedom begins to manifest itself with his fourth piano sonata. In a shift away from the influence of Romantic composers, Scriabin's creative burst brings him to create a musical language entirely his own. A number of elements crucial to his creative aesthetic include poetry, synesthesia, and theosophy. Beginning with the fourth sonata,

Scriabin's harmonic language becomes increasingly chromatic with the continuous loosening of the dominant function. Scriabin's harmonic language becomes increasingly chromatic with the continuous loosening of the dominant function. A poem Scriabin wrote describes the mystical spirit of the work:

In a light mist, transparent vapor
Lost afar and yet distinct
A star gleams softly.

How beautiful! The bluish mystery
Of her glow
beckons me, cradles me.

O bring me to thee, far distant star!
Bathe me in trembling rays
Sweet light!

Sharp desire, voluptuous and crazed yet sweet
Endlessly with no other goal than longing
I would desire.

But no! I vault in joyous leap
Freely I take wing

Mad dance, godlike play!
Intoxicating shining one!

It is toward thee, adored star
My flight guides me

Toward thee, created freely for me
To serve the end

My flight of liberation! In this play
Sheer caprice
In moments I forget thee
In the maelstrom that carries me
I veer from thy glimmering rays

In the insanity of desire
thou fadest
O distant goal

But ever thou shinest

As I forever desire thee
Thou expandest, star!
Now thou art a Sun
Flamboyant Sun! Sun of Triumph!

Approaching thee by my desire for thee
I lave myself in thy changing waves
O joyous god

I swallow thee
Sea of light

My self-of light

I engulf Thee!

The shortest of the piano sonatas, the fourth sonata is in two continuous movements, the first permeated by song-like melodies, the second dance-like throughout. The lyric *Andante* movement opens the work with a poetic introspection. There is a tendency with each phrase to pull the music toward the higher registers of the keyboard. The pull to the top almost serves as a foreshadowing of the ecstatic flight to come. The opening theme serves as the unifying thread throughout the work with its masterful transformation into a dance in the second movement. Following the deeply expressive lyricism and shimmering suspension of harmonies of the *Andante*, the second movement enters *attacca*, emerging seamlessly out of silence.

Marked *prestissimo volando*, Scriabin demanded of the movement: “(I want it) as fast as possible, on the verge of the possible... it must be a flight at the speed of light, straight towards the sun, into the sun!”³ The second movement has transformed the principal theme from the first movement into an energetic, listless character that is constantly evading dominant resolution. The development section further accelerates the tumultuous musical insanity, increasingly complicated by technical acrobatics, sudden register changes, leaps, jumps. One can almost see the dance unfolding. With the arrival of the Coda, the principal theme returns in a cataclysmic final statement, an eruption of jubilant ecstasy. The final unrelenting, repeated harmonies bring the work to a glorious and affirmative end.

7 Fantasies, Op. 116 (1892)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Following another break from writing piano music, this time to focus on vocal works, Brahms produced his Opp. 116-119 in the early 1890s, shifting focus from large scale piano compositions towards miniature forms. Though brief, these late period compositions are among

³ Nicholls, 1996.

some of his most musically complex and densely composed works. Deeply expressive and personal, these pieces are a characteristic example of Brahms' turn inward, away from virtuosity toward introspection. The Op. 116 pieces are unique among the late period sets in their designation as *Fantasies*, rather than the more general *Klavierstücke* or *Intermezzi*. Two fiery Capriccios in D minor frame the work, with the inner *Intermezzo* movements alternating between passion and drama with sweet moments of contemplation and reflection.

The opening Capriccio, marked *Presto*, begins the set with an energy reminiscent of Brahms' earlier works. The sense of drama is heightened by rhythmic volatility, as Brahms creates textures that sometimes sound like groups of two, and sometimes groups of three depending on how one hears them. The effect is unsettling and driving, ceaselessly propelling the energy to the end. The A minor Intermezzo unfolds a delicately beautiful melody with a halting emphasis on the second beat of the bar. In many ways, this piece is reminiscent of a sarabande, seen through Brahms' 19th century eyes. In ternary form, the middle section introduces a new melody in the top register, also with complicated rhythmic and textural ambiguity in the patterns, while the left hand transforms the opening sarabande rhythm into an oscillating accompaniment. The captivating passage of seventh chords transitions into the final restatement of the principal idea. The Capriccio in G minor brings back the passionate energy of the first piece. The chordal middle section evokes a sense of nobility reminiscent of Brahms' earlier works. The E major Intermezzo is perhaps the most personal and introspective of the set. The evolution of the melody finds a fitting environment in the meditative character of the piece. This piece is also the first of three Intermezzi in E that create a sense of one slow movement in three parts. The second Intermezzo in E minor begins with an episode of puzzle-like static patterns, note-against-note counterpoint, one hand an inversion of the other. These initial unresolved harmonies are briefly

interrupted by a lyrical middle section in the brighter and more hopeful key of B major. After a return of the opening in the unusual key of the subdominant, the restatement of the chordal pattern concludes the piece. The final E major Intermezzo opens with a chorale-like texture marked *Andantino teneramente*. One could easily imagine a chorale of sorts performed on an organ. The minuet-like character of the melody, one full of rich chromaticism, gives way to the harmonically ambiguous middle section which features a beautiful melody woven into cascading triads. The return of the E major melody brings the piece to a warmly nostalgic close. The set concludes with a whirling final Capriccio in D minor. The descending thirds motif heard in the third movement is intensified by contrary motion between the hands. In the middle section, the crossing of voices and rhythms creates further instability. The return of the modified opening section ushers in a virtuosic coda that brings the piece to a triumphant end.

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