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A COMPARISON OF TWO SETS OF VARIATIONS ON CHOPIN'S  
*PRELUDE* OP. 28, NO. 20 IN C MINOR:  
FERRUCCIO BUSONI'S *TEN VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY CHOPIN*, BV 213a AND  
SERGEI RACHMANINOFF'S *VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF CHOPIN*, OP. 22

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores and compares two sets of variations that use Frédéric Chopin's Prelude, op. 28, no. 20 as a theme: Sergei Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme by Chopin*, op. 22 (1902-1903) and Ferruccio Busoni's *Ten Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*, BV 213a (1922). The first primary goal of this paper is to provide a comparative overview of the two variation sets through their different approaches to the use of the same musical theme, including historical, compositional, and performance considerations as well as recording history. While it is impossible to prove theories about a society's musical tastes, this study will provide a better understanding of culture and history surrounding these works. Through an examination of each composer's approach to variation form and their development of Chopin's Prelude, op. 28, no. 20, combined with a catalog of recordings of each work, the secondary goal is to be able to increase the understanding of the reception of both composers' use of the same work as a theme. This information will allow for greater inferences to be made about the development of musical tastes and history in recent years.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I devote this dissertation to those who have helped me make it to my final course of studies, both academically and personally. I foremost mention my committee, especially my professor, Dr. Ian Hobson, and my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Gayle Magee. In addition, I greatly appreciate the knowledge and advice provided by my additional committee members, Dr. Christos Tsitsaros and Dr. Dana Robinson. I also appreciate all that my family, particularly my parents and brother, have given and done to make this achievement possible for me. Without them, I would never be where I am today.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Overview

This project studies and compares two sets of variations that use Frédéric Chopin's Prelude, op. 28, no. 20 as a theme: Sergei Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22 and Ferruccio Busoni's *Ten Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*, BV 213a. This study will provide a better picture of Rachmaninoff and Busoni through their different approaches to the use of the same musical theme, including historical, compositional, and performance considerations as well as recording history.

This study investigates several elements of each of the two sets of variations, including their compositional and public histories, through reviews and recordings and an interview with a performer. In particular, the role of this Chopin work in the lives of Busoni and Rachmaninoff as well as the recording and reception histories of their works will be examined. This study also analyzes and compares the structure and compositional features of both sets of variations, including an analysis of how Busoni and Rachmaninoff utilize texture and variation techniques in their variations on Chopin's Prelude op. 28, no. 20. Finally, the dissertation compares the two works, particularly their commercial recording success.

By examining these works, the dissertation will consider two contrasting compositions on the same theme, which have remarkably different profiles. Busoni's set of variations is unknown to many pianists and has not had more than one scholarly study dedicated to it. Dr. Yoon's Doctor of Musical Arts dissertation includes only a minimal analysis of each variation, with the dissertation's main focus being on differences in form between the 1884 and 1922 editions.

There is no mention of performance trends or reception history.<sup>1</sup> The Rachmaninoff, on the other hand, has been the focus of study in Dr. Ysac's Doctor of Education dissertation<sup>2</sup> which compares Rachmaninoff's *Chopin Variations* to his *Corelli Variations*; Busoni's variations are not a topic of the dissertation. Considering this dearth of information, this research will help to increase knowledge and familiarity with these works both individually and in relation to one another. Both Busoni and Rachmaninoff have made significant contributions to the standard repertoire throughout their lifetimes, and the skills needed to play their piano works require a level of training not often seen.

Neither Rachmaninoff's nor Busoni's variations are well-known today, at least compared to their other more famous and frequently performed works such as Rachmaninoff's twenty-four Piano Preludes, four Piano Concerti, and Busoni's Piano Preludes and his transcriptions of works such as Bach's Chaconne in D minor. Studying these sets of variations and how the composers chose to adapt and embellish a theme provides not just a comparative history of the works but also provides information about their recording and reception history, which is key to understanding both the works and composers. This examination is vital for better understanding why these works are not performed more often and explaining why they should be more frequently approached by listeners, performers, and musicologists alike.

Part of why I am drawn to this topic is due to my undergraduate music history thesis in which I investigated the performance history of the Debussy Piano Preludes in the United States

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<sup>1</sup> Soomee Yoon, "Addition, Omission and Revision: The Stylistic Changes Made to *Zehn Variationen über Ein Präludium von Chopin* by Ferruccio Busoni" (University of North Texas, 1994), <http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc278472/>.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Ysac, "A Study, Analysis and Performance of the Two Sets of Piano Solo Variations by Sergei Rachmaninoff: 1. Variations on a Theme of Chopin op. 22. 2. Variations on a Theme of Corelli op. 42" (Teachers College, Columbia University, 1978), <http://search.proquest.com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/pqdtft/docview/302922811/citation/A5CB3CF8511540F0PQ/4>.

from 1900-1940. In doing so, I was able to contribute to an understanding of the development of music history and tastes in the United States. Similarly, I am adding additional information to the history of the works and making unique contributions to the reception history of Rachmaninoff and Busoni's variations on Chopin Prelude, op. 28, no. 20. I seek to begin a discussion of the reasons for the relative lack of recordings of these variation sets.

### **Methodology**

I conducted my research in several stages. First, I reviewed secondary sources in order to provide the necessary background information, including a history of the use of theme and variation form, a history of the Chopin Preludes, op. 28, and basic biographies of Rachmaninoff and Busoni. To compare and contrast these particular works, I reviewed and analyzed primary sources, especially *urtext* editions of the scores and recordings. I used available secondary sources, particularly dissertations, that describe these works.

To provide interpretative and performance data, I utilized a combination of primary and secondary sources. I listened to recordings of each work and followed the score as well as provided available reception history data. I also spoke with Dr. Ian Hobson, who has recorded a live performance of the Rachmaninoff variations, about the work and its interpretation and challenges. I used the same sources to analyze and compare the treatment of the theme and texture both within variation sets and between the sets and composers. To successfully discover additional influences on these works, the composers, and their compositional processes, I acquired, analyzed, cataloged, and compared secondary sources.

In the final portion of my dissertation, I created a catalog of recordings of each work and performed an analysis of this data. I used this information to make inferences about the reception history of these works and begin a discussion about the potential reasons for clear trends. The



trends of each individual set of variations can be used to propose preferences of musical taste and reveal why one work might be more popular than another. The hope is to spark interest in doing this type of analysis of additional works. Such recording detail will also be a great source of information for potential performers to find recordings and for those interested in the popularity of classical piano music (especially Rachmaninoff and Busoni) to further their studies.

### **Literature Review**

There is a significant amount of literature that addresses the Chopin Preludes, op. 28, but fewer works that discuss Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, and Busoni's *Ten Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*, BV 213a individually. There is nothing, however, which compares the two sets of variations side by side. Furthermore, the available literature is generally brief in its description and analysis of the works but deep in biographical details. Many of these sources describe the evolution of Busoni's and Rachmaninoff's compositional styles and techniques. The most significant number of sources pertain to the Chopin Preludes, op. 28.

Preliminary biographical data can be obtained through the entries on Busoni and Rachmaninoff in the *Grove Dictionary*.<sup>34</sup> Antony Beaumont's entry on Busoni provides extensive information not only on the background of Busoni's life and history but also on his compositions, offering detailed information about his piano compositions, performance career, and writings. Geoffrey Norris wrote a similar entry on Rachmaninoff's life and works which will also serve as foundational background data. An additional source is *Grove's* the entry on variations, which includes extensive information on the form and its use in different times and stylistic periods. I will further discuss two books in this literature review: *Busoni the Composer*

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<sup>3</sup> Antony Beaumont, "Busoni, Ferruccio," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed September 10, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/04438>.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Norris, "Rachmaninoff, Serge," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed September 10, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/50146>.

by Antony Beaumont and Edward Dent's *Ferruccio Busoni: A Biography*.<sup>56</sup> Elaine Sisman includes pertinent information regarding the necessary attributes of thematic material for use as a theme during the nineteenth-century.<sup>7</sup>

One important biography for this project is the aforementioned volume by Edward Dent, which is unique because the author knew Busoni personally.<sup>8</sup> This relationship enables Dent to provide additional details absent in many other publications. Most of the book is biographical and recounted somewhat subjectively and informally, making it more understandable and drawing in the reader. The appendices give a more systematic description of Busoni's repertoire, solo and orchestral performance locations, and complete works. Dent's book will be important to this project because it is a more personal take on Busoni's life, which will be especially valuable when investigating the reasons that he decided to edit his original set of variations.

A slightly later monograph by Antony Beaumont contains an early overview of Busoni and his works, which recognizes that Busoni was not well known at the time of the book's publication. His goal, therefore, is to provide biographical information and a basic overview of Busoni's mature compositions. He also provides a complete list of Busoni's works, although he only discusses the final fifty-eight in great detail. The chapter that will be most useful for this dissertation is chapter 21, "The *Klavierübung*,"<sup>9</sup> which discusses his late piano works, including the revised version of the original *Variations and Fugue in C minor on Prelude, op. 28, no. 20* by *Frédéric Chopin*, BV 213. This piece is discussed in the context of Busoni's organization and

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<sup>5</sup> Edward J. Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni: A Biography* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1974).

<sup>6</sup> Antony Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), specifically the chapter, "Chopin Variations," 295-310.

<sup>7</sup> Elaine Sisman, "Variations," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed September 11, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/29050>.

<sup>8</sup> Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni*.

<sup>9</sup> Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer*, 295-310.

publication of his complete piano works. Beaumont partially bases his study of these variations on Busoni's correspondence, some of which is replicated in the book, providing useful original data from the composer himself.

Larry Sitsky wrote a more analytical book, *Busoni and the Piano: The Works, the Writings, and the Recordings*,<sup>10</sup> which provides a descriptive catalog of his piano works. It also discusses his stylistic development and compositional periods, creative outlook, theory, and transcription practices. While discussing these topics, Sitsky provides excerpts from scores and manuscripts and includes a catalog of works and editions at the end. The most useful portion for my dissertation will be a section from chapter 5 that includes a brief comparison of Busoni's first and second versions of the variations on a Chopin's Prelude, op. 28, no. 20. Here, Sitsky compares only basic facts like composition date, dedicatee, form, published edition, and compositional influences.

Another source which includes relevant information is Grigory Kogan's book, *Busoni as Pianist*.<sup>11</sup> Kogan focuses primarily on Busoni as a performer but includes information in chapter 6 about his interpretation of Chopin. Of particular interest is a quote detailing that when Busoni played Chopin, it would turn into something nearly unrecognizable due to his embellishments.<sup>12</sup> Although there is no significant mention of either of his variation sets on the Chopin Prelude, op. 28, no. 20, Kogan does include a list of recordings that Busoni made. Here, it is revealed that CD transcriptions of his piano rolls have been made, including his recordings of the Chopin Preludes,

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<sup>10</sup> Larry Sitsky, *Busoni and the Piano: The Works, the Writings, and the Recordings* (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2009), specifically the chapter, "Miscellaneous Published Works," 49-70.

<sup>11</sup> Grigory Kogan, *Busoni as Pianist* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Kogan, *Busoni as Pianist*, 27-28.

op. 28.<sup>13</sup> Any CDs or other recordings pertaining to this dissertation were obtained through online databases, interlibrary loan, purchased or acquired digitally.

There are not many scholarly articles about Busoni and none to my knowledge about his *Ten Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*, BV 213a in particular. One of the few relevant articles is by Marc-André Roberge,<sup>14</sup> which provides a complex but useful explanation of the links between a number of composers and transcribers. Roberge groups them into “networks” based on their training, performances, writings, and transcriptions. His goal in discussing these relationships and their compositional style is to provide important links between composers and shed light on those less-frequently studied. Roberge supports this by providing examples of both academic and musical writings by the composers he discusses. The information on the “Busoni network” will be most pertinent to this dissertation, providing links to potential influences on the composer as well as people he might have influenced. It will be useful for furthering research and providing a background on compositional circumstances and the work itself.

While not specifically about either of these sets of variations, Erinn Knyt’s article, “‘How I Compose’: Ferruccio Busoni’s Views about Invention, Quotation, and the Compositional Process,” examines Busoni’s views on the compositional process, particularly his thoughts on quotation.<sup>15</sup> These views will be of particular importance when making conclusions about Busoni’s revisions and even his original composition. One of Knyt’s first statements is how Busoni’s continuous practice of arranging other people’s works always affected his original compositions, which will have a significant influence on my final analyses and conclusions.

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<sup>13</sup> Kogan, *Busoni as Pianist*, 115-20.

<sup>14</sup> Marc-André Roberge, “The Busoni Network and the Art of Creative Transcription,” *Canadian University Music Review* 11 (1991): 68-88.

<sup>15</sup> Erinn E. Knyt, “‘How I Compose’: Ferruccio Busoni’s Views about Invention, Quotation, and the Compositional Process,” *The Journal of Musicology* 27 (2010): 224-64.

Even with the lack of published articles on Busoni's two sets of variations on the Chopin Prelude, there is one dissertation that approaches the work. Soomee Yoon's Doctor of Musical Arts (University of North Texas) dissertation, "Addition. Omission and Revision: The Stylistic Changes Made to *Zehn Variationen über ein Praludium von Chopin* by Ferruccio Busoni,"<sup>16</sup> compares Busoni's original *Variations and Fugue in C minor on Prelude op. 28, no. 20* by *Frédéric Chopin*, BV 213 and his revised version, *Ten Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*, BV 213a. It is approached primarily as a compositional analysis focusing on differences in form between the earlier and later sets rather than giving any performance history or suggestions. In particular, Yoon discusses the changing use of the Chopin Prelude, op. 28, no. 20 as a theme from the 1884 to the 1922 version. My study will go into an in-depth analysis of each variation and will examine the performance and recording histories of these works, thereby offering a measure of the public success of these works.

The sources on Rachmaninoff are much more prevalent and detailed than some of the Busoni sources. Julian Haylock's book, *Sergei Rachmaninov: An Essential Guide to His Life and Works*, provides a basic biography of Rachmaninoff's life, starting as early as when he was a child in Russia and continuing until his death.<sup>17</sup> It also provides a complete list of works in addition to a list of recommended recordings. The book will be valuable for my dissertation because it provides a historical context for Rachmaninoff's composition. Regarding Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Haylock provides details about the events in his life at the time as well as a brief description of the work.

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<sup>16</sup> Yoon, "Addition, Omission and Revision."

<sup>17</sup> Julian Haylock, *Sergei Rachmaninov: An Essential Guide to His Life and Works* (London: Pavilion Books Limited, 1996).

Barrie Martyn's book, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, focuses on the overall history of Rachmaninoff's life in greater detail than the other sources found so far.<sup>18</sup> It also extensively discusses Rachmaninoff as a pianist and includes his concert statistics, repertoire, and discography. A large portion of the book is also spent discussing Rachmaninoff as a conductor. Martyn's purpose in covering each of these careers is to show the reader how Rachmaninoff achieved greatness in his life. Martyn discusses its significance as Rachmaninoff's first large-scale piano work and relationship to his other piano works from the same period. It also discusses the structure of the piece and touches on some theoretical issues as well.

Max Harrison's *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings* provides a great deal of background information about Rachmaninoff's life and style in addition to discussing the history behind his *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, their form, early performances, and context.<sup>19</sup> Harrison's work is one of the most valuable sources besides a Doctor of Education dissertation by Albert Ysac.<sup>20</sup> The dissertation serves as a companion to the performance of two doctoral recitals by the author. Ysac's goal is to provide a teaching and performance guide for the Chopin and Corelli variations that covers the structural, stylistic, and interpretative features of the works. Since the two sets of variations were composed around thirty years apart, Ysac's dissertation provides a substantial look at the development of Rachmaninoff's skills and style. The dissertation begins with a look at the development of theme and variation style as a whole since the Baroque and considers overall trends in Rachmaninoff's music, examines each variation individually, and ends with a summary of the wealth of technical and interpretative challenges found in both works. Ysac's work will be very valuable as a starting point for my analysis

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<sup>18</sup> Barrie Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990).

<sup>19</sup> Max Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings* (London: Continuum, 2006), specifically chapter 17, "Variations, Preludes, a Child is Born," 110-15.

<sup>20</sup> Ysac, "A Study, Analysis and Performance of Two Sets of Piano Solo Variations by Sergei Rachmaninoff."

(interpretative, technical, etc.) of Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin* and for examining compositional methods in comparison to Busoni's *Ten Variations on a Prelude by Chopin, BV 213a*.

In order to fully grasp and make my own conclusions on the similarities and differences between these two sets of variations, an understanding of the history of the Chopin Preludes, op. 28 is vital. In Jim Samson's book, *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*,<sup>21</sup> he collects and edits a number of chapters providing an overview of Chopin's style, work, development, reception, and influence on others. This book also includes a brief chronology of Chopin's life and a survey of the recordings of his works. There are two chapters most important to my dissertation. The first is the opening biography and introduction to Chopin's life. Here, Samson gives a brief overview of Chopin's life and states that the book's primary purpose is to introduce Chopin's works and their style.<sup>22</sup> The other key portion is chapter 6, "Small 'Forms': In Defense of the Prelude" by Jeffrey Kallberg,<sup>23</sup> which discusses the meaning of "form" within music, particularly "generic form" versus "structural form." Kallberg also discusses the status of miniature works in addition to the Preludes, op. 28 in particular. On the whole, Kallberg encourages people to study and perform the set of Chopin Preludes individually rather than the entire set in order to understand the challenges that Chopin composed within them and how he wanted audiences and performers to perceive them.

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<sup>21</sup> Jim Samson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Jim Samson, ed. "Myth and Reality: A Biographical Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1-8.

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey Kallberg, "Small 'Forms': In Defence of the Prelude," in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, Jim Samson, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 124-44.

Kallberg also wrote, “Chopin’s March, Chopin’s Death,” in which he provides information about Chopin’s use of the march.<sup>24</sup> Most of the information regards the third movement of Chopin’s Second Piano Sonata, which is commonly referred to as a funeral march or dirge, and the chapter also provides general ideas about his use of the march as a whole. Kallberg’s information is key to this dissertation since the Prelude, op. 28, no. 20 is also written in the form of a march. Information about this style and Chopin’s compositional choices are key for analyzing how Busoni and Rachmaninoff used it. A helpful, but perhaps less significant, source is Brown’s “The Chronology of Chopin’s Preludes”<sup>25</sup> that discusses the possibility of and reasoning for the author’s belief that some of Chopin’s Preludes, op. 28 were written several years before their publication in 1839.<sup>26</sup> Some of the reasoning for this hypothesis includes the publication dates of the surrounding opus numbers, Chopin’s correspondence that discusses manuscript copies, and the fact that he could not remember the opus number reserved for the works and had to ask his publisher, Pleyel. This article is useful for providing information about the origin of the theme for the two sets of variations, although other more recent sources will provide a more significant quantity of information.

Bengt Edlund analyzes the Chopin Prelude, Op. 28 no. 20 in his essay collection, *Chopin: The Preludes and Beyond*,<sup>27</sup> which provides a detailed background of a selection of the Chopin Preludes and other related works. The information provided includes some discussion of theory, notes on style, and a plethora of historical details. Edlund wrote his essays over a period of twenty-five years and primarily focuses on formal and theoretical issues while spending limited time on other musical influences. The most relevant portion of the collection to this dissertation

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<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey Kallberg, “Chopin’s March, Chopin’s Death” *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 25 (2001): 3-26.

<sup>25</sup> Maurice J. E. Brown, “The Chronology of Chopin’s Preludes,” *The Musical Times* 98, no. 1374 (1957): 423–24.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, “The Chronology of Chopin’s Preludes,” 424.

<sup>27</sup> Bengt Edlund, *Chopin: The Preludes and Beyond* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013).



is chapter 6, which contains a discussion of analytical trends for the C-minor Prelude, op. 28, no. 20. Edlund discusses the Prelude's motivic structure, harmonic and rhythmic patterning, melodic implications, Schenkarian reduction, and the formal ambiguity.<sup>28</sup> Edlund's evaluation has been useful as a basis for a formal analysis performed on the themes and variations discussed here.

A final analysis of the Chopin Prelude, op. 28, no. 20 is contained in Anatole Leikin's book, *The Mystery of Chopin's Preludes*, which focuses on the external sources that influenced the composition of Chopin's Preludes, op. 28.<sup>29</sup> Leikin's book includes information about the events occurring in Chopin's life at the time of the Preludes' publication (1838-39), a comparison to other works, and a discussion of each prelude individually. The discussion of the C-minor Prelude will be important for my dissertation. Leikin goes into great detail about its link to other preludes, gives score examples, and discusses an earlier version of the same prelude. His theories, albeit somewhat controversial, are thought-provoking.

After examining all of the sources yet studied, the most significant gap is a comparison of Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22 and Busoni's *Ten Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*, BV 213a. This comparison has not yet been made at all, despite the fact that they use the same composition as their theme. Detailing the relationship between these works will allow performers to approach performing one of these works from a new perspective by providing them with the details of how another composer used the same theme. The study will also provide direct interpretative suggestions for the same group of readers. Unlike other research, my dissertation will compile a previously undocumented catalog of recent recordings, which will be a valuable resource for musicologists and those interested in Busoni and

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<sup>28</sup> Edlund, *Chopin: The Preludes and Beyond*, 341-64.

<sup>29</sup> Anatole Leikin, *The Mystery of Chopin's Preludes* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), specifically chapter 5, "Deciphering the *Préludes*," 130-33.

Rachmaninoff. It will also be of great interest to scholars who compile and evaluate recording histories to discover music appreciation trends and developments. By not only comparing compositional trends but also providing data on recordings and interpretations, this project serves as an advantageous resource for anyone seeking to perform these pieces and for scholars investigating recent classical performance trends.

## CHAPTER 1: SERGEI RACHMANINOFF'S *VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF CHOPIN, OP. 22*

Sergei Rachmaninoff utilized Chopin's *Prelude*, op. 28, no. 20 as the theme for a set of variations, completing his work in 1904. Before examining and analyzing the work in depth, a brief biography of Rachmaninoff is necessary in order to understand this work in the context of his life.

### History of Rachmaninoff

Sergei Rachmaninoff was born in 1873 in Imperial Russia during the reign of Emperor Alexander II, a social reformer and lover of the arts who emancipated the serfs and promoted European culture. The young heir apparent Alexander received a broad and liberal education from a Russian poet and was the first Russian emperor to tour most of Russia and Europe before his coronation. Before and during his reign, and even after his assassination in 1881, music and literature flourished in the Empire. Rachmaninoff's birth year of 1873 and the decades that followed were an opportune era for the arts in Imperial Russia.

Rachmaninoff was born into a wealthy but non-aristocratic family at Oneg in northern Russia. His father, Arkady Alexandrovich Rachmaninoff, was a second-generation military officer, amateur pianist, and general lover of life's pleasures, especially gambling. Married to a general's daughter, Lyubov Boutakova, Arkady received five large estates as his wife's dowry. Young Rachmaninoff enjoyed a privileged childhood of culture, including many of his family members playing piano around him. When Rachmaninoff showed an early talent for music, the family was affluent enough to hire a live-in piano tutor from the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Anna Ornatzkaya.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff, A Lifetime in Music* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), 1-8.

Unfortunately, in young Rachmaninoff's adolescent years, his father's spending habits caused the family to agonizingly lose one property after another until all were gone. The family moved to St. Petersburg and plans for the children's education were altered due to their dire financial situation. His parents' marriage became strained and his beloved, fun-loving father separated from the family. Fortunately, during this difficult time, the St. Petersburg Conservatory offered young Rachmaninoff a scholarship. Unfortunately, perhaps in response to the chaos of this home life, he did not make the most of his opportunity and, although considered to be talented, he had a pattern of truancy and poor grades. His mother, overwhelmed by his behavior, had two people who could possibly help her with her son: her mother and her cousin.<sup>31</sup>

First, Rachmaninoff's mother asked her own mother, Grandmother (in Russian *Babushka*) Boutakova to intervene. *Babushka*, as she was called, doted on Rachmaninoff and immediately took action. She purchased a farm near her home in Novgorod and had him spend summers there with her. This chance to experience summers in the country, as well as the doting love of his *Babushka*, seems to have been a positive influence on not only his behavior but also his future compositions. *Babushka* loved to visit churches and her grandson was partial to the bells that tolled; bells are a consistent theme in many of his compositions.<sup>32</sup>

Rachmaninoff's mother also appealed to Alexander Siloti, a cousin of her husband, who was a pupil of Franz Liszt and had influence at the St. Petersburg and Moscow Conservatories. Siloti recognized young Rachmaninoff's talent and suggested a more structured, rigorous lifestyle for the young man. Siloti arranged for Rachmaninoff to be transferred to the Moscow Conservatory and to live with one of his own teachers, Nikolai Zverev.

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<sup>31</sup> Julian Haylock, *Sergei Rachmaninov: An Essential Guide to His Life and Works* (London: Pavilion Books Ltd., 1996), 8-10.

<sup>32</sup> Barrie Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990), 30.

Professor Zverev was a strict disciplinarian, which had an immediate effect on Rachmaninoff. Living with Zverev and two other talented students, Rachmaninoff had a schedule for every hour of the day both at the Conservatory and at home. Instead of rebelling, the young musician flourished under such a watchful eye. However, discipline was not the only benefit of living in the Zverev home; the professor was also a Russian impresario. Zverev regularly hosted the most influential musicians of the day at his home, and Rachmaninoff was frequently exposed to great musicians such as Siloti, Tchaikovsky, and other visiting artists. Zverev also insisted on a thorough immersion in the arts, including attendance at concerts and stage works, as well as exposure to poetry and the visual arts. Rachmaninoff succeeded at the Moscow Conservatory, making money teaching private lessons, earning high marks, writing many student compositions (including his *Piano Concerto No. 1*), and passing his final exams with the highest possible grade with Tchaikovsky himself as the judge.<sup>33</sup>

Rachmaninoff appears to have enjoyed a happy personal life but a miserable political existence. In 1902 he married his first cousin, Natalia Siloti, a union officially forbidden under the Eastern Orthodox Church; another relative arranged for a priest to marry them quietly in the military barracks.<sup>34</sup> The couple's marriage, which produced two daughters, remained intact despite the terrible political disruptions in Russia in the early twentieth century. The Bolshevik Revolution and subsequent formation of the totalitarian Soviet Union left Russian artists with an impossible decision; leave their beloved homeland or stay under Communist rule. The Rachmaninoffs were able to secure exit visas only through an invitation to appear in concert in Stockholm, a letter that Rachmaninoff "attributed to the grace of God."<sup>35</sup> The family had a

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<sup>33</sup> Geoffrey Norris, *The Master Musicians: Rakhmaninov* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1976), 9-13.

<sup>34</sup> Haylock, *Sergei Rachmaninov*, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff*, 205-7.

harrowing journey, leaving St. Petersburg (then renamed Petrograd) on December 23, 1917 under the sound of gunfire, traveling through Finland in an open sled, and allowed only one suitcase packed with Rachmaninoff's unpublished music. Rachmaninoff never returned to his motherland, considering himself an exile for the rest of his life. The composer was famously serious and even morose, and many believed this to be due to his longing to return to Russia. Stravinsky famously called him "a six-and-a-half-foot scowl."<sup>36</sup> In 1934, Rachmaninoff was interviewed by the *Evening Post* about Russia: "You cannot know the feeling of a man who has no home. Perhaps no others can understand the hopeless homesickness of us older Russians...Even the air in your country is different. No, I cannot say just how."<sup>37</sup>

Rachmaninoff enjoyed success as a pianist, composer and conductor. The majority of his income was generated from being a concert pianist. Famous throughout Russia, Europe, and America for concertizing, conducting, and composing prior to 1917, he only published opp. 40 to 45 after that date. However, these rare compositions were among his most important, including the *Piano Concerto No. 4*, op. 40; *Variations on a Theme by Corelli*, op. 42; the famous *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, op. 43; and the *Third Symphony*, op. 44. Many biographers thought that focusing on concertizing after leaving Russia was done out of financial necessity. However, Andrei Sedikh interviewed Rachmaninoff on his sixtieth birthday on April 2, 1933 and the composer was quoted as saying, "...Somehow, since leaving Russia, I don't feel like composing...No, I do not regret it. I love to play. I have a powerful craving for the concert platform."<sup>38</sup>

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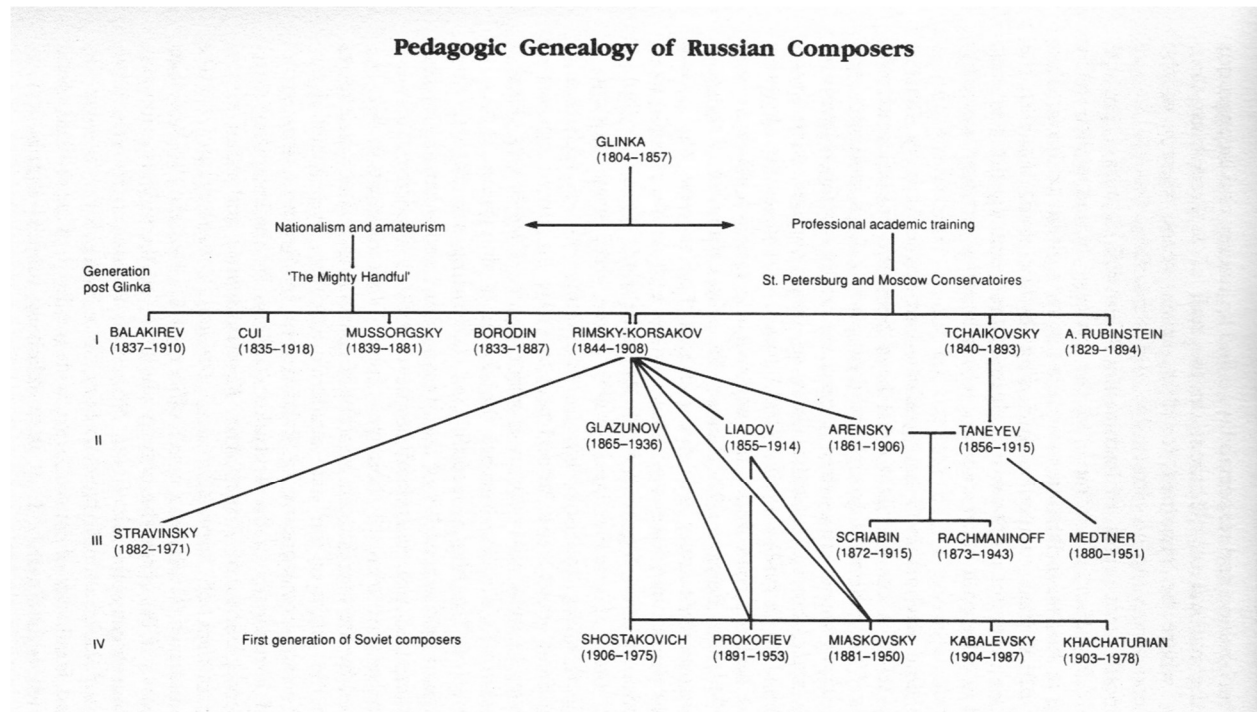
<sup>36</sup> Norris, *The Master Musicians: Rakhmaninov*, v.

<sup>37</sup> Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff*, 300.

<sup>38</sup> Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff*, 295.

Rachmaninoff the composer is an important link in a long, rich history of Russians; Barrie Martyn dedicates an entire chapter of his volume to a discussion of those who wrote before, contemporaneously, and after Rachmaninoff. There is no doubt that the composer, as noted above, was familiar with and taught by many of Russia's greatest composers at the St. Petersburg and Moscow Conservatories as well as at Zverev's home. Instructed in composition by no less than Arensky and Taneyev, Rachmaninoff also benefited from the German and Viennese composers through the Rubinstein brothers, who studied in Germany and Austria and then returned to Russia to found the dual state conservatories. Rachmaninoff was a contemporary of Scriabin and Stravinsky, and while the earlier works of all three are said to bear resemblances, their later works could not be more different. For example, in 1934 when Rachmaninoff published the lush and romantic *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, op. 43, it had already been over 20 years since Scriabin had published his chromatic and dissonant *Sonata No. 9*, op. 68, also known as the "Black Mass." Similarly, Stravinsky premiered his bitonal and complexly-metered *The Rite of Spring* in 1913, twenty-one years before the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*. The following schematic from Barrie Martyn helps to illustrate the links between the Russian composers beginning with Glinka and ending with the Soviet-era composers.

Figure 1.1-Russian Composers and Their Pedagogues



39

Rachmaninoff is often described as a nationalist Russian composer. While it may be impossible to quantify nationalism, it is clear that Russian folk music, an obvious feature of Glinka and the Mighty Handful, is not apparent in Rachmaninoff's works. An excellent description of the Russian nature of his music includes broad, extended melodies that have been linked to the broad plains, or steppes, of Russia. There may also be a pervasive sense of pessimism, often cited as a feature of Russian society and certainly a trait of Russian literature. A fitting quote from Ernest Newman, as quoted in *Hallé* in 1960, may provide the most apt portrayal:

<sup>39</sup> Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 7.



Superficially he is perhaps less national than composers who coquet with Russian folk music. But in a deeper sense, he is perhaps more national than they; his somberness is the purest vintage of a wine that is to be found only in the more pessimistic of the Russian poets. He is more truly in the line of the pure Russian culture accession than Borodin or Rimsky-Korsokov, who often wrote as if Russian literature hardly existed.<sup>40</sup>

Critics were ruthless in their assault on Rachmaninoff for what they saw as his failure to change his compositional methods to the more modern approach taken by his contemporaries. Yet pianists today still yearn to play his pieces and audiences flock to halls when his works are programmed. Rachmaninoff was often asked why he did not alter his style of composition to that which was considered more progressive. Here is his opinion of modern music and his perceived lack of its lack of emotional depth in an interview with *The New York Times* in 1931:

“The poet Heine once said, ‘What life takes away, music restores.’ He would not be moved to say this if he could hear the music of today. For the most part it gives nothing. Music should bring relief. It should rehabilitate minds and souls, and modern music does not do this. If we are to have great music, we must return to the fundamentals which made the music of the past great. Music cannot be just color and rhythm; it must reveal the emotions of the heart.”<sup>41</sup>

### **Rachmaninoff’s Variation Sets**

Rachmaninoff’s works are often divided into three periods; the divisions are created by two traumatic events in his life. The composer was highly successful in performance and composition from his first student works in 1890 through about 1896 (op. 16), just after the time when he suffered his first public failure with the disastrous premiere of his First Symphony, op. 13. After a four-year hiatus, Rachmaninoff published his highly successful Second Piano Concerto, op. 18 in 1900, beginning his second period of compositional accomplishment. After publishing opp. 17-39, including the *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Rachmaninoff

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<sup>40</sup> Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 27.

<sup>41</sup> Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff*, 284.

was forced into exile in 1917 and entered his third period of composition, during which he published fewer works.<sup>42</sup>

Rachmaninoff was successful in publishing three sets of variations for piano, namely the *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22 (1902-3) for solo piano, the *Variations on a Theme of Corelli*, op. 42 (1931) for solo piano, and the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, op. 43 (1934) for piano and orchestra. The *Chopin Variations* are the least frequently performed of the three sets, but they do bear similarities to the other two.

A critical parallel is that Rachmaninoff creates a semblance of sonata form in each of the sets by creating an opening movement, a slow movement, and a finale by changing keys and tempi for the center variations in each set. Martyn proposes the following division of the *Chopin Variations*:

Figure 1.2-Theoretical grouping of Rachmaninoff variations according to sonata form

The variations are grouped in such a way as to form a continuous structure with the rough overall outline of a three or four movement sonata.

<i>Movement</i>	<i>Variations</i>
I	1 – 10
II (a)	11 – 14
(b)	15 – 18
III	19 – 22

43

Focusing now on the composition of the first set, the *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, the composition of this work began while at Ivanovka, his summer estate, in August 1902. This fruitful period, shortly after his marriage to Natalia Satina, was possible because Rachmaninoff's cousin and fellow pianist Siloti generously supported him financially for two years in order to allow Rachmaninoff to reduce concertizing and focus on composition.

<sup>42</sup> Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 19-29.

<sup>43</sup> Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 146.

Published by Gutheil in February 1904,<sup>44</sup> the work was also his first twentieth-century composition for his own instrument.<sup>45</sup> Of course, this two-year period falls within the second period; his compositional activity can be divided between Moscow, Dresden, and his beloved Ivanovka. During this same time, he wrote many other works, funded by Siloti, for voice (including opera), along with the first set of *Preludes*, op. 23. The *Chopin Variations* fall into a larger successful time period between the Second and Third Piano Concerti, and just before the *Etudes-Tableaux*, op. 33 and second set of *Preludes*, op. 32; the second period ends with the second set of *Etudes-Tableaux*, op. 39 (1916).<sup>46</sup>

The premiere of *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, was given by Rachmaninoff himself on February 10, 1903 at a private fundraiser for the Ladies' Charity Prison Committee, organized by Princess Alexandra Levin. Rachmaninoff continued to program the piece in its entirety throughout that concert season, although decades later he did eliminate some of the variations in concert in an effort to shorten the work.<sup>47</sup> The following excerpt from a review by Yuli Engl was less than stellar, but in light of the recording and performance history of the work, it may not reflect its long-term musical value:

“Of his new compositions the most congenial impression was made by three of the preludes...Must less interesting, at least on first acquaintance, seemed the larger work, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*. The variations, although significant, are not always worthy of the beautiful theme that inspired them.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff*, 411.

<sup>45</sup> Max Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings*, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 2006).

<sup>46</sup> Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 119-121.

<sup>47</sup> Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 145.

<sup>48</sup> Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff*, 100.

## Analysis of Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22

### Theme: Largo

Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, begins with Chopin's original Prelude in C minor, op. 28, no. 20. Chopin wrote an original version of this short Prelude that was even more brief. His good friend, fellow composer, and publisher Ignaz Pleyel commented on the brevity of the piece; afterwards, Chopin added another four measures to the original nine by repeating measures 5-8, albeit with slightly different dynamics. In his introductory notes to his edition of the Preludes, Ekier states, "Op. 28, no. 20: 'Note for the publisher (in Rue de Rochechouart): a small concession in favour of Monsieur \*\*\*, who is often right.' Note at the repetition of bars 5-8, marked in abbreviated fashion on the manuscript for publication of this Prelude."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Chopin, 11.

Example 1.1. Chopin Prelude Op. 28 No. 20

op. 28 nr 20

**Largo**

20

*ff*

*p*

*ritenuto*

*pp*

*cresc.*

*f*

**\*\***

*Red*

51<sup>50</sup>

\* Patrz Komentarz źródłowy.  
Vide Source Commentary.

\*\* W jednym z autografów zamiast akcentu jest *ff*.  
In one of the autographs there is *ff* instead of the accent.

Rachmaninoff reversed that decision, having his theme state only the first eight measures of Chopin's Prelude with no repeat, but maintaining the extra measure, now measure nine, with a whole note chord. Written in common time with a tempo indication of *largo* and a dynamic marking of *fortissimo*, the rhythm is identical in all eight measures in the right hand, namely quarter note, quarter note, dotted eighth and sixteenth notes, then two quarter notes. The left hand echoes the right-hand tonalities in quarter note octaves for the first four measures in contrary motion, but the second four measures introduce a chromatic bass line. Harmonically

<sup>50</sup> Fryderyk Chopin, *Fryderyk Chopin Preludia Op. 28, 45*, ed. Jan Ekier, vol. VII (Warszawa: Foundation for the National Edition of the Works of Fryderyk Chopin, 2015), 51.

rich and homophonic, the first four-measure phrase ends with a half cadence while the second four-measure phrase ends with a perfect authentic cadence. An additional measure replays the tonic C-minor chord which ended measure eight.

The performance challenges of the theme are musical, assuming that the pianist has adequate technical skills to produce proper voicing within dual-hand chordal structures. The musical challenge is to create a long, expressive line or phrase for each four-measure section with the main melody voiced loudest; this is critical so that the audience focuses on that melodic line in preparation for listening to its variations. Please note that it is this author’s opinion that to create a four-measure phrase for both measures one through four and five through eight is best, and that it was not Chopin’s intent to create an obvious musical “breath” after measures one and two as might be interpreted from the phrase markings.

Example 1.2. Rachmaninoff Variations on a Theme of Chopin, op. 22, Theme

**ВАРИАЦИИ  
НА ТЕМУ ШОПЕНА**  
Соч. 22

**VARIATIONS  
ON A THEME OF CHOPIN**  
Op. 22

3

**С. РАХМАНИНОВ  
S. RAKHMANINOV  
(1873–1943)**

**Thème (F. Chopin, Op. 28. N° 20.)**  
**Largo**

51

<sup>51</sup> Sergei Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin, op. 22*, Edition Jurgenson (Moscow: Edition Jurgenson, 2012), 3.

It is now worthwhile to refresh the reader's memory about the scheme proposed by Martyn above, namely that Rachmaninoff's *Chopin Variations* are structured, along with Rachmaninoff's other two piano variation sets, as an overarching sonata form (see above). According to Martyn, variations 1 through 10, all in the same C-minor key as the theme, resemble a single sonata-allegro movement. In addition to Martyn's scheme, it is noteworthy that the variations have a general trend of becoming progressively longer as the work proceeds, which gives the impression of cumulative growth.

#### Variation One: Moderato

Variation one is just like the theme in that it is eight measures long and written in common time. With a tempo marking of moderato and a metronome indication of 66 on the quarter note, Rachmaninoff gives an immediate sense of increasing speed by providing the right hand with sixteenth notes throughout. The texture is thin and contains no left hand until measure five, and then only four measures of a solidly-held (and, of course, fading) pedal point bass C. The fast-moving passages are reminiscent of Bach and stealthily hide the melodic line of the theme within their scales at random points which do not coincide with the rhythm of the theme.

Technical challenges for variation one are minimal, assuming that the performer can produce a clean, even line of sixteenth notes; this should be a reasonable assumption if one is approaching the technically-challenging set of variations as a whole. A key musical challenge is to respect the frequent crescendi and decrescendi without interrupting the longer musical phrase lines that Rachmaninoff indicates. Another challenge is to maintain a full, singing tone for the running sixteenth notes in measures five through eight, despite the pianissimo dynamic marking.

Example 1.3. Rachmaninoff Variations on a Theme of Chopin, op. 22, Variation I

**Var. I**  
**Moderato** (♩ = 66)

Edition Jurgenson 0099 П. Юргенсон

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Variation Two: Allegro

Variation two continues the eight-measure idea of both the theme and variation one and is also in common time. However, now the tempo is marked allegro and the metronome indication is 132 on the quarter note, providing a sense of sudden doubling of tempo. Sixteenth notes continue uninterrupted but alternate between the left and right hands. Whichever hand is not playing continuous sixteenth notes plays a single-note line that is a melodic fragment of the theme, providing two voices. The technical challenges are the same as for the runs of sixteenth notes discussed in variation one, but now the tempo is doubled. Also, the sixteenth note line must be uninterrupted although it switches frequently between the right and left hands, making evenness of tone between the hands a potential difficulty. The same hand-switching challenge is

<sup>52</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 3.



present for the melodic line, which is constructed of short motives but must remain seamless in four-measure stretches.

Example 1.4. Rachmaninoff Variations on a Theme of Chopin, op. 22, Variation II

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### Variation Three

Variation three is identical to variations one and two in that it is eight measures long and identical to variation three in that its metronome indication is 132 on the quarter note. While there is no tempo increase, Rachmaninoff creates more complexity by adding voices and polyphony. The third variation can be seen as the last in a set of the first three variations because it remains in common time but adds another voice. Rachmaninoff creates a pattern: variation one has only one voice (except the single tonic pedal tone starting in measure five), variation two has two voices, and variation three has three voices. The new tenor voice appears in fragments of the

<sup>53</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 4.

bass line in measures five through eight of the theme (descending chromatic line) while the soprano and alto voices have nearly continuous sixteenth notes in counterpoint. This texture is canonic in style, particularly due to the similar nature of their entries and lines that creates a *stretto*. In addition to providing a thicker texture, Rachmaninoff also indicates a number of crescendi and diminuendi, culminating in a *forte* in measure seven, which is the loudest dynamic marking since the *fortissimo* of the theme.

Technical challenges require the performer to be proficient in fast, running sixteenth notes simultaneously in the right and left hands. The ability to voice a tenor line in the left hand while playing running sixteenth notes in the alto line is needed. Musically, the performer must be aware of the entrance of the soprano and alto voices and should highlight these for the listener in the same manner as would be done in any work containing counterpoint. Left-hand voicing is necessary to differentiate the chromaticism displayed in the tenor voice.

Example 1.5. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation III

54

### Variation Four

Variation four continues the pattern of variations one through three in that it has a perpetual motion of sixteenth notes at the same metronome indication of 132 to the quarter note as variations two and three. It also continues the creation of a progressively thicker harmonic texture, building on the one, two, and three voices noted above in the first three variations, respectively. The full texture is provided in the right hand with three notes, namely an octave with one harmonic tone between; these chords always appear in a rhythmic pattern of an eighth rest followed by an eighth note and two quarter notes. The left-hand tenor carries the thematic

<sup>54</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 4.

motives in continuous eighth notes and the bass continues to provide sixteenth notes in perpetual motion. However, three-quarter time replaces the common time of the theme and first three variations, and a total of twenty-four measures are presented instead of eight. This time signature is also key in noting the waltz-like style that Rachmaninoff utilizes in composing this variation. The complete variation can be divided into three parts: the first eight measures are in the tonic, the second eight are in the dominant, and the third eight return to the tonic, culminating in a ritardando with diminuendo leading to the slower fifth variation.

Technical challenges increase with this variation as the complexity increases. In the right hand, the performer must maintain legato playing despite the fact that all but those with the largest hands will not be able to reach from one filled-in octave to the next. In the left hand, the performer has to be able to bring out the tenor voice in eighth notes. This is difficult while maintaining the clarity and evenness of the appearance of continuous sixteenth notes in the bass, although many notes have double stems and serve as both tenor and bass. Musically, the challenge is to form the eight-measure phrase groups noted above in order to produce long, intense, lyrical phrases. Also, it is critical to produce a peak early in the third eight-measure phrase so that enough room is allowed for an effective ritardando to diminuendo sequence to serve as a bridge to the following variation.

Example 1.6. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation IV

Var. IV  
(♩ = 132)

*p*

2 1 2 1 4 5

1 2 1 1 2 5

55

### Variation Five: Meno mosso

Variation five breaks the patterns in variations one through four, creating faster movement, thicker harmonic texture, and longer duration. In fact, it is marked *meno mosso*, has a slower metronome marking of 92 to the quarter note, and returns to common time. Variation five does continue the rhythmic division of three in variation four, which is marked in three-quarter time, by dividing each quarter note into a group of six sixteenth notes. The texture reverts to only two voices through most of the variation's eight measures, a reduction from the twenty-four measures of variation four. The soprano voice continuously plays a sextuplet rhythm with the first in each group of six being a rest. For the first half, the left hand reverts to a single line,

<sup>55</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 5.

similar to the approach in variation two, and the rhythm is quarter note, quarter note, quarter note, triplet. For the second half, the left-hand texture thickens with a rolled chord and an added bass line. In the last two measures, the left hand alternates between thirds and fourths, and the descending chromatic line reminds one of the left hand chromatic line of the second half of the theme.

Technical challenges in variation five are minimal but musical challenges abound. The performer must bring out the left hand, which contains the flowing melodic line, and keep the busy, arpeggiated right hand softer despite its more frequent motion. Even more difficult is the overall mood, which must portray a sense of serenity in contrast with the building excitement of the previous four variations. Finally, a high level of planning and musical sensitivity is required to produce long lines and follow the overall dynamic plan, which is a gradual crescendo for the first four measures and then a diminuendo for the final four measures.

Example 1.7. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation V

**Var. V**  
Meno mosso (♩ = 92)

The musical score for Variation V consists of three systems of music. The first system begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system includes a crescendo (*cresc.*) marking. The third system concludes with a forte (*f*) dynamic followed by a diminuendo (*dim.*) marking. The left hand features a prominent melodic line with chromatic descents, while the right hand provides a complex, arpeggiated accompaniment.

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<sup>56</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 6.

### Variation Six: *Meno Mosso*

Variation six starts a trend that continues through the next three variations by building on the basic divisions of three started in variation five. It is marked *meno mosso* (cumulatively, in addition to the *meno mosso* of variation five), is given a metronome indication of 94 to the quarter note, and is twelve measures long. The right hand plays two groups of six per measure, the first note of each measure is a rest and the left hand plays two groups of nine per measure. While both are multiples of three, in six-four time this results in a polyrhythm of two (right hand) against three (left hand), which of course creates a more complex texture. The right hand is an embellishment of the theme, and the left hand provides a complex arpeggiated accompaniment over a wide range of pitches. The general plan is AB in a similar fashion to the theme. The first six measures echo the two-voice setting of most of variation five, but the final six measures introduce a fuller sound by adding an alto voice in the right hand and also has two wide rolled chords at the beginning of beats one and four.

For the first six bars, the first technical challenge is the proficient performance of two-against-three rhythms; this procedure must be solidly established prior to attempting variation six since there is another difficulty in addition to the polyrhythm. The second challenge is the smooth execution of large, wide-ranging arpeggios in the left hand, of course made more difficult by the polyrhythm. Starting in measure six, an alto countermelody is established which alters between the left and right hands; it is difficult to play in combination with the other voices, especially for those pianists with smaller hands. Beginning in measure seven (the B section), huge rolled chords in the left hand must be quickly and proficiently executed in order to move immediately into the wide-ranging arpeggio that follows. Finally, measures nine through eleven are made even more complex by the right-hand sextuplets being changed from a single note to a

continuous flow of octaves. All of these technical challenges in combination provide for a very difficult feat. It would be advisable for the performer to be well-versed in all of these techniques in other pieces or exercises prior to attempting them in this combination.

Musically, similar challenges exist to those discussed in the previous variation. The performer must bring out the right hand, containing the flowing melodic line, and keep the busy, arpeggiated left hand softer despite its more frequent motion; this is the reverse of variation five. As the technical complexity of the variation increases cumulatively in measure six with a countermelody, measure seven with rolled chords, and measure nine with continuous right-hand octaves, voicing the melodic line first and the countermelody second becomes very difficult. Similar to variation five is the difficulty of retaining a sense of calm despite the high complexity of many voices and difficult technique. The pianist must focus on the beautiful production of long melodic lines; this requires effortless technique because it would be nearly impossible to be struggling with technical difficulties and remain relaxed enough to bring out a beautiful musical phrase. Finally, careful planning and musical sensibility are needed to follow Rachmaninoff's dynamic instructions, particularly the *piano* and *pianissimo* sections, in light of the complex musical texture.



Example 1.8. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation VI

Var. VI  
Meno mosso. (♩ = 84)

7

57

Variation Seven: Allegro

Variation seven is a brief little wonder. It is marked allegro, has a metronome indication of 120 to the quarter note, and has continuous sixteenth note triplets which amount to six to a beat. It is only eight measures long, and it is, like the theme and many other variations, in AB form: A is the first four measures and B the final four measures. Except for a bass C quarter note to begin the piece, much of the A section could appear to be thin in texture. This is not the case

<sup>57</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 7.

as Rachmaninoff creates a chordal movement out of a single voice. Rachmaninoff gradually introduces a second line in the A section by either adding an additional note or sometimes incorporating the second line into the perpetual sextuplets by indicating a *tenuto*. In the B section, starting in measure five, the second line gains prominence and complexity in the soprano voice, culminating in a *forte* in measure seven and then a diminuendo into variation eight.

The technical challenge of playing sextuplets in perpetual motion, trading off between the right and left hands, is obvious. One must have fluid technique in order to attempt this fast variation. The increased difficulty of the B section with its complex second voice requires the overlapping of the right hand as well as the two hands playing quickly in close proximity.

The musical challenge is summarized in Rachmaninoff's instructions at the beginning of the variation: *leggiere*. To play a piece with this level of fast technique and maintain a sense of lightness requires not only technical proficiency but also musical sensitivity. Lack of confidence regarding technique or failure to follow the *leggiere* direction will ruin the mood of quietude. Performing the two four-measure phrases in two long, extended phrases requires advance planning and a careful, sensitive listening ear. Although the piece culminates in measure seven with a *forte* dynamic marking, the performer must be subtle and not forceful in order not to break the overall sense of lightness that Rachmaninoff requires.

Example 1.9. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation VII

\*) Var. VII может быть выпущена. (Примечание С. Рахманинова)  
Var. VII can be omitted. (Note by S. Rakhmaninov)

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### Variation Eight

Variation eight remains in common time, has a metronome indication of 120, and has perpetual sextuplets; this creates a sense of continuity with variation seven that is identical in those three ways. However, variation eight immediately sounds more complex because it has three voices instead of two and its polyrhythm of six notes per beat in the alto voice versus four notes per beat in the tenor produces textural complexity. On top of these two perpetual-motion, flowing, two-against-three voices, a soprano is added in brief staccato motives. The eight-measure variation follows the theme's general form of AB, divided into two four-measure sections. The beginning two measures of section B, measures five and six, use a syncopated left-hand rhythm which breaks the left-hand sixteenth-note flow; this returns in measures seven and eight.

<sup>58</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 8.

Technical challenges remain similar to the preceding variations in that fluid technique is needed in both hands. Proficiency in two-against-three rhythms is necessary. Large left-hand jumps are required in measures five and six. The right hand in measure six is particularly challenging since there is a rapid, ascending pattern of two notes at a time which can be confusing and technically difficult since the intervals vary from a second to a sixth and the fingering is irregular. Etudes or exercises in thirds, fifths, or sixths may be useful preparation for this variation.

Musically, the *leggiero* challenge is similar to variation seven. Dual-hand perpetual motion at *pianissimo* makes it difficult to maintain a full tone quality, especially when the composition is textually thick due to the polyrhythms. The alto sextuplets are no longer of melodic importance but rather are motivic and accompanying in nature; they should be voiced softer than the tenor or soprano. Creating a clear, bell-like tone in the soprano staccato motives is difficult while playing a fluid, legato, and *pianissimo* sextuplet alto line with the same hand. Finally, focusing on the creation of long, singing phrases, which are *de rigueur* in Chopin and Rachmaninoff alike, can be overwhelming when so many technical challenges abound.

Example 1.10. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation VIII

Var. VIII  
(♩=120)  
*pp leggiero*  
*cresc.*  
*sf pp*  
*cresc.*

59

### Variation Nine

Variation nine is a sudden break with the lyrical, serene nature of variations five through eight. While it continues in common time with a metronome indication of 120 on the quarter note just like variation eight, it is suddenly *fortissimo* and *sempre marcato*. Treatment of the theme becomes motivic instead of lyrical and is presented in blocked chords for the first time since the original theme. Each eighth note rhythm has a chord and no eighth beat has a rest or a held-over longer note. The entire variation is structured in imitation; specifically, a short rhythmic motive is introduced in chords and is then immediately repeated in octaves. In

<sup>59</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 8.

combination with the *marcato* and *fortissimo* indications, the impression is a serious, almost violent assault in contrast to the previous lyrical and even serene variations. There are seven eighth notes that are replaced with sixteenth notes in pairs; in all but one case this rhythm appears on the upbeat and is, as noted above, repeated in imitation. As is the case for many variations, the eighth is in an eight-measure, AB form, which follows the general tonal structure of the theme.

Technical challenges are not as demanding as with previous variations. However, a mastery of leaping octaves is mandatory. Because many notes are filled in between the octaves, those with small hands may have difficulty reaching them. However, using rolled chords instead of blocked ones, a technique some instructors recommend if a reach is impossible, would not be appropriate due to the strict, almost militaristic rhythm of the piece. If reaching all notes is impossible, strategically eliminating some notes would be preferable to rolled chords in this particular setting.

Musical challenges include a clear voicing of the melodic line, which can be problematic because of the stretch required to reach the octaves with fill-ins, as noted above. Also, it is important to vary the dynamics and form a melodic line despite the *fortissimo* and *sempre staccato* indications. The pianist must avoid playing all notes in a similar fashion; to do so would be cacophonous and an assault to the senses. Finally, the tempo should be carefully maintained from variation eight. Both are given a metronome indication of 120, and to continue a consistent beat creates an impression of an even greater contrast between the dynamics, mood, and rhythmic structure of the two movements. Looking forward to the next variation, this maintenance of a consistent beat is critical because increasing the speed would spoil the contrast of the *più vivo* of variation ten.

Example 1.11. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation IX

Var. IX  
(♩ = 120)  
*ff* *sempre marcato*

9

60

### Variation Ten: *Più vivo*

Variation ten continues the common time signature of variation nine, but a sudden increase in tempo is indicated by both the instruction of *più vivo* and the metronome marking of 144 on the quarter note. As noted above, it is important to provide this contrast from variation nine to ten. The composer further indicates *martellato*, a seldom-used term meaning hammered. Rachmaninoff replaces the nearly perpetual eighth notes of the previous variation with perpetual sixteenth notes. In combination with the increased tempo, this provides listeners with a sudden impression of speed and complexity. The overall structure of the variation is similar to many others in that it is AB, with measures one through eight comprising A and measures nine through

<sup>60</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 9.

fourteen being a slightly abbreviated B. The variation starts with a canon in sixteenth notes beginning in the right hand with the left hand repeating the pattern one beat later and an octave lower. The resultant harmonies are parallel sixths on the beat. This pattern repeats in two-measure sections three times; that is, for measures one and two, three and four, and five and six. Measures seven and eight continue the perpetual motion sixteenth notes, but only in the left hand and in a descending pattern, while the right hand plays large octave chords in contrary motion; that is, in an ascending pattern. Measures nine through twelve return to sixteenth notes in both hands, with each beat (or pattern of four notes) consisting of contrary motion. Measures thirteen and fourteen are transitional to variation eleven, in which left-hand sixteenth notes continue in measure thirteen while the right hand plays chords. Then, in measure fourteen, both hands play unison chords. The variation ends in an eight-note C-minor (tonic) chord marked fortissimo with a fermata. This serves as a clear ending to section one (similar to a sonata-allegro movement) of the variations in preparation for section two (similar to an andante movement).

The technical challenges of variation ten are numerous. A facility in playing fast runs of sixteenth notes in both hands is necessary. Experience with counterpoint is needed to bring out the canonical nature of the first six measures. Work with fast-paced contrary motion is required in measures nine through twelve. The last two measures require a reach of an octave and the ability to reach the fill-in notes between the octaves, making it difficult for those pianists with small reaches.

With a variation that is this fast and technically challenging, it is easy to overlook musical imperatives. In addition to focusing on accuracy, the pianist must make sense of the work to the listeners, and this is even more important for lesser-known works such as this. The artist must tell a story with the music, and creating distinct phrasing and musical direction is essential.



Because of the AB form, it is recommended to make a long phrase out of measures one through eight, then *diminuendo* in measure nine in order to allow a gradual crescendo to the end of the variation.

Example 1.12. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation X

\*) **Var. X**  
**Più vivo** (♩=144)

\*) Var. X может быть выпущена; в этом случае к var. IX прибавляется еще такт: (как в теме)  
 Var. X can be omitted; in this case, one bar must be added to Var. IX: (as in the theme)

### Variation Eleven: Lento

As a matter of review, variation eleven is the first of four variations which Martyn considers to be the first half of the second movement of a sonata form. He states, “A move to E-flat and a change in mood, tempo and dynamics herald the second movement.”<sup>62</sup> Indeed,

<sup>61</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 318.

Rachmaninoff has, after his rather final-sounding chord with a fermata at the end of the previous variation, made a change to the relative major. The time signature is 12/8, the tempo marking is *lento*, and the metronome indication is 44 to the dotted quarter note. There are fifteen measures, and they can be divided into a one-measure introduction, two four-measure sections, and two three-measure sections. There are four voices. The soprano moves in perpetual eighth notes, grouped in three, except the fourth beat of measure ten which is four sixteenth notes, and its movement is exclusively chromatic until measure twelve. The alto is mostly eighth notes, but some dotted quarter notes are present as well; while not entirely chromatic, its largest interval is a third. The tenor is also mostly eighth notes, but like the soprano it has four sixteenth notes in the fourth beat of measure ten. While frequently chromatic, it also has a wide range of intervals at various points. The bass is mostly comprised of long pedal points, but it does have occasions on which it doubles itself an octave higher; this should be considered part of the bass line even though it occasionally crosses over the tenor line and can be momentarily higher in pitch. Of course, this type of range crossing is commonplace in choral music.

Technically, even though the variation is very slow, the constantly moving intervals of the soprano and alto voices, both played by the right hand, can be challenging in terms of fingering and memory. The left-hand fingering can also be tricky because the bass line needs to be held, making finger substitutions and cross-overs necessary for the tenor voice. There are no fast technical passages, and the only octaves that might be difficult for small hands are fleeting in measures twelve and fifteen.

This variation, while technically less trying than others, is still musically difficult. Voicing the soprano while simultaneously playing the alto at varying intervals with the right hand requires experience and careful listening. Similarly, the bass line should be brought out as

the second-loudest voice, but doing so while playing a moving tenor line is taxing. Of course, Rachmaninoff's phrase lines are marked legato throughout and must not be broken, and respecting the composer's dynamic markings is essential. Finally, forming long phrases in a slow tempo, specifically measures two through five, six through nine, ten through twelve, and thirteen through fifteen, is a demanding task because maintaining a line and creating a crescendo and diminuendo over such an extended time is difficult, especially since Rachmaninoff indicates a ritardando at the end of each of the four phrases.

Example 1.13. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation XI

The musical score for Variation XI is presented in three systems. The first system is marked "Lento (♩=44)" and contains two systems of piano and bass staves. The piano part features a melodic line with dynamics of *mf* and *dim.*. The second system is marked "a tempo" and also contains two systems of piano and bass staves. The piano part includes dynamics of *pp*, *cresc.*, *rit.*, and *pp*. The bass part includes a double bar line with a "2" below it. The third system contains two systems of piano and bass staves, with dynamics of *pp*, *mf*, *f*, and *p*, ending with "rit. e dim.". The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

<sup>63</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 10.

### Variation Twelve: Moderato

Variation twelve continues the trend of slower inner movements. It is in common time and marked *moderato* with a metronome indication of 60 on the quarter note. It is further marked *sempre legato*, which is particularly interesting because it is a four-voice fugue. Rachmaninoff makes it clear that legato is his intention here. The fugue utilizes the first measure of the theme, albeit in a different key and entering on beat two of each subsequent measure. The subject enters first in the bass, then the other three voices enter in ascending voice order, namely tenor, alto, then soprano. This order of entry is not prohibited in a Baroque fugue, but it might be considered unusual by many musicians. The fugue continues through measure twenty-two, then suddenly measure twenty-three appears in 2/4 time, after which a fantasy appears which initially appears to take the form of a Baroque-era toccata. However, Rachmaninoff's treatment of this fantasy clearly has his Romantic signature in its chromaticism and parallelism. Measure twenty-eight has a cadenza that sounds positively Chopinesque rather than from the quill of Bach; it leads to measure twenty-nine, which is a restatement of variation one. Rachmaninoff clearly intends to emphasize that restatement as the pinnacle of this variation as indicated by his *fortissimo* dynamic marking. The following three measures *diminuendo* to a final extended eight-note C-minor chord, harking back to the final chord of the theme.

In terms of technical challenges, the fugal part of this variation shares the same issues as any other fugue, namely the ability to effectively voice subject entries, especially while playing other notes in the same hand. Holding some such long notes while continuing moving passages necessitates extra work, even from an experienced pianist. A suggestion in this type of passage would be to utilize the sostenuto pedal. Measures twenty-one through twenty-seven require fluid, legato left-hand octaves, although the tempo is not so fast that virtuosity is necessary. Measures

twenty-eight through thirty necessitate smooth, even thirds in both hands. The cadenza in measure thirty-two involves effortless, flowing scalar passages. The ending requires excellent control of the *pianissimo* without sacrificing tone quality.

The musical challenges of this variation mirror the technical challenges. Fugal passages cannot be voiced properly without careful listening and tasteful subject entries. Rachmaninoff meticulously marks the dynamics throughout the fugue, but discretion is required to ensure long, horizontal phrases instead of the vertically-focused, motivic-sounding fugues of the inexperienced pianist. Measures twenty-eight through thirty, although divided into segments by wide rolled chords, can be artfully worked together into one long phrase. Shaping the cadenza in measure thirty-two by emphasizing the rising and falling scalar passages adds interest and excitement. Finally, careful planning and discretion are needed to achieve the extended three-measure diminuendo to the final C-minor *pianissimo* chord.

Example 1.14. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation XII

\*) **Var. XII**  
Moderato (♩=60)

*mf sempre legato*

*mf*

*m.d.*

*m.g.*

*dim.*

*m.d.*

*p*

*m.g.*

*m.d.*

*mf*

*mf*

*p*

*m.d.*

64

### Variation Thirteen: Largo

Variation Thirteen enters after the fermata that ends variation twelve, the fugue and fantasy. The fermata serves well as a transition, necessary because variation thirteen involves major changes from its predecessor. Although the tempo is only slightly slower, indicated as 52 to the quarter note instead of 60 for the previous variation, not many other similarities exist. This variation is in three-quarter time, has long phrases as opposed to fugal subjects, and is rhythmically consistent throughout the first twelve measures. The most immediately noticeable

<sup>64</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 11-12.

aspect of the variation is this rhythmic pattern uniformity. A quarter note, or occasionally a dotted eighth note with a sixteenth note, is followed by a half note on beat two. This sonorous half note on beat two, continuously appearing except at the end, takes on the effect of a tolling bell. Beat three, always a quarter note, is preceded by an ornament with the rhythmic value of a sixteenth note. The flourish always appears in both hands, sometimes as two thirty-second notes and sometimes as four sixty-fourth notes. The final four measures rhythmically vary from the first twelve, simplified but retaining strong three-beat patterns. This consistent, plodding, *largo* rhythm in a minor key gives the impression of a slow march, perhaps even a dirge. In terms of form, the variation's sixteen measures are divided into two eight-measure segments; together they are an excellent example of a parallel period. The first eight measures, or antecedent phrase, ascend chromatically to form a musical question and the final eight measures, or consequent phrase, descend chromatically to answer the musical question.

Because of the slow nature of the variation, it has only a few technical challenges. Some left-hand chords require a reach of a tenth, and re-handing is not possible due to an octave chord also existing in the right hand. Rolled chords could be considered, but might break the solemn, straight rhythm which is essential to the piece, as noted above. Therefore, it might be necessary to eliminate some notes for those pianists with smaller hands. A notable technical challenge is the fast, light motion needed for the quick flourishes, which precede beat three in measures one through twelve. It should be noted that these flourishes must be played while the half-note chords are held. However one chooses to reach the wide ranging chords, it must be remembered that all notes need to be heard while the flourishes are played. One solution is to use the sostenuto pedal and hold it for the duration of the half note. This may be a difficult or unfamiliar skill for some, but

for pianists without a large reach it will create the sound most authentic to what Rachmaninoff noted.

Musically, this variation is quite challenging. It would be very easy to focus on the flourishes and rhythmic consistency and ignore the difficulty of creating long, sweeping musical phrases. Advance planning and carefully graded dynamics are needed to achieve a *largo* eight-measure phrase and, of course, one must respect and follow Rachmaninoff's dynamic markings while doing so. A second musical challenge is to maintain lightness in the flourishes while carefully following the exact rhythm and playing them light enough so that they are softer than the preceding half note as it naturally fades over time. Finally, the successful performer must voice the composer's full chords so as to emphasize the soprano first, then the bass, and then all other voices. This voicing is especially challenging given the range of Rachmaninoff's wide-spanning chords and the stretch of the hands required to reach all of the notes.



Example 1.15. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation XIII

The image shows the musical score for Variation XIII, titled "Largo" with a tempo marking of quarter note = 52. The score is written in grand staff notation (treble and bass clefs) and is in the key of B-flat major (two flats) and 3/4 time. The piece is marked *pp* (pianissimo) at the beginning. The score consists of three systems of music. The first system shows the initial chords and a melodic line in the bass. The second system features a *cresc.* (crescendo) marking. The third system includes an 8-measure rest in the upper voice, marked with a dotted line and the number 8. The piece concludes with a final chord in the bass.

65

#### Variation Fourteen: Moderato

Variation fourteen is marked *moderato* with a metronome indication of 72 and appears in common time. It is comprised of four voices with Rachmaninoff clearly marking the dynamics of each voice. Despite marking the soprano, tenor, and bass all *pianissimo* and marking the alto *mezzoforte*, the composer further ensures that the alto is brought forward by writing *la melodia ben marcato* under the alto voice. Indeed, the alto carries the melody of the original theme, but

<sup>65</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 13.

the rhythm is greatly augmented, with an entire measure in this variation substituting for just one beat in the theme. For the first eight measures, flowing eighth-note scales in the soprano, dotted rhythm motives in the tenor, and a pedal point in the bass all accompany this extended melody. While the tenor dotted-rhythm motives descend in each measure, the soprano eighth-note scales descend in all measures except three and seven. Since the first eight measures can be divided into two four-measure phrases, the soprano ascending scales in measures three and seven produce a contrary motion with the tenor, thereby providing increased tension and a natural peak to each phrase. It is also interesting to note that in the parallel-motion measures (one, two, four, five, six and eight), Rachmaninoff creates one-measure canons by imitating the soprano scalar notes one beat later in the tenor. In measures nine to twelve, the composer quickens the augmented pace and reverses the tenor and soprano treatments so that the soprano plays the dotted rhythm and the tenor plays eighth-note scales. Measures thirteen to sixteen return to the original voicing and rhythmic treatment of measures one through eight, and a crescendo is indicated in measure sixteen as a lead in to the next section. In measures seventeen through twenty-two, large, right-hand octave chords move in contrary motion with left-hand intervals of as little as a third and as large as a sixth. This contrary motion, as noted for measures three, seven, and fifteen, provides a natural tension as the right-hand to left-hand intervals increase and a release as they decrease. Despite this natural tendency, Rachmaninoff leaves nothing to chance and clearly marks crescendi and diminuendi for each tension and release until measure twenty-two, in which he adds left-hand octave chords and indicates not only fortissimo but also an accent for each eighth note. Measures twenty-three and twenty-four see a reprise of measures nine through twelve with eighth notes in the left hand and dotted rhythms in the right hand; a diminuendo and *ritardando*

signal a closing of the variation. Measure twenty-five is a transition in 2/4 time to variation fifteen.

Technical challenges in variation fourteen require experience with playing four voices at a time with entirely different patterns. Slower scalar passages must be played legato and *pianissimo* without losing tone quality. Quick dotted rhythms require accuracy and clear execution despite large jumps, also at *pianissimo*. Experience with legato right-hand octave chords is a requirement for measures seventeen to twenty-two, simultaneously with two-note intervals played by the left hand that can be challenging in terms of fingering and legato phrasing.

This variation may present more musical challenges than technical ones. The performer must listen carefully and play the alto voice in a full, but not harsh, tone in order for the sound to sustain for an entire measure. Furthermore, the soprano, tenor, and bass must all be softer than the single-note alto, which is very difficult. Beautifully fluid scales must be executed, alternating between the right and left hands. Dotted rhythms must be played lightly, clearly, and softly, but tone cannot be sacrificed for the sake of *pianissimo* dynamics. The pianist must create long four-measure phrases for the first sixteen bars, after which the composer specifies dynamic markings for the close of the variation. A final musical polish is to create a sense of transition for the last three measures, along with stressing the harmonic anticipation of variation fifteen in the last measure.

Example 1.16. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation XIV

Var. XIV  
Moderato (♩=72)

*pp*  
*mf* la melodia ben marcato  
*pp*  
*m.g.*  
*cresc.*  
*f*

66

### Variation Fifteen: Allegro scherzando

Variation fifteen is presented in contrast to its predecessor in that it is a light, fast, and staccato *scherzo* instead of being slower, lyrical, and legato. This and the following three variations, forming movement IIb of Martyn's scheme, are all in F minor. Rachmaninoff writes it in 12/8 time with a metronome indication of 132 to the dotted quarter note. Most importantly, the composer indicates his intention for the approach and mood by writing the instruction of *allegro*

<sup>66</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 13-14.

*scherzando*. The textural scheme is four voices, with their roles switched frequently throughout the variation. At the beginning, for example, the original theme is presented in the soprano, with the theme's first two-note sequence written twice in dotted quarter notes in measure one followed by the theme's next three notes written out in measure two. The alto and tenor play dotted triplets, dotted quarter notes, and straight triplets as brief motives of the theme, while the bass plays dotted quarter notes. This textural plan continues until measure thirty-two, four measures before the coda, where the right hand plays wide rolled chords and the left hand plays legato scales and arpeggios. The coda concludes with the texture changing back to light, alternate hand triplets for four measures, wider chords accompanying descending scalar run, and then wide dual-hand chords in a final F-minor cadence. The general form of the piece is an altered AB with a coda. Measures one through eighteen are the first musical idea (A), presented in a staccato, dotted-triplet rhythm. Measures nineteen through twenty-six are an abbreviated reprise of A followed by B, which remains a fast triplet treatment of the theme but with a legato approach which introduces polyrhythms (two-against-three and three-against-four). Measures thirty-six through forty-three are a faster, *più vivo* coda with an indication of *leggiere*, ending with an F-minor chord. An influence for Rachmaninoff's creation of this variation may be Robert Schumann's Symphonic Etude No. 5. It includes the same direction of *scherzando*, is in AB form, and uses a similar dotted rhythm. The same etude by Schumann also is primarily in a quiet dynamic, *piano* and *pianissimo* with short outbursts of *sforzando* and *forte*.

Technical challenges are constant in variation fifteen. First, complete command of tone while playing *pianissimo* is necessary in order to avoid missing or poorly-sounding notes. Next, experience playing fast staccatos in both the left and right hands is helpful because nearly the entire piece uses this technique. Third, a facility of octaves with filled-in notes or chords is

needed because many of the triplet rhythms are written in such octaves. Fourth, an ability to continue musical ideas while switching from right to left hands, or vice versa, is required to maintain a musical line without interruptions or obvious changes in tone. Fifth, skill with polyrhythms is necessary for the B section which includes two-against-three and three-against-four. The ability to play fluid left-hand scales quickly is also required in the coda. Of course, many of these techniques appear in combination so a lack of experience with any one of them could prove to be a great difficulty when two or more are intermixed. Finally, the execution of the pedal while using these techniques must also be considered. In order to not blur fast moving rhythms and execute the work authentically, it is best to use the pedal in quick touches to expand the resonance but not mangle the sound.

The musical challenges in variation fifteen relate to producing a convincing performance while conquering all the technical challenges noted above. Phrases are generally four measures in length but creating phrases from motivic material is always more difficult than from a long, lyrical line. The performer must be cognizant of bringing forward the thematic material where it does appear, although some measures are flourishing interludes between the expositions of the theme. Maintaining a full tone at *pianissimo*, as always, requires careful listening and sensitivity. The overall form should be considered, and contrasts between the moods of A, A prime, B, and the coda should be optimized. In this vein, a truly beautiful and singing *legato* in the B section will provide an excellent contrast. Of course, the temperament of a *scherzo* must be maintained at all times in respect for Rachmaninoff's instruction; this is also true for his accents, which appear at irregular points and can truly change the nature of the performance. Finally, the coda, marked *più vivo* and *leggiero*, must sound light and fast without a hint of technical struggle.

**Var. XV**  
**Allegro scherzando** (♩=132)

Variation Sixteen: Lento

Variation sixteen is a rhapsodic in nature, and is often compared to the famous eighteenth variation in Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, op. 43 for piano and orchestra. It is lyrical, declamatory, free in style, and may be considered sectional. Furthermore, this variation is filled with possibilities for musical expression, thereby meeting the historic meaning of

<sup>67</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 15.

rhapsody being “an extravagant effusion of sentiment or feeling.”<sup>68</sup> The work’s tempo is marked *lento*, it is written in common time, and has a metronome indication of 54 to the quarter note. Rachmaninoff writes the instruction of *sempre espressivo*, which hardly seems necessary given the beautiful melodic material. The composer does not quote the theme, but rather extrapolates its stepwise, ascending, and descending motions to create a unique, gorgeous tune. The right hand carries the melody in a single line throughout and is marked *mezzoforte* at the start, with specific dynamic indications that span from *pianissimo* to *forte*. However, before the right hand begins, the left hand introduces listeners to the variation with flowing arpeggios. The left hand is marked *piano*, a direction which is assumed to last for the entire variation since no further guidance is offered. Rachmaninoff’s dynamic markings make the form of the piece and its intended phrasing clear; he writes a crescendo and diminuendo for the beginning and end of each phrase. With the variation in F minor, the first phrase starts with an A-flat as three eighth-note pickups to the second phrase, which is the rhythmic pattern in every phrase. The first phrase is two measures long, followed by another two-measure phrase starting on F. The third phrase starts on A, but it is an extended version of the melody that lasts four measures and peaks in the middle with a *forte*. The fourth and final phrase is a repeat of the first two-measure phrase, but now the left-hand arpeggios produce a richer texture by spanning a wider range and utilizing wide rolled chords. In the next measure, the right hand plays a generally descending pattern leading to the final measure, which is suddenly in the parallel major key, F major; the right hand sustains a chord while the left hand plays an ascending arpeggio. Please note that the dotted rhythm on beat four of the final measure is a pick-up to the following variation.

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<sup>68</sup> John Rink, *Rhapsody* (Interactive Factory, n.d.), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000023313>.



Technical challenges come in three categories. First, the performer must have fluid left-hand arpeggios that can remain legato despite large intervals. Second, many hand-crossings are needed throughout. Although this is a procedural difficulty, it does provide an element of visual interest for a live audience if done gracefully. Finally, there are some wide left-hand chords at the end, which can prove challenging for pianists with smaller hands.

Variation sixteen is more musically demanding than most of the other variations. The performer must have a level of discreet but solid musical sensitivity that allows for clear phrasing over extended periods. With the phrase plan outlined above, the pianist must make the overall form clear to the listeners and climax at the correct time. Building to and releasing from climaxes is much more than just a matter of dynamics, and in this variation, an artist will be distinguishable from a technician. The pianist should be mindful of the improvisatory nature of the melodic line. Finally, the performer must be able to subjugate the busy left hand to the right-hand melody at all times.

Example 1.18. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation XVI

Var. XVI  
Lento. (♩ = 54.)

*mf sempre espressivo*

*p*

*m.d.* *m.g.* *m.d.* *m.g.* *m.d.*

*m.g.* *m.d.* *p* *cresc.*

69

### Variation Seventeen: Grave

Variation seventeen is a stark and bleak contrast to the beauty and appeal of variation sixteen. Marked *grave*, it is written in three-quarter time with a metronome indication of only 46 to the quarter note. Many aspects of this variation are evocative of a funeral dirge. First, the introduction to the variation is a dotted rhythm in the two notes preceding the variation, which is a rhythm traditionally associated with a funeral march or *pavane*. Second, repeated B-flats in the tenor and bass are evocative of bells tolling, a favorite device of Rachmaninoff. Third, the slow tempo and the serious nature of the harmonies denote a processional. Finally, there is an element

<sup>69</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 18.

of hesitation, which many associate with a funeral, present in the composer's treatment of the theme. In fact, the theme is stated in the second measure in the soprano, with the first two-note pattern repeated three times in the preceding measure in a manner which evokes hesitation. This occurs twice, and both times the tenor and alto have two-note slurs which each start on G but descend one note with each subsequent beat. Throughout these four measures, the bass carries a B-flat pedal point, sometimes in octaves and occasionally interspersed with dotted rhythms. In measure five, the melodic interest switches to the alto where a mournful chordal pattern appears in the next four measures, which generally ascends chromatically, including many more descending two-note slurs; the same pattern appears in the tenor but is comprised of single notes instead of chords. The soprano and bass toll a B-flat repeatedly for two measures, sometimes in an octave and usually in a dotted rhythm, after which they generally ascend but do so using two-note descending patterns. Measures ten and eleven change dramatically to only triplet chords in both hands with a crescendo to measure twelve, in which a thick tonal structure, bell-like sonorities, and descending motives are played until the piece diminishes to an ending in B-flat minor.

Variation seventeen has several technical challenges. Because of the thick, heavy tonal structure, the performer must be constantly aware of the voicing and have the ability to express the melody clearly across large ranges. Although there are no fast passages that pose a technical challenge, there are several fast, left-hand flourishes that require a clean and quick facility. The biggest barrier to playing this piece is the large reach necessary for the chordal structure and the simultaneous overlay of multiple chords in all four voices. Those with smaller hands may need to weigh the pros and cons of playing rolled chords versus eliminating duplicative octaves.

Musical challenges in variation seventeen are easy to overlook. Because the piece is so busy with four voices, widely-spaced chords, multiple rhythms, bell tones, and the like, it is easy to overlook phrasing and overall structure. Without musical discretion, the variation becomes ponderous and without direction. Creating clear phrasing, as noted above, creates a sense of relief at the end of each mournful phrase; following the composer's dynamics will aid in this effort. A particularly important dynamic, and one that would be difficult to overlook, is the *fortissimo* climax that extends from measure eleven through fifteen, which must be maintained the entire time to avoid a premature diminuendo. It is important to create a full, but not harsh, sound and to approach the piece respectfully as the style of a funeral dirge assists in creating this solemn mood. Finally, it is critical to carefully plan the final diminuendo so as not to become too soft too quickly.

Example 1.19. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation XVII

Var. XVII  
Grave (♩ = 46)

The musical score for Variation XVII is presented in three systems. The first system begins with a treble clef, a key signature of three flats (B-flat minor), and a 3/4 time signature. The tempo is marked 'Grave' with a metronome marking of quarter note = 46. The dynamics start at *mf* and end at *f*. The second system continues with dynamics of *p* and *cresc.*. The third system is marked 'Tempo I' and includes dynamics of *f*, *un poco accel.*, and *p cresc.*. The score features complex textures with triplets and chromatic lines in both hands.

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### Variation Eighteen: *Più Mosso*

Variation eighteen may be considered as an extension of variation seventeen. It remains in B-flat minor and retains its predecessor's chromaticism, but it is marked *più mosso* (the first variation without a metronome indication) and is in common time. It may be considered an extension because the theme is only occasionally interspersed in the tenor voice and the variation bears more similarities to variation seventeen than to the original theme. The half-step motives are similar, albeit in triplet rhythms in the right hand. The left hand is arpeggiated and

<sup>70</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 19.

polyrhythms are present, but the bell-like tolling and thick, four-voice chordal structure are shed so as to make the eighteenth variation gentler. One possible visualization would be to view the seventeenth variation as a funeral dirge and then view the eighteenth variation as a memory of that funeral dirge having occurred long ago, sweetened with recollections of the deceased loved one substituted for memories of the dreaded event. This variation is only twelve measures long and its form is simple. The first four measures may be divided into two two-measure segments which each start with the tension caused by the polyrhythms that resolve into triplets in all voices wherein the theme appears in an altered rhythm in the tenor voice. The next four measures are an extended polyrhythmic section that swells and recedes dynamically, generally ascending but with temporary descending “hesitations,” as in variation seventeen. The final four measures, nine through twelve, continue the right hand’s hesitantly-ascending chordal progression, but clarity is provided with the absence of polyrhythms and the beauty of full rolled chords in the left hand. The variation ends with a gentle, improvisatory-sounding five-against-three arpeggio and chord sequence that resolves into a perfect cadence.

Technical challenges in variation eighteen include the ability to play fluid, continuous runs of right-hand octave chords. Left-hand challenges include large jumps and voicing of the tenor, where indicated, with *tenuto* markings. In the last four measures, the left hand must play very wide rolled chords over a span of three octaves. Two-against-three and three-against-five polyrhythms exist between the hands.

The musical challenges exceed the technical challenges in this variation. Voicing the tenor theme, although it appears sparingly, must be done with a full tone but with no sense of sharp attack so as not to ruin the calmer mood of this variation. Smooth legato octave chords in the right hand are difficult without the overuse and smudging of the pedal. Softer sections,

particularly in the presence of widely-spaced chords, must be executed with a full tone but without the loss of gentleness. Finally, it is critical to maintain a steady beat and utilize dynamics—but not *rubato*—for phrasing, so as not to interrupt the rocking motion of the continuous triplets.

Example 1.20. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation XVIII

20

**Var. XVIII**  
**Più mosso**

*p legato* *mf* *p* *cresc.*

71

<sup>71</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 20.

### Variation Nineteen: Allegro Vivace

Suddenly, this variation is in A major after the previous variations having been in B-flat minor; common time is the only similarity between variation nineteen and its predecessors. It is an outbreak of joy after the somber mood of the preceding two variations. Bell-like tones ring out, but unlike their funereal iterations in previous variations, these bells are ringing in festivity. This is the first of the final four variations which Martyn considers, as a group, to be the last of the three larger sonata-like movements of the work. These four have the most extended form of the twenty-two. Variation nineteen is marked *Allegro vivace* with further instructions of *sempre marcato* and *fortissimo*. Pedal tones in the bass and soprano start the variation with a reminiscence of Rachmaninoff's beloved bells. The alto and tenor enter with full octave chords which create a dense sonority. The theme, difficult to recognize, is present in the inner voices motivically; for example, in eighth and quarter notes of measures one and two in the alto. The overall structure is A, B, extended A, coda. Section A begins with a four-measure pattern that is repeated in the dominant in measures five through eight. Section B is also eight bars, spanning measures nine through sixteen with a contrasting, more lyrical, and lighter-textured approach. The melodic line is clearly marked in the tenor with slurs between the melody notes. The left hand also plays arpeggiated notes in the bass which, in combination with the tenor, create a perpetual sixteenth-note pattern. The right hand also has the melodic line in chords, each marked with a *tenuto*. However, the dynamic marking is *piano* so the overall effect is one of calm. An extended treatment of section A returns in measure seventeen, revisiting the opening sequence in a variety of tonalities until it reaches the climax in measure twenty-four. Marked *fortissimo* and *marcato*, both hands play rich octave chords in continuous eighth notes in a generally descending pattern until measure twenty-eight, where the texture gradually thins and the dynamics



diminuendo until the start of the coda in measure thirty-two. The coda is marked *fortissimo* and *maestoso* and the dual-hand octave chords reprise the rhythm of the original theme, ending in a grand fashion and leading into variation twenty.

The technical challenges of this variation are similar to the others in that facility with continuous, dual-hand octave chords is needed. However, at this point, stamina is an additional necessity given the great number of octave chords that have accumulated through all the variations to this point. The ability to play large jumps easily is also necessary due to the number and range of jumps from pedal tones to other chords. Ease of left-hand arpeggios and jumps are essential in the B section from measures nine through sixteen.

The primary musical challenge of variation nineteen is sensitivity to musical phrasing. The entire variation could turn into a cacophony of octave chords if the phrases are not planned and carefully differentiated. The pianist should plan for quiet lyricism in measures nine through sixteen. Careful voicing of the few thematic motives should be clear but not boisterous. Overall, caution is advised to have a full, joyful tone without a harsh bite. Finally, overpedaling is strongly discouraged for the sake of clarity.

**Var. XIX**  
**Allegro vivace**

*ff sempre marcato*

*dim.* *p*

Variation Twenty: Presto

Variation twenty is quick and etude-like and is thrilling for audiences to see and hear. It opens in the A major key of its predecessor but transitions to C-sharp minor. It is written in three-quarter time, marked *presto*, and given a metronome indication of 92 to the dotted half-note (full measure). The right hand is the star of this variation with continuous eighth notes from beginning to end, thereby creating a perpetual motion. The left-hand treatment varies by section

<sup>72</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 21-22.

as the variation progresses. For the first sixteen measures, the left hand plays only occasionally, sounding two-note motives in chords reminiscent of the first notes of the theme. In measures seventeen through thirty-six, the left hand plays quarter notes but not in a typical fashion for three-quarter time. Instead of a pattern of three which accents beat one, the left hand's motion alternates in sets of two, thereby creating a syncopated feeling over a two-measure period. The left hand then takes up a more traditional role in measures thirty-seven through fifty-two, treating the downbeat differently than beats two and three. Measure fifty-three is a virtuosic cadenza, which uses arpeggios and scalar passages to encompass a nearly five-octave span in descending motion. After the cadenza, right-hand eighth-note perpetual motion continues while the left hand generally follows the same variety of approaches in the same order as the pre-cadenza. In the coda, measures ninety-five to one hundred six, the left hand splits into the tenor and bass while the right hand creates one-measure patterns that ascend with each measure. Finally, the right-hand perpetual motion ends with the addition of a soprano voice, the left hand plays quarter-note arpeggios, and the variation ends with an ascending motion combined with a diminuendo.

The technical requirements of variation twenty include virtuoso speed and right-hand scalar passages with the stamina to last the entire four pages. The left hand needs to play wide jumps easily and the ability to work seamlessly with the right hand in the cadenza. There are three *ossia* passages in the right hand; these provide the option of a second note in the right hand in one *ossia*. In the other two *ossia* passages, the right hand is in a high treble range, which adds a descant-type flourish to the line. These optional passages are not advisable unless the performer is fully confident in first performing the variation hands together, at tempo.

Musically, variation twenty can be quite taxing. It is essential to allow the dynamics to ebb and flow slightly with the ascending and descending perpetual motion. If this is not done, the

variation will sound like a child playing an etude. Retaining the *piano* and *pianissimo* dynamics for most of the piece without sacrificing tone quality is difficult. It is necessary to respect all marked dynamics and syncopation for an effective performance. Most importantly, the variation should be felt in one, as a complete measure, not in three as a waltz. It is simply too fast and has too much movement to be performed as a dance movement.

Example 1.22. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation XX

**Var. XX**  
**Presto** (♩ = 92)

73

<sup>73</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 23-6.

### Variation Twenty-One: *Andante*

Variation twenty-one is written in two distinct parts: an *andante*, followed by a *più vivo*. The *andante* is written in three-quarter time, has a metronome marking of 60 to the quarter note, and is marked *cantabile*. In D-flat major, it displays the theme in an augmented rhythm and in canon. The original theme's note values are doubled and the theme first enters in the tenor in single notes, then enters again one measure later in the soprano in octaves. The left hand, in addition to the tenor melody, plays continuous sextuplet arpeggios through measure twelve. The right hand adds a variety of arpeggio rhythms to its soprano octave thematic material. These include groups of three, four, five, and six to the half note, and produce polyrhythms that create a thick, full sonority and a sense of harmonic and rhythmic complexity. Adding even further richness is the replacement of single tenor notes with increasingly wide chords starting in measure six. While the left hand provides a steady sextuplet rhythm against the right-hand polyrhythms in measures one through twelve, increasing metric complexity is introduced in measures thirteen through sixteen with both duple and triple left hand rhythms. This sense of tension finally releases in measure seventeen, when both hands have flowing sextuplet rhythms that slowly resolve to a *pianissimo* half note in measure twenty-three. Then, suddenly a dotted rhythm appears as an introduction to the second half of the variation, *più vivo*, which is in three-quarter time with a metronome indication of 100 to the quarter note. The thematic material starts in the soprano, marked with *tenuto*, and consists of two pairs of chromatically-descending eighth notes starting on the upbeat in measures two and three followed by a syncopated quarter, quarter, eighth note motive in measure four. This broken three-measure thematic motive repeats several times but is frequently surrounded by fragments of the theme constituted by two-note chromatically descending eighth notes in all voices. Syncopated rhythms and sixteenth-note runs

persist through measure sixteen. In measures seventeen through twenty-two, which begin *piano*, the right hand plays syncopated dotted sixteenth notes while syncopated sixteenth and eighth notes alternate in the left hand. A gradual crescendo through these six measures is aided by bass octaves and wide rolled chords in the left hand for the last two measures of the section. Measures twenty-four through twenty-eight are a *forte* riot of syncopation and polyrhythms, which climax in measure twenty-seven, then diminuendo to the end of measure twenty-eight. Measures twenty-nine and thirty finally resolve the rhythm into continuous sixteenth notes in the soprano with eighth notes in the alto, tenor, and bass. While the sudden lack of polyrhythms resolves tension, it is instantly built up again by contrary motion between the left and right hands, culminating in a fermata rest prior to the final, twenty-second variation.

Technically, the twenty-first variation is very challenging, especially in light of the cumulative fatigue that would be plaguing many pianists at this point. Musically, the first challenge is Rachmaninoff's own performance direction: *cantabile*. While some pianists are generally challenged when playing a lyrical line, nearly all pianists would be challenged by playing this singing tenor line with the plethora of other activity in the other three voices. In order to hear the lyrical tenor, all three other voices must be played softer. This is difficult, especially from measures six through eight, when wide-spanning rolled chords are introduced. Polyrhythms are difficult in many of the variations but are particularly problematic here because they are constantly shifting between two, three, four, five, and six subdivisions of the beat. Fluid left-hand arpeggios are required over a wide range, and legato right-hand octaves are a necessity. A broad reach is needed for the wide left-hand rolled chords that span up to three octaves. In the *più vivo* half, clear staccatos are needed in both hands and must be done at soft levels because the entire first page and most of the second is marked *piano* or *pianissimo*. Again, fluid octave

chords are necessary and may prove difficult for those with small hands. Finally, the pianist must be careful to crescendo very slowly on the final page because peaking too early would ruin the climax in the fourth measure before the end.

Musical difficulties in the *cantabile* may be overcome by viewing the creation of a singing line as an opportunity to construct a calm oasis before the storm of the final variation. The pianist must have the ability to play the tenor clearly but not forcefully and must have total control of his or her *pianissimo* in the three other voices to avoid any missing notes. The primary challenge in the *più vivo* is to portray a feeling of quiet excitement which peaks in the few measures before the last variation. It may be helpful to remember that the second half of this variation is a transition and to think of it as a short scherzo movement that leads into a larger, more serious movement.

Example 1.23. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation XXI

The image shows the musical score for Variation XXI, titled "Andante" with a tempo marking of quarter note = 60. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It is marked *mf cantabile*. The score is written for piano and consists of three systems of two staves each. The first system begins with a *p* dynamic marking. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some passages marked with fingerings (5 and 6). The second system continues the melodic and harmonic development. The third system includes a *cresc.* (crescendo) marking and ends with a fermata over the final chord.

74

### Variation Twenty-Two: *Maestoso*

Variation twenty-two is a majestic, grand finale that explores many of the ideas introduced in the other variations. It is a virtuoso's dream in that nearly every technique is on display and the full sonority of the piano is at the height of its possibilities. Carrying a direction of *maestoso*, it is written in common time and has a metronome indication of 100 to the quarter note. The variation's form is organized as A-B-A-coda. The A section starts with a restatement of the theme in the right hand for the first four beats, then a fanfare of eighth notes and flourishes

<sup>74</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 27-30.



of triplets exalt the theme for a total of four bars. The same approach occurs in measures five through eight at an interval of a fourth lower. Measures nine through sixteen continue the celebratory fanfare with harmonic and melodic motive fragments from the theme. The B section starts in measure seventeen and immediately reprises the fluid, *piano* sections of the previous variations with constant legato sextuplets in the right hand accompanied by legato eighth notes and triplets in the left hand. After four measures, the right hand maintains its sextuplet rhythm for the next four measures but becomes percussive instead of lyrical with octaves recalling the theme in half and quarter notes with repeated sextuplets in between. The left hand plays eighth notes, but they are now staccato instead of legato. Another four measures of the legato pattern follow and then another four measure of the staccato pattern. An eight-measure *leggiero* section ensues, leading into an eight-measure section marked *un poco più vivo*, which resembles the skeleton of the *maestoso* and slowly builds in orchestration until the transition back to the A section, marked *tempo primo*. The first eight measures resemble the beginning of the variation, but they are followed by an extended section that elongates the original eight measures to twelve. The sextuplet rhythm returns for twelve measures, but instead of the lyrical mood created in the B section, the theme from the beginning of the variation is overlaid. An extended diminuendo over the entire twelve measures serves as a transition to the *meno mosso*, which is a reprise of the full-chord motives in the opening of the variation, but in augmented form, at *piano* and *pianissimo* and with left-hand triplets for an accompaniment. An extended diminuendo occurs, which could be an ending, but suddenly the final *presto* section appears. Rapidly-played sixteenth notes persist until the last three measures. The sixteenth notes first appear in an alternate left hand, right hand pattern, forming an ascending scalar passage, then in four-note

ascending patterns played in unison octaves by both hands. The final ending is a series of wide, dual-hand C-major chords.

Technical challenges with this final variation encompass the majority of difficulties that a pianist could possibly encounter. These include repeated octave chords, fast dual-hand flourishes, fast passages of arpeggios and scale patterns, rapidly-repeated notes and chords, polyrhythms, large jumps, fluid octave passages, and dynamic extremes.

Musically, it might be helpful to think of this variation as similar to “The Great Gate of Kiev” at the end of Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Both sets offer a wide variety of moods and treatments, but both end grandly. Audiences wait throughout the entire *Pictures* in anticipation of “The Great Gate of Kiev,” and thinking positively about this ending in the same way might help pianists to execute an exciting, expressive ending.

Example 1.24. Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, Variation XXII

Var. XXII  
Maestoso (♩ = 100)

*ff sempre marcato*

*m.d.*

*m.d.*

75

### Interview with Dr. Ian Hobson: Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22

A discussion of the work with someone who has performed Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22 live gives an insightful view of a performer's thoughts on the challenging work. My professor, Dr. Ian Hobson, who in addition to being a world-renowned pianist, is also Professor Emeritus at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Professor of Piano at Florida State University, and conductor and director of the Sinfonia da Camera. He discussed his experience with the variations with me on February 14, 2018.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 31-6.

<sup>76</sup> Dr. Ian Hobson, A Performer's Opinion of Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22., interview by Anne Marie Kuhny, In Person, February 14, 2018.

Hobson stated that he discovered and became interested in Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, as well as other Rachmaninoff works, as a student. He chose not to perform the work until recently due to its length and, therefore, its difficulty in programming. He said he has been working on Rachmaninoff long term and that he originally recorded Rachmaninoff transcriptions after winning the Leeds Competition; these were released on LP. These transcriptions were re-recorded with some original works later on CD. He has performed and recorded most of Rachmaninoff's works including the *Variations on a Theme of Corelli*, op. 42; the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, op. 43; as well as all Preludes, Concerti, Sonatas, *Etudes-Tableaux*, and others. He performed the *Variations on a Theme of Chopin* later, most recently live in New York within the last year.

Hobson discussed his opinions regarding Rachmaninoff's use and treatment of the Chopin Prelude, op. 28, no. 20. He said that Rachmaninoff worked in the style and harmonies of Chopin but with his own chromaticism and polyphonic style. The work is drawn out and the composer chooses to do unique things, particularly in the later variations. Rachmaninoff employs variation techniques that include using polyphony, fugues, and genres like the polonaise.

Hobson then spoke about studying and performing the *Chopin Variations*. He said that some of the most rewarding aspects of the work are its full harmonies and romantic style. Some challenges of the piece include its length and therefore the extensive memory necessary to perform it. However, he said that with time he became accustomed to Rachmaninoff's ideas such as long runs, patterning, chromaticism, etc.

Hobson discussed the idea that Rachmaninoff might have performed an altered and condensed version of the *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22. He said that he would prefer to perform the original set for the sake of authenticity. He indicated that the full set and all of its

variety is indicative of Rachmaninoff's thought process at the time of composition. He found the longer version of the original set more rewarding, even if it is longer than all of the other sets of variations that Rachmaninoff composed.

Next, we discussed the numerous variation techniques in the piece. Hobson indicated that he does not believe they are clearly or distinctly organized in any fashion. However, the entire set does flow through the course of the work despite the lack of obvious organizational structure. To him, the set became stylistically clear after he had worked on it for some time.

We then spoke about the fact that some critics in Rachmaninoff's time disapproved of the work, calling the variations unoriginal. Hobson disagreed with this opinion, stating that Rachmaninoff utilized material but created variations in his own style, using the influence of his predecessors. Hobson stated that the final variation is clearly influenced by Rachmaninoff's fellow Russian, Tchaikovsky, which is evidenced by the full orchestral sound of variation twenty-two. We agreed that using the pervasive style of his time but in his own way should not be called unoriginal.

Our next topic was the comparison of Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22 with Busoni's *Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*, BV 213a. Hobson said that he has read through the lengthy earlier version (BV 213, composed in 1884) and that he found it Lisztian in style. He has not read through the 1922 final version. Hobson's opinion is that Busoni's original works are not as highly valued in quality as his transcriptions, which are well-valued by audiences. He said that Busoni transcribes other composers' works to make them sound more authentic at the piano. For example, he adds material such as harmonies, for example, to make an original organ work sound more like an organ when played on the piano. In contrast, Rachmaninoff is more Chopinesque in style with longer Romantic lines. Rachmaninoff uses

rhythms in some variations that reflect a polonaise or mazurka influence. In general, Rachmaninoff is more original and uses his own style in a more convincing manner. Hobson also mentioned that Rachmaninoff's *Chopin Variations* can be compared to Beethoven's *33 Variations on a Waltz by Anton Diabelli*, op. 120. He felt that the two sets are comparable in terms of length and variety of styles in the variations, but the harmonies are quite different. However, he was careful to note that the Rachmaninoff work is not to be considered equal in quality to the Beethoven work.

Finally, we discussed the originality of Rachmaninoff's work. Hobson stated that the composer remained true to the influence of his predecessors but over time added increasing degrees of chromaticism, seventh chords, and other modern compositional features. Even so, Rachmaninoff always reverted to tonal harmony.

### **Conclusion**

Rachmaninoff saw great personal and political change in his life. Born into a wealthy bourgeois Russian family with five estates, his father's spending habits forced his wife and children into a relatively meager existence while Rachmaninoff was still a youth. Fortunately, Imperial Russia had central conservatories and, once secure in the Moscow Conservatory, Rachmaninoff escaped his family life and focused entirely on developing his musical talents. After graduating with high honors and marrying happily, Rachmaninoff again found himself in turmoil during the Bolshevik Revolution. Fleeing to freedom, Rachmaninoff made another career in Europe and America, but forever missed his beloved Russia.

Later in life, Rachmaninoff found himself unsatisfied with his *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22. He was particularly bothered by its extensive length, leading him to make variations VII, X, XII, and the coda optional to the performer. In the minds of some, this slightly

impairs the structural potential of the work.<sup>77</sup> Martyn describes Rachmaninoff's opinion about the *Chopin Variations* in the following manner:

More than anything he was bothered by its length; he made performance of three of the variations - 7, 10 and 12 - and the coda optional, and in a note appended to the list of his compositions he sent Asayev in 1917, he remarked that he played the work "in a shortened and altered form," and that he intended to include his corrections in a new edition (though nothing came of this). Sixteen years later, talking to Alfred Swan about what he saw as superfluties in some of his early works, Rachmaninoff mentioned the *Chopin Variations* as one of the pieces he had changed.<sup>78</sup>

Some reasons that the *Variations on a Theme of Chopin* remains underperformed and may continue to be include the opinion of some musicians that the overall structure of this piece lacks the forward progression found in the *Corelli* and *Paganini Variations*. Moreover, it poses programming problems due to its length as it is too long to be anything short of half of a recital for most performers. Even so, due to its obvious technical virtuosity and beautiful musical moments, it is rewarding enough to make it a programmed work for a pianist with excellent technical and musical skills.

Rachmaninoff himself preferred these variations enough to make them a part of his repertoire during his first seasons as a full-time virtuoso pianist. In addition to the *Chopin Variations*, he also prepared works by other composers, including Beethoven's Piano Sonata, op. 10, no. 3, the Bach-Busoni D-minor Chaconne, Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody no. 12, Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons*, Rubinstein's Barcarolle in A Minor, op. 93, no. 7, and many other works, both of his own and by other composers. While he had been famous in Russia as a performer since at least 1894, Rachmaninoff's worldwide career truly accelerated in 1918. He

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<sup>77</sup> Max Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings*, 2nd Edition (London: Continuum, 2006), 110-12.

<sup>78</sup> Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 147-8.

toured the world, averaging about fifty concerts a year but chose to limit himself to performing solely in North America for periods of up to four years.<sup>79</sup>

Others also deem these variations significant enough to include them as part of their repertoire, evident in their choice to record them. Their prevalence in the recording industry, particularly in comparison to that of Busoni's variations on the same prelude, will be thoroughly examined in chapter four. It is quite likely that live performances followed the same trend, but such an examination is not a part of this study.

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<sup>79</sup> Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 382-4.



## **CHAPTER 2: FERRUCCIO BUSONI'S *TEN VARIATIONS ON A PRELUDE BY CHOPIN*, BV 213A**

### **History of Busoni**

Ferruccio Dante Michelangelo Benvenuto Busoni was born on April 1, 1866, during the reign of King Victor Emmanuel II, the first king of a united Italy since the fall of the Roman Empire. During this proud time in Italian history, his father, Ferdinando, gave him three middle names in honor of three great men in his Tuscan heritage, undoubtedly Dante Alighieri, Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, and Benvenuto Cellini. This magnificent naming after Tuscan artistic giants was almost certainly a foretelling of Ferdinando's image of his son's role in the world and in the family's life, as he unquestionably had high ambitions for his son.<sup>80</sup>

Much information exists regarding Ferruccio's parents and the roles that they played in his life. Earlier texts written only a decade after the composer's death, such as those by Edward Dent, do not entirely agree with newer books, such as that by Della Couling, which are based on original letters and other primary sources from both the free world and what was previously known as the Iron Curtain. What we do know is that his father, a full-blooded Tuscan, was a virtuoso clarinetist who traveled and concertized throughout southern and western Europe until Ferruccio was about six years old. His mother, Anna Weiss, was half German and half Italian, born and raised in Trieste, an Italian city which at the time was part of the massive Austro-Hungarian Empire under Emperor Franz Joseph II. She was a successful pianist who was well-known across Europe, had an excellent reputation on the concert stage, and had played for Franz Liszt. She was also a devout Catholic, a devoted mother, and a dutiful wife despite her husband's spending habits and parenting methods. Being the son of two musicians, young Ferruccio was

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<sup>80</sup> Robert Rimm, *The Composer-Pianists: Hamelin and The Eight* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 2002), 47.

exposed to great music from infancy, having lessons with his mother from the age of three or four. Unexpectedly, after age six, it was Ferdinando who taught the boy, not Anna, despite her high level of pianistic skill and experience. Avoiding the controversy between various biographies regarding details of the young composer's training, a quote directly from Ferruccio elucidates the pedagogical relationship between father and son:

My father knew little about the pianoforte and was erratic in rhythm, so he made up for these shortcomings with an indescribable combination of energy, severity and pedantry. For four hours a day he would sit by me at the pianoforte, with an eye on every note and every finger. There was no escape and no interruption except for his explosions of temper which were violent in the extreme. A box on the ears would be followed by copious tears, accompanied by reproaches, threats and terrifying prophecies, after which the scene would end in a great display of parental emotion, assurances that it was all for my good, and so on to a final reconciliation—the whole story beginning again the next day.<sup>81</sup>

Ferdinando, prior to his son's turning six, was frequently away from the family on concert tours. However, on Christmas 1872, Ferdinando suddenly returned to Trieste where, in his absence, he had deposited his son and his wife with her father. Young Ferruccio displayed great gifts for pianism and composing at this early age, at which time Ferdinando promptly gave up his nomadic clarinet career to turn his full-time attention to his son's musical education and the public promotion of the child's career.<sup>82</sup>

Ferdinando's public promotion of his son's prodigious talents began shortly afterward. In 1873 the young Ferruccio gave his first public appearance with his parents in a joint concert in Trieste, playing the Mozart K. 545, two selections from Schumann's *Album für die Jugend*, and Clementi's F-Major Sonatina. A local critic was ebullient in his praise:

...arousing a real feeling of astonishment and admiration. The truly phenomenal little boy played from memory on the piano with his little hands pieces from Mozart and Schumann, which are not accessible to every grown-up pianist, with a confidence, and a precision in tempi, beyond all praise. The little Weiss-Busoni must without a doubt be endowed with natural talent, but his precocious musical culture also to a great extent

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<sup>81</sup> Edward J. Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni: A Biography* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1974), 16.

<sup>82</sup> Antony Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 21.

reflects honor on his distinguished and gifted mother, who with a very special intuition has been able to guide his exceptional aptitude.<sup>83</sup>

Ferruccio remained with his parents in Trieste for about two more years, with his mother teaching piano lessons to the young ladies of the area to earn money for the family. The young pianist went to school with other children but was otherwise completely occupied with piano lessons from his father and violin lessons from a local teacher. He also produced a large number of compositions, many of which Sitsky cataloged.<sup>84</sup> He was always busy with lessons, composing, school, and homework, and noted later in life that, “I never had a childhood.”<sup>85</sup> Although young Ferruccio described the lessons of his early years with his father negatively as noted above, in the preface to his edition of Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*, he wrote that he was grateful for his father’s rigor regarding the thorough study of Bach:

I have to thank my father for the good fortune that he kept me strictly to the study of Bach in my childhood, and that in a time and in a country in which the master was rated little higher than a Carl Czerny. My father was a simple virtuoso on the clarinet, who liked to play fantasias on *Il Trovatore* and the *Carnival of Venice*; he was a man of incomplete musical education, an Italian and a cultivator of the *bel canto*. How did such a man in his ambition for his son’s career come to hit upon the one very thing that was right? I can only compare it to a mysterious revelation. He educated me in this way to be a “German” musician and showed me the path which I never entirely deserted, though at the same time I never cast off the Latin qualities given to me by nature.<sup>86</sup>

After two years of intensive study in Trieste, Ferdinando decided that Vienna, then the musical center of Europe, was the only place for his *wunderkind*. With much hope and little money, the pair set out for the capital of the powerful Austro-Hungarian Empire in fall 1875. Ferdinando’s plan, or lack thereof, was to live in high style at the “Hotel Erzherzog Carl—the hotel for princes and celebrities”<sup>87</sup> and to pay for it with Ferruccio’s income from concerts and

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<sup>83</sup> Della Couling, *Ferruccio Busoni: A Musical Ishmael* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 14.

<sup>84</sup> Larry Sitsky, *Busoni and the Piano: The Works, The Writings, and The Recordings*, 2nd ed. (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2009), 9-34.

<sup>85</sup> Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer*, 21.

<sup>86</sup> Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni*, 17-8.

<sup>87</sup> Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni*, 20.

Anna's income from teaching piano lessons back in Trieste. Financial planning was not Ferdinando's forte and the pair found themselves in frequent fear of debt from the hotel and meal bills.<sup>88</sup> However, Ferdinando was charming and convincing, often bringing important musicians back to his room at the hotel to hear the young pianist. This plan, ill-conceived as it may have been financially, was fruitful for Ferruccio's career because he was able to establish important contacts such as Anton Rubinstein. Maestro Rubinstein wrote that Ferruccio "possesses a most remarkable talent, both as a performer and a composer."<sup>89</sup> While Ferdinando surely appreciated such praise, he ignored Rubinstein's advice that Ferruccio would be ruined by concertizing and that the boy must be allowed to complete his musical education without traveling to earn money. Ferdinando did not allow the young man to cease his concertizing for the benefit of his schooling for another four years.

Musically, young Busoni thrived in Vienna. Most importantly, he was immersed in music and heard many of the world's great artists and composers, thereby honing his musical ear and refining his likes and dislikes. His solo debut received positive reviews and he was admitted to the Conservatory. Patronage was found in the generous Gomperz family, whose daughters, Frau von Wertheimstain and Baroness Todesco,<sup>90</sup> provided much-needed financial support for Ferruccio for many years to come. He gave frequent piano recitals of works by the great masters as well as his own compositions. Busoni was prolific during this time, writing not only for piano but also for chamber ensembles, chorus, and orchestra. He played for Franz Liszt, but the opinion of the great Hungarian composer, then about 65 years old, is a matter of dispute between

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<sup>88</sup> Couling, *Ferruccio Busoni*, 21.

<sup>89</sup> Grigory Kogan, *Busoni as Pianist* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010), 9-10.

<sup>90</sup> Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni*, 21.

Busoni biographers; Dent states that Liszt did not offer a testimonial, but Couling asserts that Liszt did.

Ferruccio's professors at the Vienna Conservatory recommended a minimum five-year course of study, but Busoni's father ensured that time away from touring would be shorter. The reason for this early departure appears to be twofold. First, shortly after his solo debut, young Ferruccio contracted diphtheria and was seriously ill for months; his physician recommended he be removed from crowded and cold Vienna. However, the second reason became clear soon afterward as Ferdinando reignited Ferruccio's touring schedule across Europe, spreading the young boy's fame and generating income enough for the entire family. During this period, he spent some time studying composition at Graz with the famous composer Wilhelm Mayer,<sup>91</sup> during which he conducted his own choral works and performed his own piano pieces. Busoni completed Mayer's usual two-year composition course in fifteen months, one which was rich in history and the arts. In fact, "the widest possible culture makes the artist" was his motto.<sup>92</sup> After the course, he was withdrawn from Mayer's care to complete yet another European tour and did not focus solely on his education again until the age of fifteen.

Ferdinando, continuously seeking honor and recognition for his prodigious son, looked to the young Mozart as a model. Ferdinando sought the same honor for his son as Mozart had been awarded. According to Kogan, Ferruccio's father proceeded,

With his maniacal aspiration to copy the biography of Mozart. As the latter was elected to the famous Philharmonic Academy in Bologna in the fifteenth year of his life, so the fifteen-year-old Busoni was required to seek the same honor. After passing an extremely difficult examination, in 1881 he, too became a member of the Bolognese Academy-the first one since Mozart to be awarded this honorable title at such an early age.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer*, 22.

<sup>92</sup> Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni*, 38.

<sup>93</sup> Kogan, *Busoni as Pianist*, 10.

During his time in Bologna, Ferruccio wrote and published several large-scale works including his first transcription, a category of compositions which would result in his longest-lasting fame.

Not surprisingly, Ferruccio sought independence from his father when he reached the age of eighteen. He remained mostly in Vienna, Leipzig, and Berlin as a pianist, composer, and author of articles on musical topics for various periodicals. Notably, he premiered his original version of the *Variations and Fugue in C minor on Prelude op. 28, no. 20 by Frédéric Chopin*, BV 213 (originally op. 22) in Berlin in 1885. However, due to the lack of a permanent position, Busoni had difficulty supporting himself during this time. In an August 1921 letter to Myasnikov, Busoni relates a charming story regarding his eagerness to earn money in 1886:

I am walking down the street and run into Schwalm (the owner of C. F. Kahnt publishing house - G. K.). I immediately stop him: "Please take my compositions - I need the money." "I can't do that right now, but if you would like to write a little Fantasy on the *Barber of Baghdad* for me, come to me in the morning, and I'll give you fifty marks in advance and a hundred after it's ready." "Agreed!" We said our goodbyes.

The next morning I come for the fifty marks: "Does our agreement still stand, Mr. Schwalm? One hundred after the job is done?" "Of course! Here are the fifty!" "And here is the finished work," and I take the manuscript out of my pocket. I worked from nine at night to three thirty, without a piano, and not knowing the opera beforehand.<sup>94</sup>

Busoni's adventures in Leipzig, Berlin, and Vienna were fruitful in terms of the formation of life-long friendships with many of the most important musical minds of the day. Tchaikovsky and Brahms both endorsed the young composer. However, seeking a regular income and independence, in 1888 Busoni accepted a full-time professorship at Helsingfors Institute, then part of the Russian Empire but now Helsinki, Finland.

Busoni's time in Helsinki began badly with a rough sea journey and terrible seasickness. Upon arrival, he discovered that Helsinki was far from a musical capital and lacked the type of artistic culture to which he had become accustomed. There was no opera house, few galleries,

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<sup>94</sup> Kogan, *Busoni as Pianist*, 11.

and the orchestra was at constant odds with the conservatory. Most distressing was the inferior quality of his students, most of whom were playing at the level of Clementi; Busoni's introduction of Beethoven and Bach was a serious shock. However, Busoni afforded every performance opportunity with both the orchestra and the Institute, spending what free time he found composing.<sup>95</sup>

Busoni formed many long-lasting friendships in Helsinki, including with Jean Sibelius. However, when term breaks arrived, Busoni found himself leaving Scandinavia for other European musical capitals. Over the winter and summer holidays, he continued concertizing on the continent, thereby continuing to build his experience and reputation. On one of these trips to Hamburg, his piano transcriptions of Bach's organ works were much lauded after a friend suggested such arrangements to him. Another critical European trip was to Saint Petersburg in August 1890 for the inaugural Rubinstein Competition to which Rubinstein himself personally invited him. There were two competition categories: piano and composition. Busoni won the composition prize but lost the piano honor to a Russian named Nicolai Dubasov. However, Rubinstein consoled Busoni with an offer of a professorship at the Moscow Conservatory, which Busoni was only too glad to accept after feeling that he had been culturally exiled in Helsinki for two years.<sup>96</sup>

Despite Busoni's unfavorable memories of Helsinki, he did meet the love of his life there. After only a few weeks, Busoni met and became engaged to Gerda Sjostrand, the daughter of a Swedish sculptor who had studied in Italy. Their engagement, however, proved much longer for many reasons. First, Anna Weiss-Busoni was a devout Catholic while Gerda was a Protestant, and Anna did not favor the marriage even though her adult son was not an actively practicing

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<sup>95</sup> Couling, *Ferruccio Busoni*, 101-8.

<sup>96</sup> Kogan, *Busoni as Pianist*, 13-4.

Catholic. Second, Busoni had a mercurial temper and often, probably unintentionally, offended Gerda in both his speech and in letters. Third, as noted above, Busoni traveled extensively during term breaks, leaving little time for his budding relationship. However, deciding that they could not be apart, Gerda traveled with her father and sister as chaperones to Moscow where Busoni had already arrived in preparation for his new professorship.<sup>97</sup> Upon arrival, they were promptly married by a Protestant minister and had a long and reportedly happy marriage despite Busoni's life-long global wanderings. In a letter to Gerda in 1898, Busoni tells her that he "thought of at every hour, especially if I see something beautiful or am with good people."<sup>98</sup>

Moscow was an excellent musical match for Busoni. The Russian Empire had made a concerted effort, at great expense, to improve its musical standards and education. The Moscow and St. Petersburg Conservatories attracted the best students and professors and a climate of excellency pervaded. His first concert in October was a great success. Couling states, "He [Busoni] played Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No. 5* with his own cadenzas, earning eight curtain calls and two encores."<sup>99</sup> Busoni followed his Helsinki pattern of concertizing successfully across Europe during academic breaks. However, the newly-married couple was financially stressed due to the high expense of decent housing in the Russian Empire's capitol and, as was the Italian custom, Busoni was expected to send monetary support to his parents. Furthermore, Busoni had established himself as an international musical persona, and in the highly nationalistic period preceding World War I in Europe, he did not experience cultural acceptance by some of his Russian colleagues. Within his first year in Moscow, Busoni received a proposal from William Steinway, then president of the family's piano firm in New York and Hamburg.

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<sup>97</sup> Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni*, 76-93.

<sup>98</sup> Rimm, *The Composer-Pianists*, 52.

<sup>99</sup> Couling, *Ferruccio Busoni*, 128.



He was offered a professorship at the New England Conservatory in Boston at three times his Moscow salary; he and Gerda readily accepted.

Busoni's time in America did not prove any more stable than his time in Helsinki or Moscow. Arriving first in New York in August 1891, Busoni and Gerda found housing in Boston and quickly welcomed the birth of their first son, Benvenuto. However, just as in Finland and Russia, Busoni was predictably disappointed with his professorial duties at the New England Conservatory. His students were not well-prepared or particularly talented and the puritanical viewpoints of the city baffled Busoni after his Italian upbringing. He was able to concertize on term breaks and did so often. His compositions flowed readily, especially transcriptions, which became more heavily influenced by Liszt's approach to that genre. After experiencing America, it became clear that the young family yearned for Europe. He and Gerda planned for him to teach just one year in Boston and concertize for another two years, by then having saved enough money to return to Europe and focus on composition. They set their sights on Berlin as a cultural home base for a musical career and departed for that city from New York in April 1894.<sup>100</sup>

Busoni quickly began a European concert artist's career, touring frequently as pianist and conductor. Over the next twenty years, he evolved as a musician by embracing both his German and Italian nationalities, consistently supporting the performance of new music, being acquainted with the best minds in Europe, and embracing the arts as a whole. Alternating between periods as a traveling concert artist with rest periods during which his composition flourished, Busoni's reputation and value grew as one of Europe's foremost musicians. During this time, his musicianship became dichotomous in terms of critical acclaim; he was either lauded or reviled. There is no doubt as to his virtuosic technique, but his interpretations, especially of Chopin, were

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<sup>100</sup> Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni*, 97-104.

not always well received.<sup>101</sup> Volumes have been written by critics and admirers alike and a thorough analysis is outside the scope of this dissertation. Suffice it to say that Busoni's unique interpretations, driven by his emotion and which were frequently different from one performance to the next, were loved by many but reviled by some. Regardless of this fact, Busoni experienced a very successful performance career, filling concert halls across Europe and America for decades.

Busoni's pre-World War I years were instrumental in his development as a pedagogue. Lacking enthusiasm for conservatory teaching after his experiences in Helsinki, Moscow, and Boston, Busoni started teaching mostly in a masterclass format. The Grand Duke Karl Alexander sponsored Busoni summer piano masterclasses in Weimar beginning in 1900. The master excelled at this less formal format, thoroughly enjoying the mix of musicianship and comradery. He and Gerda acted as hosts to talented young pianists from across Europe and students remained grateful for the musical and cultural experience.<sup>102</sup> Busoni continued to utilize the masterclass teaching format for the rest of his life.

In spite of a childhood that was financially challenged due to his father's habits, Busoni did not seek financial comforts in his adult life. Kogan makes much of this in his biography but many of those statements, as explained in the introduction, must be taken in the light of the Soviet communist ideals under which the book was originally published. However, a quote from Busoni in his forties accurately describes his opinion of mercenary attitudes:

As soon as I make my aim a profitable one, as soon as there begins to be a practical advantage in doing a thing, something in me begins to bleed, a kind of disablement overtakes me, and it is only with pain and effort that I can carry through what, otherwise, I could achieve easily, happily, and better...<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Kogan, *Busoni as Pianist*, 19-46.

<sup>102</sup> Couling, *Ferruccio Busoni*, 174-5.

<sup>103</sup> Rimm, *The Composer-Pianists*, 51.

World War I changed Busoni's life of itinerant wandering and concertizing. When Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated, Busoni did not change his travel plans for America. Like many others, he underestimated the length and ferocity of the Great War. After a tour of North America, he found himself without a visa and unable to return to either Germany or Italy, so he and Gerda settled in neutral Switzerland for the entire duration of the war. Able to concertize only in Switzerland, Busoni finally had an opportunity to concentrate on composition, publishing a wide variety of original compositions and transcriptions. Despite war raging all around, Busoni was able to successfully premiere two operas, *Turandot* and *Arlecchino*, during his time in Zurich; he also made significant progress on *Doktor Faust*. Intellectually, his revised and expanded manifesto, *New Aesthetic of Music*, was widely read even during the Great War with tens of thousands of copies printed.<sup>104</sup>

After World War I ended in 1918, Europe quickly rallied to reclaim its cultural heritage. Busoni was welcomed back in concert halls across the continent and received honorary degrees and awards from a variety of academic and cultural institutions. In 1920, Busoni and Gerda finally packed all of their Zurich belongings and returned to their pre-war Berlin apartment, which remained their home until his death. Although the music scene was excellent, the political upheaval in this era of the Weimar Republic was difficult. Soon, provisions became difficult to obtain and hyperinflation spiraled out of control. Busoni, usually a poor steward of his family's finances, wisely kept his foreign currency from ongoing tours as insurance against skyrocketing prices.<sup>105</sup>

In 1922, exhaustion from touring kept Busoni confined to his home in Berlin. Although he continued to teach several composition students, his days as a traveling concert pianist had

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<sup>104</sup> Kogan, *Busoni as Pianist*, 101-8.

<sup>105</sup> Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni*, 273-7.

ended. However, he remained dedicated to composition, particularly the completion of *Doktor Faust*. His health wavered, with months-long stretches confining him to his apartment, while short recuperations allowed him to attend important musical events. In July 1923, he traveled to Weimar for a premiere of his *Short Pieces for Piano*, a concert at which he met Stravinsky. After receiving a grave prognosis from a Parisian physician retained by Busoni's friend Isidor Philippe, *Doktor Faust* became his singular obsession. When Ferruccio Busoni died of heart failure on July 27, 1924, all but the final scene of *Faust*, begun twenty years earlier, was complete.<sup>106</sup> His legacy as a multi-faceted artist lives on and will now be examined in terms of his two non-pianistic roles: composer and author.

### **Busoni as Composer and Author**

As noted above in the chronology of Busoni's life, he began composing at a very young age and continued until his death. This was not unusual, as many pianists of his time also composed. Also, as discussed in chapter one regarding variation form, pianists were expected to improvise prior to and between pieces at a recital, as well as composing their own cadenzas. While entire volumes are dedicated to cataloging and analyzing Busoni's compositions, the following metric from Sitsky provides an outline of his compositional stages:

1. Works from his childhood, delineating his mastery of counterpoint and classical forms (1873-1880)
2. Early large-scale works showing formal mastery, including the last manuscript sonatas (the f-minor, dedicated to Anton Rubinstein, 1883; the *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, 1884)
3. Early romantic mastery, including his first published works of miniatures and "character pieces" (*Una Festa di Villaggio*, 1882; *Marcia di paesani e contadine*, 1883)
4. Full romantic mastery culminating in the *Piano Concerto op. XXXIX* (1903)
5. The impressionist works (*Elegies*, *Nuit de Noel* 1909)

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<sup>106</sup> Couling, *Ferruccio Busoni*, 348-51.

6. Full synthesis of formal, expressive and polyphonic styles (the *Sonatinas*, *Toccata*, *Doktor Faust*, 1910-1924).<sup>107</sup>

Busoni's evolving attitude toward composition may be better explained by his letters to colleagues. Early in his career, as described above, he surrounded himself with composers who utilized traditional harmonic and rhythmic devices common during their compositional lives such as Brahms and Tchaikovsky. However, around the *fin de siècle*, Busoni began writing to more innovative composers like Schoenberg, Scriabin, and Bartók. He availed himself of opportunities as a conductor to introduce new music to audiences.<sup>108</sup> Busoni advocated for a dodecaphonic approach, but not the strict twelve-tone formulas of Schoenberg. He used chromaticism widely in his later works and polyrhythms abound. He also utilized both minor and major modes simultaneously. In fact, a suggestion for future graduate study in musicology would be to analyze all of these changes throughout Busoni's career. For the sake of this introduction to Busoni, it is sufficient to conclude that unlike most other composers, he truly evolved in a revolutionary fashion throughout his career.<sup>109</sup>

Over time, Busoni's original compositions tend to have been overshadowed by his transcriptions. Bach-Busoni and Liszt-Busoni works remain popular on today's concert stages. An endearing story is that Gerda Busoni was often mistakenly addressed as "Mrs. Bach-Busoni."<sup>110</sup> This has long led to some to criticize Busoni for his lack of originality. For example, in 1965, John C. G. Waterhouse managed to publish a generally derogatory article in the *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* entitled, "Busoni: Visionary or Pasticheur?" In this essay, Waterhouse reviews a number of Busoni's transcriptions and goes as far as to call

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<sup>107</sup> Sitsky, *Busoni and the Piano*, 320.

<sup>108</sup> Rimm, *The Composer-Pianists*, 58.

<sup>109</sup> Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer*, 25-34.

<sup>110</sup> Erinn E. Knyt, "'How I Compose': Ferruccio Busoni's Views about Invention, Quotation, and the Compositional Process," *The Journal of Musicology* 27, no. 2 (2010): 224.

Busoni a “simple kleptomaniac.”<sup>111</sup> In defense of Busoni’s use of non-original themes, Beaumont states, “In using such material...he seeks the voice of Nature; he points to the timelessness of melody...and he indicates his belief in a universal music.”<sup>112</sup>

Much may be discovered about Busoni’s compositional attitudes through his writings. Busoni was a prolific writer not only of letters, which are quite elucidating regarding personal and professional matters, but also of publications including journal articles and books. His magnum opus is *Outline of a New Aesthetic of Music*, originally published in 1907, revised in 1916. Part of the book is philosophical, describing music as a young art form compared to the visual arts, and then envisioning absolute (not programmatic) music being set free of all its constraints in order to reach its penultimate expressive form. He purported that realism should be avoided and that music should focus on nature and human expression.<sup>113</sup> The bulk of the text is mathematical and theoretical, introducing new methods of notation and a harmonic system with infinite intervals between octaves. While the first edition of the book was poorly circulated, the second edition was widely read despite its release during the Great War. Many music theorists consider it prophetic regarding the compositional trends throughout the twentieth century.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> John C. G. Waterhouse, “Busoni: Visionary or Pasticheur?,” *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 92 (1965): 79.

<sup>112</sup> Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer*, 39.

<sup>113</sup> Rimm, *The Composer-Pianists*, 51.

<sup>114</sup> Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer*, 89-98.

### **Busoni's Two Sets of Variations on a Prelude by Chopin**

Busoni first approached Chopin's *Prelude* in C minor, op. 28, no. 20 as a theme in 1884 at the age of only eighteen. Thought to be modeled after Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*, Busoni sought to free himself from the constraints of Classical and Romantic form, thereby naming the original variation set *Variationen und Fuge in freier Form über Fr. Chopin's C-moll Praludium*, op. 22, translated as *Variations and Fugue in Free Form on Chopin's C-minor Prelude*, op. 22. This massive work contains the original theme by Chopin, eighteen variations, and an extended fugue. All of the variations are in AB form, each having a double bar dividing the first and second halves, which roughly correspond to the first and second lines of the original Chopin *Prelude*. Generally, in C minor, some relative major keys present themselves. Variation VIII, *L'istesso tempo, leggero e staccato*, is in C major. Variation XII, *Più calmo, semplice, con eleganza*, is in A minor. Variation XIII, *Vivace, con fuoco*, is in C major. Variation XVII, *Andantino, dolce ed espressivo*, is in C major. There are discrepancies in the key schemes noted here in the works of both Beaumont and Yoon; Beaumont states all of the variations are in C minor<sup>115</sup> and Yoon has a different numbering without including tempo markings.<sup>116</sup> In any case, the original *Variations* are rarely performed due to their length, as recorded performances average slightly less than thirty minutes, making the work difficult to program with other pieces of significant length.

Busoni first indicated an intention to revise his *Chopin Variations* in a letter to Egon Petri in 1912 stating, "They are not worth saving!"<sup>117</sup> However, in 1922 Busoni corresponded with Frau Kwast-Hodapp, another musician to whom he frequently wrote, about his intent to rewrite

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<sup>115</sup> Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer*, 298.

<sup>116</sup> Yoon, "Addition, Omission and Revision."

<sup>117</sup> Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer*, 296.

the youthful work and then several more times about the revision process. He referred to the work as too highly Germanic, perhaps in reference to the harmonies. When completed, he informed Frau Kwast-Hodapp that he considered the newly completed *Variations* to be “freed from heaviness and more rounded in form.”<sup>118</sup>

The new set, entitled *Zehn Variationen über ein Praludium von Chopin*, BV 213a, translated as *Ten Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*, is clearly a work of the mature Busoni. Asserting his authority, Busoni begins the set by adding a four-bar canon to the very beginning of the theme, placing his statement ahead of Chopin’s. This addition consists of a sequence of descending motives based on the first measure of Chopin’s original theme. Busoni refers to this downward sequence as “Faustian”<sup>119</sup> in a letter to Frau Kwast-Hodapp on April 20, 1922. Although no explanation is given for this moniker, one can imagine that the progressively lower sequences, forming a canon, relate to Faust’s ultimate descent into hell as a result of his agreement with Mephistopheles. After Busoni’s opening of his own four bars, Chopin’s original thirteen bars appear.

Significantly shorter at a performance time of only about ten minutes, the new *Variations* are more accessible for concert programming. After the theme described above, Busoni writes only ten variations, some of which have no basis in the original eighteen. The final variation is a light scherzo as opposed to the prolonged fugue of the original. A detailed comparison of the two sets is an appropriate topic for another academic inquiry, perhaps building on the work of Yoon who examined only changes in form.<sup>120</sup> However, Sitsky provides a brief and expert summary of the differences:

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<sup>118</sup> Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer*, 298.

<sup>119</sup> Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer*, 297.

<sup>120</sup> Yoon, “Addition, Omission and Revision.”



Alterations to the earlier work include attenuation of texture, accent toward polyphony; sudden side slips of key; continuity of development rather than boxed-in variation structure; disinterest in strict fugue, almost a burlesque of it presented; and homage (sic) to Chopin, rather than Brahms. Despite all this, op. 22 is still a very solid and worthwhile work in its own right.<sup>121</sup>

### **Analysis of Busoni's Ten Variations on a Prelude by Chopin, BV 213a**

Busoni's title indicates that the set includes ten variations but he includes no variation numbers. To add to the confusion, some variations are not differentiated by double bars. However, all are delineated with tempo markings or other musical directions. For the clarity of this analysis, measure numbers will be provided and each variation will be given a number in order. Please note that two lists of variations, namely those of Yoon and Sitsky, do not agree on where the variations start and end. Furthermore, Sitsky lists eleven variations instead of ten. This analysis, which uses the Breitkopf and Härtel edition,<sup>122</sup> will list ten and, as stated, will provide measure numbers for clarity.

#### Theme: *Sostenuto, Largo*

The theme is written in common time in the key of C minor. Instead of a tempo marking, both *sostenuto* and *dolce* are provided as instructions. As stated above, Busoni opens the work with his own four "Faustian" measures instead of Chopin's *Prelude*. These four novel measures establish a dour mood for the set with progressively descending patterns set in a three-voice canon, but of interest is the fact that they are marked *dolce*. Busoni applies two surprising features to this counterpoint. First, the alto and tenor voices enter on off-beats, namely beats two and four of the first measure. Second, while the alto enters a fifth lower, the tenor enters in

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<sup>121</sup> Larry Sitsky, *Busoni and the Piano: The Works, The Writings, and The Recordings*, 2nd ed. (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2009), 51.

<sup>122</sup> Ferruccio Busoni, *Zehn Variationen über Ein Präludium von Chopin Busoni-Verz. 213a* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, ND).

octaves at a sixth lower, providing an unusual harmonic feature. These initial four measures are followed by a quote of all thirteen bars of Chopin with slight alterations. These exceptions include a fermata over the bar line between the first and second four-bar Chopin phrases that result in increased resonance after the *fortissimo* of the first Chopin phrase. Busoni also alters the first dynamic, writing *forte* for the first four measure phrase of Chopin rather than *fortissimo*. He also alters Chopin's dynamic structure by ending the piece triple *piano* rather than growing back to *forte*. The addition of left-hand notes in measure three of the final phrase thickens the tonal structure and adds an expanded range for the final chord but in the same tonality.

Technical challenges include the ability to produce a full but not harsh *forte* and a singing but not weak *piano* dynamic. Furthermore, a large reach is needed for the octaves and octave chords.

Musically, the initial four "Faustian" Busoni measures require the ability to clearly introduce each entrance of the counterpoint. The Chopin *Prelude* requires a mature approach to phrasing and the ability to project long phrases without losing momentum. A long, singing line is needed over each of the three four-measure phrases in order to project a horizontal, *cantabile* phrase as opposed to a series of rhythmic vertical chords.

Example 2.1. Busoni *Variations on a Prelude by Chopin, BV 213a, Theme*

The musical score is presented in four systems. The first system, labeled 'Sostenuto', features a melody in the right hand with a 'dolce' marking. The second system, labeled 'Largo', shows a strong 'f' dynamic in the bass line. The third system is marked 'p' and features a wide intervallic leap in the right hand. The fourth system includes 'pp' and 'riten.' markings, leading to a 'ppp' section with a fermata.

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Variation One: *Sostenuto (alla breve)*

Variation one begins in measure eighteen. It is written in cut time and in C minor. Instead of a tempo marking, *sostenuto*, *alla breve*, and *armonioso con pedale* are provided as performance instructions. True to the *alla breve* indication, there are two half-note beats in each

<sup>123</sup> Busoni, *Zehn Variationen über Ein Praludium von Chopin, 2.*

bar and the right hand has mostly half notes for the duration of the variation. The *armonioso* instruction specifies that Busoni wants the melody, carried in right-hand octave chords, played in a tuneful and harmonious manner. The right hand does not begin on beat one since the tonic chord ending the theme ties over into the first measure of this variation, but the left hand immediately begins its perpetual motion eighth notes, which continue until the end of the variation. Then, Busoni writes three bars of introduction before returning to the theme, now rhythmically augmented to twice its value; quarter notes are now half notes. The theme's characteristic dotted rhythms are changed to evenly valued notes, in this case quarter notes, due to the doubling of note values. Busoni continues to insert extra measures of right-hand half notes between some of the augmented two-measure motives that substitute for the original one measure in the theme. While Busoni's reason for augmenting the length of Chopin's original work cannot be discerned, the additional measures do provide a halting rhythmic quality. They also introduce chromaticism and alter the tonality, diminishing in pitch each time; this could be a recurrence of the descending motives in the introductory four measures of the theme that Busoni deemed "Faustian." Busoni also alters Chopin's Prelude and his own theme by changing the dynamic scheme. The variation opens in measure eighteen, marked *mezzo piano*, drops in measure twenty-six to *pianissimo* and soon after softens again with a *diminuendo* in measure thirty; measure thirty-two is again marked *pianissimo*. Each of the indicated dynamics at measures eighteen, twenty-six, and thirty-two coincides with an entrance of one of Chopin's original phrases, adapted and augmented to fit Busoni's style for this variation.

In terms of the left hand's perpetual motion eighth notes, the bass plays a pedal point followed by tenor eighth notes in thirds or sixths through measure thirty-seven. Busoni writes left-hand scalar passages in measures thirty-eight through forty-three. Measures forty-four

through forty-six are a transition to variation two written in common time in which the right hand alternates between C minor and A minor, and the left hand reprises its pedal point eighth note rhythm for two measures, finally evolving to triplets in preparation for the pervading rhythm of the next variation.

The technical challenge of variation one in the right hand is producing legato right-hand octave chords throughout, which is clearly critical to Busoni as he marked the variation as both *sostenuto* and *armonioso con pedale*. These continuous right-hand octave chords can be challenging to those with smaller hands or those without experience in sustaining such repeated chords. The left-hand challenges include large jumps from the bass to the tenor voices, legato thirds and sixths in the tenor, and continuous eighth note octave scales in measures thirty-eight through forty-three.

There are many musical challenges in variation one. Producing a singing melodic line, as instructed by Busoni's *armonioso*, is difficult despite his further instruction to use the pedal. The pianist cannot simply depress the damper pedal for each half note or quarter note in the right hand since the left hand is moving fast through harmonies that would be dissonant if sustained and changing the pedal every eighth note would sound fractured and overly busy. The performer must choose between using the *sostenuto*, which would have the undesired effect of also sustaining the eighth note pedal point, or attempting to connect the right hand octave chords with the hand alone. The right-hand melody is, as noted above, interrupted by extra measures that are melodic. This creates a difficulty in voicing the melody and creating a singing line over long phrases. Finally, the overall dynamic scheme of *mezzo piano* and then *pianissimo* is difficult to achieve with a full tone because of the large number of notes being sounded; there are five notes in each right-hand chord and continuous eighth notes in the left hand. Therefore, the pianist must

have experience in producing singing tone at low volumes, requiring acute listening and exquisite control of the keys.

Example 2.2. Busoni *Variations on a Prelude by Chopin, BV 213a, Variation I*

The musical score for Variation I is presented in three systems. The first system is marked "Sostenuto (alla breve)" and "mp armonioso con Pedale". The second system continues the texture. The third system is marked "pp" and "meno dolce". The right hand plays chords and the left hand plays a triplet pattern.

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Variation Two: *Poco più vivo, leggiere, scherzoso*

Variation two begins in measure forty-seven. It remains in C minor and continues the common time begun in transitional measure forty-four. By Busoni's instructions, it is to be played a little quicker, lighter, in the manner of a scherzo, and staccato. The right hand is playing continuous triplets rising and falling, frequently chromatically. The soprano to alto interval is mostly thirds and sixths, providing a limpid, peaceful texture. While the theme is nebulous, the

<sup>124</sup> Busoni, *Zehn Variationen über Ein Praludium von Chopin, 2-4*.

general changing of direction in the right hand suggests the theme's direction in reverse. For example, the first measure of Chopin's theme has one ascending and three descending notes, where the first twelve notes of measure forty-seven have a double pattern of four notes down and two notes up. The left hand starts with a suggestion of the theme's rhythm but in staccato form, having some patterns of two eighth notes followed by a dotted rhythm and then three eighth notes; this rhythm crosses bar lines. The left hand and right hand frequently play two-against-three and three-against-four, creating a thick and complex texture. As in variation one, extra bars are inserted that serve as intermediaries between the thematic material during which both hands play triplets; the longest intermediate episode occurs in measures fifty-eight to sixty-one. The dynamic scheme of this variation remains *pianissimo* as in Variation I, but here Busoni marks numerous *crescendi* and *decrescendi* in order to create a feeling of tension and release. This is not seen in the theme or in Chopin's Prelude, but some phrasing might naturally be inferred in either. The transition to the next variation begins in measure sixty-two when the right and left hands revel in polyrhythmic play. Busoni especially creates the feeling of a spirited scherzo here when the right hand plays descending triplets and the left hand plays its repeated two eighth notes then dotted rhythm in a higher register. In measures sixty-four to sixty-six, the left hand joins the right hand in triplets and the right hand ascends to high repeated notes which, with the left hand, form an E major chord in order to transition to the C-sharp minor of variation three.

Technical problems in variation two begin with the right hand. It must play continuous, rapid, light, staccato triplets in block thirds and sixths. Of course, playing these requires experience with such repeated intervals as well as full control of tone when playing both rapidly and lightly. The left hand is less challenging, only playing one note at a time. However, some large jumps and octaves are necessary. Another potential difficulty would be if the pianist is not

experienced in playing two-against-three or three-against-four, but this would be unlikely if one is undertaking this set of variations.

The musical challenges in variation two are many. The right hand should create a gentle limpid feeling of ebb and flow with the descending and ascending passages; this must not be overdone as to make the listener “seasick.” The pianist should pay careful attention to the quick, light rhythms in the left hand, accentuating the dotted rhythms which mimic the theme. The phrasing should be broad and directed over four to eight measure sections. A playful attitude, especially in the left hand, will lighten the mood after the dour variation one. A gentle diminuendo will prepare listeners for variation three.

Example 2.3. Busoni *Variations on a Prelude by Chopin, BV 213a, Variation II*

The musical score for Busoni's Variation II on Chopin's Prelude, BV 213a, is presented in three systems. The first system shows the beginning of the variation with a tempo marking of *poco più vivo, legg. scherzoso*. The second system includes the marking *poco accel.* and *staccato*. The third system concludes with a *pp* (pianissimo) marking. The score is written for piano and features a complex interplay between the right and left hands, with the right hand playing a melodic line and the left hand providing a rhythmic accompaniment.

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<sup>125</sup> Busoni, *Zehn Variationen über Ein Praludium von Chopin*, 4-5.



### Variation Three: En Carillon, *lo stesso movimento*

Variation three begins with measure sixty-seven and remains in common time but is now in C-sharp minor; the tempo is indicated to remain the same as in variation two, or *lo stesso movimento*. Furthermore, Busoni makes it clear that he wants it to sound like a bells, but also writes *con pedali*, which specifies that he wants the bells to be ringing and sonorous. The entire variation is only seventeen measures long and is written entirely in triplets. The left and right hands alternate playing each triplet value, meaning that the left hand has the first triplet of beats one and three while the right hand has the first triplet of beats two and four. The theme is heard clearly in this variation as opposed to the previous one. However, Busoni cleverly hides the melody on the second, sixth, tenth, and twelfth notes of the first measure, and the second, sixth, and tenth notes of the second measure. He then accents the seventh eighth note of each measure, which in combination with the assumed accentuation of the first eighth note of each measure, creates a strong feeling of common time. Busoni's stressing of the natural accentuation of the first and third beats of each measure creates a strong rhythmic conflict with the melody carried on other triplet notes. In fact, it causes a feeling not only of syncopation but also of confusion as to the meter. Busoni continues his practice in variations one and two of inserting extra beats and measures between iterations of the theme. For example, notes six and ten of measures sixty-eight and seventy are repeats of the final melodic tone on beat two of each of those measures. An example of extra measures is seventy-three and seventy-four, which create a feeling of a mini fantasy on the theme before the theme's reappearance. Measures sixty-seven to seventy-four represent the first four bars of Chopin's theme and measures seventy-five to eighty-one represent the second four bars. Measures eighty-two and eighty-three are a transition to variation four that end in C-sharp major, although variation four begins in c-sharp minor.

The main technical challenge of variation three is even treatment of the left and right hands. They must trade off each triplet eighth note seamlessly, a task which is rare in the piano repertoire. The ability to do so with a bell-like tone, especially in the high range of the right hand, is trying.

The musical challenges in variation three are numerous. The melody, entirely in the right hand, must be clearly voiced. While this seems like a routine task for a pianist, doing so in a high soprano range without creating stridency is difficult. The left hand, which always plays the accented notes of one and seven in each measure, must operate independently of the right hand so the meter is not lost to the right hand, syncopated melody. This syncopated feeling is critical to the character of the variation and should not be lost to the voicing of the right hand. Ideally, the long four-measure phrasing of the theme should be carried out across the corresponding eight measures, forming thematic phrases here. Such long phrasing is difficult, especially because the actual melodic notes have short note values. Of course, a tasteful diminuendo in the two transitional bars should lead the listener into the next variation.

Example 2.4. Busoni *Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*, BV 213a, Variation III

(En Carillon)  
*lo stesso movimento*  
8  
*con Pedali*

8  
8

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Variation Four: *Continuando*

Variation four begins with measure eighty-four, remains in common time, is written in C-sharp minor, and has a tempo indication of *continuando*. Busoni provides the additional direction of *dolce*. As mentioned above, variation four transitions to an ending in C-sharp major, only to have variation three begin in C-sharp minor. Busoni does write a half-note rest at the beginning of variation four. The reason for this change to major and back again is unclear, but one may theorize that Busoni intended the listener to perceive a division between sections of the variation set at this point. Variation four sees the thematic melody in augmented form, a half note instead of a quarter note, and with significant additional changes from the theme. Instead of the usual

<sup>126</sup> Busoni, *Zehn Variationen über Ein Praludium von Chopin*, 5.

melodic movement of one ascending note and three descending notes, each motif is expressed in four ascending notes. There is no subdivision of the third beat, which was originally a dotted rhythm in the theme. Finally, each melodic motif crosses over bar lines twice, creating a syncopated feeling. The result of these changes leads to Chopin's original four-bar phrase now lasting eleven measures. Throughout the variation, each half-note melodic tone is in the soprano, accompanied by a pedal point blocked fifth or sixth in the bass and tenor. The alto has continuous ascending sixteenth notes which, due to the necessity of range, alternate between the right and left hands. Measure ninety-two is the end of the fourth melodic motif, corresponding to a portion of measure four in the Chopin's theme, at which time the alto quickens from four to five and then to six notes per beat, finally breaking out into a Chopinesque two-measure cadenza of rapid, unmetered ascending and then descending arpeggios. Measure ninety-four begins with tonalities that mimic the second phrase, or measures five through eight, of Chopin's *Prelude*. In contrast to the first half of the variation, Busoni now uses an alternating skip, step interval motif instead of continuously ascending notes. The bass plays a single-note pedal point and the alto continues its perpetual motion sixteenth notes, but now they are descending. Instead of four patterns of this motif as in the first half, only two patterns occur. In measures 98-102, Busoni then introduces a fantasy-like section of perpetual motion sixteenth notes that descend from a soprano note on beat one to a bass note on beat three, at which time they ascend again. In measure 103, the bass is silent and the alto sixteenth notes descend from each soprano half note. Measures 105 to 107 are transitional measures in which the rhythm is doubled and patterns of sixteenth notes descend in a one-beat pattern instead of over two beats. These perpetual motion sixteenth notes lead right into variation five with no interruption. In total, Variation IV only utilizes two of the phrases of Chopin's *Prelude* since Busoni chooses not to repeat Chopin's

second phrase. He also does not indicate any dynamics as his marks of expressive suggestions, *dolce* and *tranquillo*, only give conceptual ideas. A performer would likely then infer that Busoni intended for the artist to stay within the same dynamic range as the preceding variation and take into account the meaning of his expressive directions.

The technical challenges in variation four begin with the ability to voice and hold the soprano melody while playing some of the alto sixteenth notes. As in variation three, perfect evenness of tone between the left and right hand is necessary because the alto sixteenth notes must transition seamlessly from one hand to another. Rapid arpeggio execution is needed in measure ninety-three, which is like a one-measure cadenza. Some quick left-hand jumps are required to move from the bass note to the alto in only the time of one sixteenth note.

The musical challenges in variation four are probably greater than the technical ones. It is difficult to voice the half-note melody in a tasteful manner with full tone but without a harsh attack. Also, this half-note melody, as noted above, crosses the bar line; the pianist must balance the feeling of syncopation with preserving a feeling of common time. Maintaining a feeling of *dolce* with rapid sixteenth notes is difficult due to the sheer volume of sound; one must have excellent control of *piano* and *pianissimo*. In order to optimize a recollection of the theme, the entire first half, or measures eighty-four to ninety-two, should have the feeling of a single phrase in the same manner as measures one through four of the theme. The large, rapid arpeggio in measure ninety-three is marked *tranquillo*, making it necessary for the pianist to have total control of the technique in order to express a sense of effortlessness. From measures ninety-eight to the end, the directionality of the sixteenth notes should guide the impulse of the phrasing in order to optimize the sense of rising and falling. No diminuendo or ritardando should be played in the last measure, and the change to variation five should be smooth but somewhat surprising.

Example 2.5. Busoni *Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*, BV 213a, Variation IV

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Variation Five: *Sotto voce e poi sempre aumentando*

Variation five begins in measure 109. It continues in both common time and C minor. There is no tempo marking, but because there is a continuous run of sixteenth notes from the last variation to this one, it may be assumed that the tempo is unchanged. Busoni writes *sotto voce e poi sempre aumentando*, which is translated as whispered and then always increasing. The theme is cleverly alluded to in an augmented form and, as was the case with previous variations, across the bar line. Each quarter note in the theme is replaced by eight unison sixteenth notes. The first

<sup>127</sup> Busoni, *Zehn Variationen über Ein Praludium von Chopin*, 6-7.

and third measures of the theme appear in one octave in unison, but the second and fourth measures of the theme appear in two octaves in unison; this creates a greater intensity. The general direction of the first four measures of the theme, equaling the first eight measures of this variation, is ascending sixteenth notes. The second phrase of the theme (measures five through eight) starts in beat two of measure 117; the second phrase is treated in the same manner except that the general direction of the sixteenth notes is descending. Finally, in measure 125, the very last beat of measure eight of the theme is seen in this variation as a sudden break out of the unison sixteenth notes; staccato eighth note chords appear in both hands ending the theme. Afterwards, there is a five-measure transition to variation six that playfully explores the octave sixteenth notes and block staccato eighth note chords. It slowly drops voices and thins in texture as the variation ends.

Variation five is technically thrilling, requiring virtuosic rapid sixteenth notes in unison between the right and left hands. Of course, this is made more difficult by the *sotto voce* instruction, especially at the beginning, because producing a full tone at a soft dynamic level with rapid runs is challenging. The only other technical issue is at the end when the pianist must play rapid staccato octaves and octave chords in both hands, some with large jumps.

Musically, variation five appears simple but is actually quite difficult. A slight stress must be placed on the first of each group of four sixteenth notes in order to bring out the melodic motive suggestions from the theme. When the interval between the hands changes from one to two octaves, the pianist should provide a dynamic highlight to this unique device which heightens the energy. As previously, the theme crosses the bar line and it is critical to respect the downbeat and allow the syncopation to provide intensity. Busoni assists the performer in creating a long phrase across the first eight measures by stating the dynamics should always be

increasing. A point of musical taste is whether or not to drop back the dynamics at the ninth measure, which is the start of the second four-measure theme iteration. This is probably preferred because a crescendo throughout the theme would be very difficult since there is no increase in texture. Staccato eighth notes near the end of the variation should be accentuated to provide contrast with the perpetual motion legato sixteenth notes up to that point. Of course, an effective but full-toned diminuendo is needed for a successful transition to variation six.

Example 2.6. Busoni *Variations on a Prelude by Chopin, BV 213a, Variation V*

The musical score for Variation V is presented in three systems. The first system begins with the instruction "sotto voce e poi sempre aumentando". The notation shows a complex texture with sixteenth-note runs in the bass and eighth-note patterns in the treble. The second and third systems continue this texture, with dynamic markings such as accents and hairpins indicating the intended performance dynamics.

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Variation Six: (no marking, begins on fourth beat of measure 131)

Variation six continues in common time, in C minor, and at presumably the same tempo since there is no other indication. Because of these similarities, some consider variation six to be

<sup>128</sup> Busoni, *Zehn Variationen über Ein Praludium von Chopin*, 8-9.



a continuation of variation five, which contributes to the confusion about the numbering of the variations, as noted in the introduction. Again, the theme is alluded to in altered form and, as was the case with previous variations, across the bar line. This time, each quarter note in the theme is replaced by a grouping of notes in the right hand equal to a quarter note, primarily comprised of quintuplets with occasional sextuplets. The left hand, instead of playing in unison, provides a spirited staccato eighth note accompaniment that provides a dance-like impression. The first grouping of eight quintuplets relates to the first measure of the theme and occurs in a high register. The next grouping of eight quintuplets, corresponding to the second measure of the theme, adds an alto quarter note at the beginning of each beat; it occurs about an octave lower. The next sixteen groups of quintuplets, correlating with the third and fourth measures of the theme, occur without interruption and a new bass voice introduces a sustained note; this final group happens an octave lower than the second group. This section, marked *forte* in the prelude, is directed to be played *piano* in this variation. Busoni then has a little fun with measures 140 and 141, playing with eight sets of ascending quintuplets and even shocking the listener by inserting two sets at *forte* while the others are *pianissimo*. Measures 142-145 correspond to the second phrase of the theme, that is measures five to eight. Busoni makes the theme more obvious than previously, although not a direct quote. This first occurs in the left hand in eighth notes, some in fourths and sixths and some in single notes. The right hand continues to play quintuplets but now they are simply an ascending and then descending chromatic scale over the entire four measures. Measures 146-149 are a reversal of the previous four measures; the right hand carries stylized motives of the theme in octave chords while the left hand has ascending and then descending chromatic scales. However, the scales ascend in quintuplets but descend in sixteenth note octaves. Busoni's next two measures are gleeful, with both hands playing chromatic

ascending scales in quintuplets but with the first note of each beat repeating the last note of the previous beat. He ends the variation with *sforzando* eighth notes and a final C-major chord, which is not only marked with a fermata but is also indicated *lunga!* or long; Busoni writes the exclamation point. In terms of dynamics, Busoni alters them by beginning in *piano* rather than *forte*.

Technical difficulties in variation six begin with polyrhythms of five-against-two; this persists throughout the variation. The right hand has rapid scalar passages, many of them chromatic, and these must continue in the soprano despite the addition of a sustained alto voice. The left hand starts with staccato eighth notes with large jumps. When the theme switches to the left hand, it must be voiced clearly over the perpetual motion in the right hand. The second half of the variation requires fast, fluid chromatic scales in both hands, and eventually, in unison. The left hand must also have the ability to play a descending chromatic scale in octaves.

The major musical challenge in variation six is to maintain a sense of jocularly. Busoni is having fun here and that must be projected to the audience. Of course, clear voicing of the theme and long phrases are necessary for thematic clarity; without them the variation will sound like a child's etude. The entire variation must be maintained at a *piano* dynamic, which is difficult because of the rapid note patterns; the only exceptions are the two beats in measure 140 marked *forte*, also probably intended as a joke. A common musical error on recordings is a *ritardando* in measure 149 before the *accelerando* in measure 150. This may be done to prevent the tempo from becoming so fast that the unison chromatic scales become too difficult, but any *ritardando* should be avoided because it breaks the perpetual motion of the variation. Another reason is that Busoni is very clear in his dynamic and tempo markings and it is likely that he would have given a direction to slow down if that was what he wanted.

Example 2.7. Busoni *Variations on a Prelude by Chopin, BV 213a, Variation VI*

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Variation Seven: Fantasia: *Tempo libero*

Variation seven is indicated to be a fantasy and in fact, it has a cadenza-like structure in which multiple brief ideas are introduced in succession. It is the longest of the variations, running from measures 154 to 208. It continues in common time, begins in G-flat major, and is marked *tempo libero*, or free time. Busoni gives further directions of *vagamente ed improvvisando*, translated as vaguely and improvising. Changes of compositional structure are so frequent that each will be listed in order:

<sup>129</sup> Busoni, *Zehn Variationen über Ein Praludium von Chopin*, 10-11.

1. Measures 154 to 164 serve as a free form introduction. Except for the last two chordal measures, the entire section has only a single note playing at a time, passed between the left and right hands. Starting with a quarter note, the rhythm gradually increases to eighth notes, triplets, sixteenth notes, and quintuplets before rapidly slowing in measure 161. In addition to increasing the subdivisions of the beats, Busoni indicates *accelerando poco a poco*; these two factors together result in very rapid notes by measure 160. The dynamic is marked *pianissimo* throughout. Measure 162 is suddenly chordal and *andante* and measure 163, remaining chordal, restates Busoni's theme prior to Chopin's theme. Finally, measure 164 has a D-major seventh chord as a transition to the next section. Technically, the pianist must possess the ability to play rapid notes at very soft dynamics. Also, it is necessary to produce seamless switching between the right and left hands. Musically, the variation would be without direction if the pianist did not create some slight dynamic ebb and flow with the ascending and descending passages. Respecting Busoni's directions, here translated, of vaguely and improvising will assist in creating a mysterious but anticipatory mood.
2. Measures 165 to 177 are also marked *tempo libero* but bear an additional instruction of *animando ma non crescendo*. The first measure is an introduction with two three-note motives, each in a slow rhythm of eighth, quarter, eighth notes. Busoni immediately tears into the *animando* with rapid triplets that alternate between the hands; the first two sets of triplets mimic the two motives in the first measure. These triplets continue for eight measures, first ascending and then descending. After these rapidly accelerating triplets, Busoni writes one measure of legato, sustained eighth note chords which ascend in the right hand and descend in the left hand, thereby increasing the sense of tension. An

immediate two measure cadenza-like flourish occurs where rapid notes (ten to a beat) ascend and then descend. A final measure ends with a two-note chordal slur resolving to a G-major chord. Prior to the next section, a respite is provided with a fermata over the bar line. The continuing improvisatory nature of this section creates an ambiguous relationship between these measures and the theme. Technically, it is necessary to play rapid, light triplets that trade-off between hands. The cadenza-like measures require rapid scalar passages, again switching between hands. Musically, it is critical to maintain interest through the triplet section by creating a gentle tension with the ascending measures and a gentle release with the descending ones. No crescendo is possible due to Busoni's specific instructions not to do so. Measure 174 necessitates that the pianist produces legato, sustained chords. Of course, the cadenza must express ebb and flow with its ascending and descending motion in order to avoid it sounding like a child's scalar exercise.

3. Measures 178 to 198 form an extended third section. Busoni indicates *leggiero e scherzando vivacemente*. It begins with a repeated triplet, eighth note, eighth rest staccato motif. This repeats only three times before Busoni starts expanding it to include triplets alternating between the hands and sometimes playing together. The four-measure pattern repeats once at a higher pitch. The mood suddenly changes in measure 186, where despite the continuation of the triplet rhythm, the staccatos change to legato. The indication is *un poco appassionata con moto*. The pattern is largely ascending. Measure 190 sees an ascending row of sextuplets alternating between the hands in chordal fashion, then rapidly ascending and descending patterns with various rhythmic iterations over the next two measures. Measure 192 is marked *forte risoluto*, and for the next five measures we

hear a hint of the theme on various notes that are on the beat while wide rapid flourishes occur between thematic tones; octave pedal points enhance the texture. Measure 198 is a final ascending and descending Chopinesque cadenza that ascends and descends before descending chromatic triplets lead into the next section. Technically, the pianist must possess a wide variety of virtuosic skills including rapid octave chords, smooth scalar passages, and interplay between hands. Musically, this section is very difficult to form into a cohesive whole because of the variety of textures and rhythms. A good large-scale plan would be to accentuate the differences between the staccato in the first section and the flowing legato in the second section.

4. Section four includes measures 199 to 208, which is the last section of variation seven. Busoni returns to the theme with a quote from the second measure of the thematic material, albeit with different harmonies, and indicates *tempo originale*. This return lasts only one measure, after which two extensive measures of rapid scalar passages appear; the first is entirely ascending and marked *glissando* and the second is descending in grouped triplet thirty-second note fashion. In measure 202, there is a sudden change from rapid, light flourishes to *allegro deciso* and the dynamic is *fortissimo*. A reprisal of the theme's dotted rhythmic pattern is written in triplet form, which begins with intervening rests but rapidly increases in frequency until continuous octave triplets appear that switch between the left and right hands. These continue for two measures, diminuendo, and then transition seamlessly to variation eight. The technical requirements of section four are similar to those of previous sections and include rapid scalar passages in both hands, crisp octave staccatos, and alternating left- and right-hand octaves in fast succession. Musically, the theme must be clearly stated in a similar fashion to the opening of the set

in order to return the listener to that musical thought. The performer must make a decision in measure 200 regarding the *glissando* indication because the notes probably could be played with fast fingering instead, in which case the clarity would not be lost. For measure 201 and the beginning of 202, the quick descending passages must be clear and the first notes of each beat should be slightly accentuated to provide clarity to the pattern. The *allegro deciso* must be approached, from the beginning, as a transitional section. Therefore, the pianist must build a sense of anticipation.

Example 2.8. Busoni *Variations on a Prelude by Chopin, BV 213a, Variation VII*

Fantasia  
Tempo libero

— continua il Ped. \*

pp accel. poco a poco

pp presto

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<sup>130</sup> Busoni, *Zehn Variationen über Ein Praludium von Chopin*, 12-16.

### Variation Eight: Scherzo Finale: *Vivace misurato*

Variation eight starts at measure 209, is in twelve-eight time, in C minor (except for two introductory measures), and marked *vivace misurato*, translated as in a lively manner but in strict time. The entire variation, except for four left-hand measures with a reprisal of the original theme's rhythm, is written in continuous eighth notes. The twelve-eight time signature provides a sense of four triplets to a measure. As was the case in some previous variations, Busoni uses the triplet rhythm, either as a pattern of eighth-rest, eighth or quarter, eighth, as a proxy for the dotted rhythm in the theme. Therefore, much of this seventh variation relates to the theme through its rhythm. As was Busoni's habit with previous variations, he intersperses brief melodic thematic motifs with segments of playful non-thematic material. An example is the accented thematic melodic motif in measures 208 and 209, then a continuation of the rhythmic motif without melodic theme references in measures 209 and 210. The overall plan of the variation is additive. It begins with just one note sounding at a time for six measures, then each hand playing one note for six measures, then the addition of a third voice for six measures, and eventually building to a thick, broad-ranging texture with octave chords in both hands. Of course, this cumulative addition of voices creates increased the volume through measure 235. In measure 236, Busoni creates a sudden *piano* not only by writing that dynamic instruction but also by tightening the range and decreasing the voices to only three. In measures 248 to 251, the left hand plays a dotted rhythm with a quote of the original theme and the only rhythmic change in the variation. Measure 252 is marked *mezzo forte* and *crescendo*. Octaves appear in the left hand and the number of voices in the right hand slowly increase until a loud, marcato ending. A measure of silence prepares the listener for the softer ninth variation. Technically, the eighth variation contains many of the same requirements as the previous variations, namely the clear



interplay between hands, rapid octave chords, and the critical ability to play lightly and quickly at the same time without losing tone quality. Musically, this variation is quite difficult because it requires a long-term dynamic plan. The pianist must be mindful of the need for reserve because a large *crescendo*, aided by the additive force of voices, appears for the first time over twenty-seven measures and for the second time over thirteen measures. This variation's dynamic plan, however, is not the same as the Prelude, which begins forte, drops suddenly, and then briefly grows back to forte at the end. It is difficult to maintain a *scherzo* mood over the entire variation because of the need to concentrate on the technical difficulties. Busoni's instruction of *vivace misurato* must be strictly observed. Finally, the sole rhythmic interest of the variation, namely the four measures of left-hand dotted rhythms in measures 238 to 241, must be clearly stated and not lost in the pervading triplet feel of the eighth notes.

Example 2.9. Busoni *Variations on a Prelude by Chopin, BV 213a, Variation VIII*

**Scherzo finale - (Vivace misurato)**

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<sup>131</sup> Busoni, *Zehn Variationen über Ein Praludium von Chopin*, 16-18.

Variation Nine: Hommage a Chopin: *Tempo di Valse, tranquillo moderato*

Variation nine, an “homage to Chopin,” begins at measure 250, is written in three-quarter time, and begins in C major. Busoni indicates both *tempo di valse* and *tranquillo moderato*. The six-measure introduction sounds like a veiled reference to the introduction of the Chopin *Waltz* op. 34, no. 3 in A-flat major. Soon after, the second and third phrases sound much like Chopin’s *Waltz* in A-flat Major op. 42. Chopin and Busoni write a turning, twisting pattern of single wandering right-hand notes using just a few closely-spaced tones accompanied by a waltz bass in the left hand. The pieces were published many years apart and, of course, music evolved in the interim. Busoni introduces new concepts such as chromaticism, crossing the bar line with each group of six eighth notes, and creating an ascending line by raising the pitch with each group. After this introduction, Busoni writes a direction of *legato, elegante, melodioso* and indirectly recalls the theme by augmenting the rhythm so that each quarter note of the original theme is now subtly inferred in one measure of the waltz. Therefore, the entire restatement is thirty-two bars of the waltz for the first eight measures of the theme. During this restatement, the right hand plays continuous single eighth notes in a scalar and arpeggiated form while the left hand has a typical waltz accompaniment of a pedal point, followed by either one or two quarter note chords in a higher range. Next, there is an eight-measure transition, marked *e sempre raddolcendo*, translated as always becoming gentler and calmer, where chords are played on all three beats, accompanied by an ascending scalar passage. The scale starts in the left hand with the right hand playing chords approximating the theme’s rhythm, then switches hands for the second four measures. The final transition is a repeated staccato rhythm of quarter note, eighth rest, eighth note, quarter note which leads into the tenth and final variation.

The technical difficulties in variation nine begin with the right hand, which must play legato, continuous eighth notes that frequently change direction and require large jumps. The left hand must be proficient in playing a waltz accompaniment that requires a solid pedal point and then a large jump to the accompanying chords. Beginning at measure 288, the ability to play large octave chords and seamlessly switch hands is needed at a *piano* dynamic.

The musical challenges probably exceed the technical ones in variation nine. The pianist must immediately impart the sense of a waltz in the six-measure introduction, not awaiting the waltz accompaniment in measure 256. Busoni's directions of tranquil, legato, elegant, and melodious must be respected, but this is difficult considering the sheer volume of notes and the technical difficulties to be overcome. Measures 288 to 295 are a particular challenge because the pianist's tendency is to increase the volume and tension in the ascending passages, but Busoni directs that it must be played *piano* and become gentler and calmer; this is a difficult musical feat. Finally, it is helpful to think of the rhythm in the last four bars as being in six in order to project the groupings of six in the next and final variation.

Example 2.10. Busoni *Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*, BV 213a, Variation IX

(Hommage à Chopin)  
Tempo di Valse, tranquillo moderato



Example 2.10 continued. Busoni *Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*, BV 213a, Variation IX

The image shows two systems of musical notation for Variation IX. The first system is marked 'legato, elegante, melodioso'. It consists of a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a harmonic accompaniment. The second system continues the piece with similar notation. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 12/8.

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### Variation Ten: *Tempo dello Scherzo*

Variation ten begins with measure 300, is in twelve-eight time, and begins in B-flat minor. Busoni's indication of *tempo dello scherzo*, instead of being taken as a general direction, most probably refers back to variation eight, which was also a scherzo. There is a three-measure introduction where the rhythmic motives are presented. Like many other variations, this is driven by perpetual motion; this time the eighth notes are in twelve-eight time which, of course, are grouped like triplets. The theme is alluded to in the soprano with the direction patterns of its close-range pitches; as was the case with previous variations, this occurs intermittently with measures of extrapolation between. There is a sense of complexity created by three-against-two because the left hand plays four eighth note chords per measure. A new section begins in measure 312 with a key change to B minor, which Busoni makes clear in the first two measures that they serve as a transition. The soprano plays perpetual motion eighth note single Bs that vary

<sup>132</sup> Busoni, *Zehn Variationen über Ein Praludium von Chopin*, 18-20.

in octave, the tenor plays continual duple eighth note Ds, and the bass plays ascending minor thirds starting on B. Measures 314 to 322 are marked *mezzo leggiero, staccato* and this indication must be followed in order to avoid the heaviness that Busoni's insistent-sounding rhythmic pattern could impart. Still in twelve-eight time, there are now perpetual motion eighth notes in both hands. However, instead of being grouped in threes, they are notated as two eighths and a single eighth. Also, in the right hand, the second eighth note in each group of three is always a single note that is the same as the soprano of the preceding note but down an octave. In the left hand the opposite is true; that is, the second eighth note in each group of three is always a single note that is the same as the tenor but down an octave and sometimes there is a rest instead. The impact is that the second note of each group of three is deemphasized, resulting in a pattern that sounds like a skipping motion. The theme is nebulously presented in the general direction of the first note in each group of three. Measures 321 and 322 are a transition to the coda with right hand ascending octaves and left hand descending major thirds; both end in unison Cs for the transition back to C minor. The coda begins on measure 323 and for the next four measures there is a clever reprisal of the coda of variation nine, *Hommage à Chopin*. A continuous ascending chromatic scale, this time in octaves, starts in the left hand with the right hand playing descending chords approximating the theme's rhythm, then switches hands for the second four measures. Measure 327 is marked *fortissimo*, which continues through the next and final eight measures. This ending is highly rhythmic and the right hand generally plays the first and third of each group of three eighth notes accentuated. The left hand plays a descending scale in thirds for the first three measures, then plays groups of descending arpeggios in octaves for three measures. It is interesting to note that measures 330 to 332 alternate repeatedly between the

tonic and subdominant in preparation for the finale. The last two measures are rhythmically unison octave chords in both hands, ending on a grand final chord of the tonic, C minor.

Variation ten is virtuosic and has many technical challenges. The pianist must have fluency in rapid repeated notes, two-against-three, octave chord scales, and large jumps. Technically, this variation is the culmination of most of the skills needed for the preceding variations.

Musical skills are also critical in variation ten. The repeated notes and thick texture will become a directionless cacophony if not planned carefully and performed with sensitivity. Phrases are readily distinguishable and should have a sense of rising and falling. The pianist must follow Busoni's clear directions in terms of accents, dynamics, articulation, and, for most of the variation, *leggiero*. It helps to remember that while this is a grand ending, it is a finale for a ten-minute piece, not an hour-long magnum opus.

Example 2.11. Busoni *Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*, BV 213a, Variation X

**Tempo dello Scherzo**

The musical score consists of three systems of two staves each. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a tempo marking 'Tempo dello Scherzo'. The right hand features a complex, rhythmic melody with slurs and accents, while the left hand provides a dense, harmonic accompaniment. The second system continues the piece with similar complexity. The third system shows the piece concluding with a final cadence. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings like 'p'.

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### Conclusion

Ferruccio Busoni's music evolved and matured significantly between the 1884 and 1922 versions of his *Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*. By the time of the 1922 publication, he was 58 years old and, not surprisingly for the life expectancy of that era, unwell and only two years from his death. Busoni had traveled the world, taught in major conservatories, given a plethora of private masterclasses, was a successful touring concert pianist for fifty years, and had lived through the Great War. Naturally, his outlook on life had changed. He had shifted his focus from his Germanic to his Italian heritage and thereby had lightened his approach to harmony and taken a more lyrical approach. He also embraced and even published on a variety of newer

<sup>133</sup> Busoni, *Zehn Variationen über Ein Praludium von Chopin*, 20-2.

compositional approaches as described above. Perhaps a quote from his dedication of the set to his friend, Frau Kwast-Hodapp, on April 28, 1922, provides the best insight into Busoni's own opinion of his transformed variations: "The remodeled work is—or so I hope—freed from heaviness and more founded in form ... (you will see that I end with a scherzo) ... Scarcely a trace of 'depth' or 'meaningfulness.' But hopefully fun to play and entertaining."<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer*, 297-8.



## **CHAPTER 3: COMPARISON OF RACHMANINOFF'S *VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF CHOPIN*, OP. 22 AND BUSONI'S *TEN VARIATIONS ON A PRELUDE BY CHOPIN*, BV 213A AND THEIR RECORDING HISTORIES**

### **Comparison of Compositions**

Rachmaninoff and Busoni composed distinctive variation sets on the same theme. The two variation sets' use of the C-minor Chopin Prelude, compositional practices, performance techniques, and ability needed by recording artists as well as live performers is wide-ranging. Understanding a comparison of these factors allows one to greater appreciate and link the recording history through the compiled data. Composed only twenty years apart, the sets of variations by Rachmaninoff and Busoni sound considerably dissimilar and, when considered in detail, are much different in style.

To grasp this, one first must understand the basic similarities and differences between the *Variations on a Theme of Chopin, op. 22* by Rachmaninoff and *Ten Variations on a Theme by Chopin, BV 213a* by Busoni. The first way in which the works are alike is that both composers choose to vary the theme slightly rather than writing it exactly as Chopin did in his original C-minor work. Rachmaninoff does not include the last four measures of the Chopin Prelude, which are a repeat of measures five to eight, thus leaving Chopin's composition briefer but completely tonally intact.<sup>135</sup> However, Busoni adds four measures to the opening of the theme, and although these are based on the theme, their tonality is strikingly different.<sup>136</sup> As discussed in chapter two, Busoni introduces his own musical language at the outset, including polyphony, polytonality and dissonance prior to stating Chopin's entire twelve measure theme verbatim. In contrast, Rachmaninoff's use of polyphony is more classical, and polytonality and dissonance resolve

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<sup>135</sup> Rakhmaninov, *Variations on a Theme of Chopin, op. 22*, 3.

<sup>136</sup> Busoni, *Zehn Variationen über Ein Praludium von Chopin, Busoni-Verz. 213a*, 2.

quickly. Interestingly, both composers choose to use an accidental that is debated in various editions. Rachmaninoff and Busoni both write an E natural for the fourth beat of the third measure of the theme. In one urtext version of the Prelude, this is marked as an E-flat, but in others it is marked with a parenthesis stating there is an option for E-flat or E-natural.

Rachmaninoff and Busoni also both choose to omit the crescendo to the final closing chord of the theme.

The second similarity is that both Busoni and Rachmaninoff choose to use leave Chopin's original structure intact in most of their variations. Chopin's first eight measures can be clearly divided into a standard two-part, or AB, form by separating measures one through four from measures five through eight, and the different tonal progression of A and B can be distinguished in many of the variations by both composers. When the structure does change, it is typically through omission of the repetition of the second phrase. This is the case with many of Busoni's variations, as mentioned in their individual descriptions.

The third similarity is common to many character variation sets. Both the *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22 by Rachmaninoff and *Ten Variations on a Theme by Chopin*, BV 213a utilize a particular idea, concept, or approach of change in each variation. For example, Rachmaninoff utilizes a continuous sixteenth-note approach in variations one through three, while Busoni uses a constant eighth-note rhythm in cut time in variation one.

The final similarity is that both sets focus their key structure around the key of the theme: C minor. Each composer leaves and returns to the key in a very different manner, but the overall practice is the same.

As one might expect, there are a number of critical differences between the two composers' sets. This is likely for a several reasons. First, they had different ethnic backgrounds

and therefore different cultures; Busoni was of Austro-Hungarian and Italian descent while Rachmaninoff was purely Russian. Second, they had vastly different educational experiences since Busoni was mostly educated at home with private tutors while Rachmaninoff was musically educated in a central conservatory from the age of twelve and even lived with his teacher and fellow students for a number of years. These early life differences between the two composers impacted how they chose to compose as well as their career paths. As discussed in chapter two, Rachmaninoff's exile from Russia in 1917 caused him to focus on performing, and his compositional output for the period afterward was sparse. His *Chopin Variations* display late romantic elements and satisfied the public's general desire for traditional harmonies, as evidenced by his highly successful concert career playing his own works and mostly those of Romantic composers. The influence of his nationalistic style, including full and dense harmonies as well as church bells, is clear. Though dissonances are felt, they resolve to warm harmonies not shocking to listeners at the time. In contrast, when Busoni finally chose to revise his *Chopin Variations* in 1922, the musical world was a very different place. New styles of tonality and composition had been introduced, some through Busoni's own writings, by the time he completed his changes. He embeds these innovative and previously taboo ideas, including but not limited to polyrhythms, polytonality, and dissonance, into the final work. In the end, both sets are magnificent works and unique in their own right but are definitely characteristic of each set's composer and time period.

Considering their differences, Busoni's edited variations are significantly shorter at about eleven minutes rather than approximately thirty minutes for the Rachmaninoff. Interestingly Busoni's original 1884 version was approximately equal in length to Rachmaninoff's set. At the time of the composition of the final edition, Busoni's increasingly modern approach was

certainly unfamiliar to many ears and possibly even unappealing. As previously mentioned, Busoni's own opinion of the work was neutral, if not negative, and no record of Busoni performing his edited version can be found. In comparison, the Rachmaninoff variation set was performed often by the composer despite some less than positive reviews.

Both works are technically and artistically challenging to those who approach them. Although the ultimate choices of expression are the purview of the performer, the way in which the variation sets were written demands prowess and understanding of both the style of the time and of the composer. Some previously mentioned considerations for successful performance include clarity of pedal, an understanding of difficult rhythms and harmonies, and successful technical choices to allow for enough stamina to perform an extended, demanding work well. Of course, these technical considerations are of no use without an emotional grasp of what the composers desired. This emotional understanding is potentially easier for a work like the Rachmaninoff because many artists are more familiar with Rachmaninoff's other piano works, and his musically Romantic language is similar to other late Romantic composers. Unlike Busoni, Rachmaninoff chose not to utilize new and unfamiliar modern musical ideas such as polytonality, and only makes use of polyrhythms in his penultimate Variation XXI. This likely makes Rachmaninoff's Variations more familiar to the ear and to the emotions of the performers and listeners.

Rachmaninoff's more lyrical style may have felt more emotional, beautiful, and even enjoyable to numerous listeners. It can be inferred that recording artists might have shared these opinions because Rachmaninoff's work had double the recordings made compared to the variations by Busoni. Obviously, it is not possible to determine the opinions of people living a century ago, but the fact that Rachmaninoff's *Chopin Variations* were more often performed and

recorded does allow one to make conclusions regarding the acceptance of his musical language versus that of Busoni.

### **Comparison of Recording Histories**

In order to fully understand the depth of any work, it is vital not just to see and read about the works but to also understand the history of their performance. It is not possible to examine all live performances of a particular work, but it is possible to find all examples available of the studied work that are recorded. In order to provide a conclusive study, numerous databases were searched. Those used in this dissertation were: WorldCat, Naxos Digital Music, Alexander Street Press Classical Music Digital Archives, Library of Congress Digital Archives, Wheaton Public Library, Urbana Free Library, Champaign Public Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library, and the Inter-Library Loan System. Recordings discovered were found as LPs, CDs, and Online Resources. No videos with audio recordings are included in this study. When a recording was discovered that was pertinent to this study, it was documented in both the tables (found in the appendix) and the bibliography. The tables are critical to giving an overall chronological view of the recording history of each piece, although it is critical to note that many release dates are clearly re-releases of older recordings without any indication of the original recording date. More information and analysis are possible than would be provided if the recordings were only documented in a bibliography or mentioned in the body of a paper.

The earliest documented recording discovered with a known date of Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, was made by Paulina Drake in 1975.<sup>137</sup> Discovered as an online resource, this was the first of a few recordings that were found within the next ten

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<sup>137</sup> Paulina Drake, "Paulina Drake Presented by the Yehudi Menuhin Foundation," 1975, <https://illinois-naxosmusiclibrary-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/catalogue/item.asp?cid=LAN0005>.

years. After that, three LPs were found between 1976 and 1982, each by a different artist and produced on a different label. The years these recordings were released are 1976, 1979 and 1982.

After this, all recordings of the Rachmaninoff found are either online resources or CDs, many of which are collections and include titles like “Complete Rachmaninoff Piano Works” or “Rachmaninoff Piano Variations.” This is likely the case since the lesser known *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22 are paired with complete Rachmaninoff works or included with similar groups including his more familiar *Paganini* or *Corelli Piano Variations*.

Only two recordings of Rachmaninoff variations are found during the 1990s, one from 1995 and one in 1999. A resurgence began in 2002; over half of the twenty-six total recordings made have been released or re-released during or after that year. None of these are by the same performer. Although many are marked as an Online Resource, due to their discovery through database searches and availability to listen through the database, it is possible that they also had been, or still might be available as a CD. An example of an Online Resource also available in CD format is the most recently published recording by Ruth Laredo ,“Ruth Laredo Plays Rachmaninoff: The Complete Works for Solo Piano.”<sup>138</sup>

While Rachmaninoff himself did not provide an audio recording of his Chopin Variations, it is known that he publicly performed them. It is a disappointing fact that not even a live recording or piano roll is available as is the case for some other Rachmaninoff works. Such a recording by the composer himself would be of great value since it could be an example for performers, or at least a valuable way to compare other interpretations with what the composer preferred and intended.

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<sup>138</sup> Ruth Laredo, “Ruth Laredo Plays Rachmaninoff: The Complete Music for Solo Piano,” 2016, <https://illinois-naxosmusiclibrary-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/catalogue/item.asp?cid=886445521764>.

Recordings of the *Ten Variations on a Chopin Prelude*, BV 213a by Busoni are significantly sparser, only twelve in number. Just like Rachmaninoff, Busoni did not record his *Chopin Variations*. The two found LPs, one recorded by Gunnar Johansen<sup>139</sup> and the other by John Ogdon<sup>140</sup>, can be assumed to be recorded prior to the mid-1980s since no CD or electronic version is available. The next recording in chronological order is not until 1987 and made by Geoffrey Douglas Madge<sup>141</sup>. The majority of the recordings that exist have been made infrequently with a fair number of years between them. Seventy-five percent of the twelve recordings are in the CD format. It is notable that a cluster of releases (or perhaps re-releases) occurs in 2009-2011, but none have been made since then (a period of at least seven years). In terms of Busoni's own performance of the work, it is clear from Busoni's communication with Frau Kwast-Hodapp, as discussed in chapter three, that the composer was not particularly fond of his own compositions. However, it is unknown if he himself played it publicly in the few years that followed before his death.

No single artist has recorded both the Rachmaninoff and Busoni *Chopin Variations*, but some labels did release recordings of both works on separate LPs or CDs. These labels are limited to Naxos and Hyperion. It is interesting to note that some recordings, particularly Kyung Nim Ko's recording of the *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22 by Rachmaninoff<sup>142</sup> and Daria Rabotkina's recording of Busoni's *Ten Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*, BV 213a<sup>143</sup> were both made as part of Doctor of Musical Arts projects at their respective universities

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<sup>139</sup> Gunnar Johansen, *Busoni Complete Piano Works: Album III*, LP, vol. III, V vols. (Blue Mounds, WI: Artist Direct, n.d.).

<sup>140</sup> John Ogdon, *John Ogdon: Liszt & Busoni Improvisations*, LP (Hollywood, CA: Seraphim, Unknown).

<sup>141</sup> Geoffrey Douglas Madge, *The Piano Works: Ferruccio Busoni*, Compact disc, vol. 2, 6 vols. (Netherlands: Phillips Digital Classics, 1987).

<sup>142</sup> Kyung Nim Ko, *Twentieth Century Variations on Borrowed Themes*, Compact disc (University of Maryland, 2005).

<sup>143</sup> Daria Rabotkina, *Daria Rabotkina, Piano*, Compact disc (Rochester: Eastman School of Music, 2009).

(University of Maryland and Eastman School of Music respectively). Therefore, it is fair to assume that both variation sets have sparked interest in the academic world, but unfortunately neither dissertation focuses on performance or recording history.

A major question then becomes, why is there a lack of equality in the number of recordings between these two works? An obvious and likely answer includes preference of one work over the other, possibly due to the knowledge or popularity of it. Based on my research, Rachmaninoff's variations were recorded more than double the times that Busoni's were. I myself had no familiarity with either work in the beginning which, in part, led to my interest in investigating these valuable contributions to the piano repertoire. Research shows that today more digital recordings of the Rachmaninoff are available, making it more accessible to listeners. The larger number of recordings and the formats which are available cause the Rachmaninoff to be better known, and as a result possibly cause them to be performed more frequently than those by Busoni.

Some might seek to combine both the original and final Busoni variations on the Chopin Prelude, op. 28 no. 20 together when comparing recordings of his variations to those of another composer on the same theme. This would not be an equal comparison between the Busoni and Rachmaninoff variation sets because it could provide false assumptions if two essentially separate works of Busoni were compared to one work of Rachmaninoff. The later, final 1922 variations of Busoni were chosen to compare to Rachmaninoff's variations because the later Busoni set was his stated preference. Similarly, the original Rachmaninoff set was chosen for this comparison because it is the only written record of Rachmaninoff's treatment of the same theme. As noted in chapter one, Rachmaninoff did perform the set with some variations deleted,



but accounts are unclear and dissimilar in terms of which variations (or portions thereof) were skipped in any given performance.

Another possible explanation for the greater number of recordings of Rachmaninoff's set is that Rachmaninoff himself performed them, and his performances were reportedly very popular across Europe and America. This large number of performances is likely to have acted as a form of promotion of the *Variation on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22., during Rachmaninoff's lifetime. Interestingly, besides my discovery that there are more than double the recordings of the Rachmaninoff than the Busoni, I also found that Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin* has comparably fewer recordings than many of his other more popular works such as his *Variations on a Theme of Corelli* or *Variations on a Theme of Paganini*. Many times when searching for recordings of his *Variation on a Theme of Chopin*, the recordings contained both other works, or did not have the *Chopin Variations* at all but rather had one or both of the other sets in combination with other piano works.

Finally, the *Variations on a Theme of Chopin* might be more recorded more frequently since they may be more appealing to the ears of many listeners and performers. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, a number of factors support this likelihood, the first of which is that their composer, Sergei Rachmaninoff, was and still may be better known than Busoni. This, in part, is due to his devotion to performance, particularly in the later years of his life; he was popular across Europe and the United States, filling concert halls in every major city. Also, as discussed above, the Romantic musical language of Rachmaninoff may make it more approachable and better understood than the more modern musical language of Busoni.

Some recordings are by little-known artists and produced by lesser-known recording labels. Others could only be found in recording databases and not seen in comprehensive

WorldCat library searches. People who did not have access to such a recording database would not know that a variety of these recordings existed. One such example is Paulina Drake's recording "Paulina Drake presented by the Yehudi Menuhin Foundation." An online search revealed that the recording was available as an LP the 1970s and was popular enough to be mentioned in a New York Times article about the various new audio publications of Rachmaninoff's Piano Music. The article, titled "Rachmaninoff's Piano Music on New Disks," discusses a variety of performers who recorded a number of works. Drake's recording is mentioned at the end of author Francis Crociata's article.<sup>144</sup> Recordings of the Busoni set are almost exclusively made by lesser-known artists. Upon searching for biographies, one might find impressive credentials but the performer is not generally known to the classical listener. For example, this is the case with Swedish pianist and harpsichordist Roland Pontinen, who studied with major artists including Menahem Pressler, György Sebok and Elizabeth Leonskaya; he has not concertized widely.<sup>145</sup> Interestingly, his biography mentions his release of a new CD of Busoni's piano music in the coming months, indicating this an important interest for him. His recording of the *Ten Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*, BV 213a was only found online, although it is listed as having been available and released on CD previously.<sup>146</sup>

Several other online only resources exist, most of which have been recorded by artists with unfamiliar names and on lesser-known recording labels. As such, this is clear evidence of Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22 being unknown to many listeners. Labels and artists who weren't well known are unlikely to be available in libraries and can be

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<sup>144</sup> Francis Crociata, "Rachmaninoff's Piano Music on New Disks," The New York Times, September 10, 1976, <http://www.nytimes.com/1976/09/19/archives/rachmaninoffs-piano-music-on-new-disks.html>.

<sup>145</sup> "Roland Pontinen (Piano, Harpsichord)," Bach Cantatas Website, May 29, 2017, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Bio/Pontinen-Roland.htm>.

<sup>146</sup> Roland Pontinen, "Homages a Mozart, Bach & Chopin," 2011, <https://illinois-naxosmusiclibrary-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/catalogue/item.asp?cid=777427-2>.

more difficult to discover and purchase. Without databases such as those made by Naxos, a person might not even know that a number of the online resources exist and certainly might be unable to listen to them. Busoni's *Ten Variations on a Prelude by Chopin*, BV 213a have a similar situation but their modern, dissonant sound as well as the fact that they have fewer recordings makes it clear they are lesser known than the Rachmaninoff.

Understanding these factors makes one ponder what impact might occur if either Busoni's or Rachmaninoff's *Chopin Variations* were better known. A possible change is that there might be more recordings. While live performances, especially by the composers themselves, have not been studied for this dissertation, their percentage of concert repertoire compared to other works is likely similarly low. This may be particularly true since each composer expressed a desire to change their original work, although only Busoni rewrote his original set. Rachmaninoff, on the other hand, chose to perform his variations for the public, at least for the first season after their publication.

Knowing this, one might wonder why both Rachmaninoff and Busoni chose Chopin's Prelude in C minor, op. 28 no. 20 as the basis for a large set of variations. Although no evidence exists from either composer regarding the choice of theme, both variation sets were modeled and designed based on events and knowledge from early points in their careers. Busoni's first set on this theme was written in 1884 during his student years, of course with major revisions decades later. The revision is so extensive that it may almost be considered a completely new work. Though based on variations from the original set, there is a significant amount of reordering, rewriting, and removal of numerous variations. As stated earlier, Busoni's distaste for the original set is revealed in a letter. Despite his friend's urging him to rewrite them at the end of his life, Busoni still does not consider the work to be noteworthy. He instead hopes others can

enjoy them, never expressing he feels more enthusiasm for the final version studied in this dissertation. In the case of Rachmaninoff, his variations were written at a period of great productivity when he was fully focused on composing and happy in his new marriage. He was still in the early part of his career and knowledge from the Moscow Conservatory was surely influential in his writing style.

In the end, can one say that either composer did not succeed in their writing of variations on the same theme? While it may appear that the Rachmaninoff set of variations could be perceived as greater success than the Busoni set due to a greater number of recordings, there are many other measures of the musical success of a piece, most of them subjective. Neither work was discarded completely by its composer, and in fact both continued to show interest in the pieces late in their careers. Rachmaninoff continued to play his *Chopin Variations* in concert, albeit with some sections redacted. Busoni thought enough of his *Chopin Variations* to take the time to significantly revise and republish the work. Both works continue to be the focus of academic inquiry and recording, and certainly have the capability of being enjoyed by audiences should they be programmed more frequently.

Considering the music alone, each set of variations is representative of the knowledge and style preferences its composer had at the time it was written. Today, scholars and the general public alike study and even appreciate works in comparison to their own background as well as their understanding of the works in perspective of their history. To fully understand a work, one must view and comprehend a composition, its recording history and ideally its performance and public reception as well. This broader variety of perspectives provides the opportunity to combine the knowledge of respective work, an understanding of the work amongst the eye of its performers as well as those who additionally decided to devote time to record it and consider the

opinion of the composer. This combination allows for the creation of the most comprehensive and well-studied view of any work.

As not all aforementioned data is available for the works discussed in this dissertation, most particularly live performance data, one must rely upon the information presented. It is highly likely that comprehensive performance data is difficult or impossible to compile, except in limited circumstances. What, then can be gained from collecting more readily available recording data? An understanding of how a work grew or lost importance over time as well as a grasp of the history of a work becomes clear. One can also use recording data to understand the changing taste of artists over the years.<sup>147</sup>

Still, one must consider the fact that not all recordings survive and that the ability to record is relatively new. This, in combination with the data accessibility means that what is available gives a helpful yet limited picture of a work or collection's importance. Part of the limitation comes from the changing types of recordings, including but not limited to LPs, CDs, digital sources and other types over the years. There is also a newer desire to create archives and a record of historical data for both current use and later generations.<sup>148</sup> No matter the type of recording, the fact persists from earlier generations that recordings of composers playing their own works are considered most authentic of interpretations. Individual artists have the right to be unique as well as the choice to play in a matter similar to composers or other performers in preexisting recordings. The compiled catalog gives access to information on where to find both types of recordings. The goal of this dissertation, however is not just to be a source and

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<sup>147</sup> Desmond Shawe-Taylor, "Recording," *Grove Music Online*, accessed January 30, 2018, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000011552>.

<sup>148</sup> Shawe-Taylor.

comparison of the musical works, their history, and recordings but also to evaluate compositional choices and to consider an opinion of their success.

## CONCLUSION

Both Rachmaninoff and Busoni utilized these historical variation techniques as well as their own unique approaches, and both added great technical and musical difficulty. The variation sets by Busoni and Rachmaninoff are examples of character variation form, utilizing their signature harmonic and rhythmic enrichments. The author chose to compare these two works because the pieces are surprisingly unfamiliar even though their composers are famous. Also, the two sets of variations display significant compositional and stylistic differences even though they were composed just twenty years apart. The author's enjoyment of both Rachmaninoff and Busoni as well as the theme's composer, Chopin, made this study even more appealing.

The overall structure of Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22 is a theme and twenty-two variations. Extensive in length, the set has four major parts that are hypothesized to be in sonata form. As the work progresses, the variations have an overall trend of increasing in length and difficulty. Each variation has its own characteristic manner of utilizing elements of the theme, thereby displaying a diversity of moods, textures, and techniques of composition. Rachmaninoff's style is borne of his Russian heritage, including his use of deep and dense harmonies, long and yearning melodic lines, and the sound of tolling bells. The great deal of chromaticism in his variations relates both to the original prelude and to Rachmaninoff's increasingly modern style. Some elements of the variations display mastery of the topics, including counterpoint, learned during his education at the Moscow Conservatory. Composed in 1902, the *Chopin Variations* are his first true mature piano work. While Rachmaninoff's true opinion of this work is not recorded, he did shorten the set later in his life during performances.

Busoni adds his own taste of modernism to his *Ten Variations on a Prelude by Chopin, BV 213a* (1922), a major revision of his 1884 work on the same theme. By fashioning unusual and unexpected harmonic and rhythmic changes, Busoni created an atypical work for listeners at the time. Busoni's 1922 set has the structure of a theme and ten variations, a fact not made clear in the written work. The variations remain unnumbered and do not hold double bars to notate breaks in all places. In addition, the theme is altered by adding material to the opening. His manner of modernizing both harmony and form fit his mature compositional style not long before his death. Some examples include polyrhythms, simultaneous combinations of minor and major, writing phrases across the bar line, augmentation of the theme, and confusion of thematic material between voices. Fortunately, Busoni is very specific in terms of musical markings and performance directions given, many of which are the opposite of a pianist's usual tendencies. Overall, careful study of the set leads to a better appreciation of the many ingenious methods used by the composer.

Rachmaninoff and Busoni composed variation sets on the same Chopin theme, but they sound quite different in character. Similarities include alteration of the statement of the original theme at the opening of the set, use of polyphony, structural integrity, use of unique character variation compositional technique, and an overall use of and return to the original C-minor tonality. Differences abound, probably explainable by the composers' different ethnic backgrounds, musical education, need to cater to audience preferences in live performances, and the era in which the compositions were published. When comparing the sets, Busoni's may be performed in only eleven minutes; Rachmaninoff's takes a full thirty minutes. The primary difference to listeners is the prevalence of modern techniques of polyphony and polyrhythms. While both composers utilize these techniques, Rachmaninoff resolves them quickly into



traditional harmonies and rhythms to which more audiences can relate. Busoni revels in these modern techniques, explores them extensively, and only occasionally gives way to a traditional method of resolution. Both compositions require virtuosic pianistic skill.

Recording data was researched as a proxy measure for both performance data and popularity. After an extensive database study, the cataloged recording data led to possible conclusions about these works. For one, the comparison shows that the Rachmaninoff set is more accessible to listeners than the Busoni with nearly double the number of recordings obtainable. The relatively high number of recordings may also be attributable to listeners being more familiar with *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22, or at least with Rachmaninoff as a composer. Another implication could be that they were recorded more often since they were more pleasing to audiences or performing artists since recording a popular or more appealing work offers more potential for financial or professional gain. Of course, one must bear in mind that data are not available on the use or availability of the works in their earliest performed and recorded forms, including methods like piano rolls. In terms of trends over time, it is difficult to draw conclusions because many recordings have release dates which are clearly re-releases of older recordings without reference to the original recording date. However, there is a wave of releases in the recent decade, which may indicate a resurgence of interest.

This dissertation's study of recording data offers a plethora of opportunities for further research. While all recordings available in databases were exhausted, one might attempt to perform primary-source research to uncover older recordings by investigating the archives of the two composers, as well as universities, agents, publishers, and other institutions with which they were affiliated. Of course, a frequent update of recording data should be made when new recordings are released. Contacting recording companies for information on sales data would

also be valuable. A time-consuming but informative project would be performance data from selected concert halls; as described in the introduction the author used this approach for her undergraduate thesis and is aware of the resources required to do so. Interviews with those artists who have recorded, should they still be living, would provide a wealth of information on performance suggestions and challenges as well as public reception. Finally, it would be ideal to determine the approach of a current composer's approach to variations on Chopin's C-minor Prelude, but of course this would require the financial resources necessary to commission a new work.

It is sincerely hoped that this study has contributed to the research of and appreciation for these two variation sets, and that suggestions for future research will spark academic interest in continued investigation.

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## APPENDIX A: RECORDING DATA

### Recordings of Sergei Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, op. 22

Recording Title	Performer	Release Date	Format	Label
The Collector's Rachmaninoff	Thew, Warren	Unknown	LP	MGM Records
Paulina Drake presented by the Yehudi Menuhin Foundation	Drake, Paulina	1975	Online Resource	Naxos Music Library
Rachmaninoff Piano Music	Ponti, Michael	1976	LP	Vox
Ruth Laredo Plays Rachmaninoff Transcriptions: Complete Works for Solo Piano	Laredo, Ruth	1979	LP	Columbia Masterworks
Variations: Rachmaninoff-Chopin, Liszt-Bach, Schumann-Beethoven	Katsaris, Cyprien	1982	LP	Telefunken
Rachmaninov: "Chopin" Variations, 5 Preludes, Melodie, Liebeslied & Liebesfreud	Bolet, Jorge	1988	CD	Decca
Rachmaninov: <i>Variations on a Theme of Chopin</i> , op. 22 and <i>Variations on a Theme of Corelli</i> , op. 42	Shelley, Howard	1988	CD	Hyperion Records
Rachmaninov Piano Works	Chuprik, Ethella	1995	Online Resource	Amadis
Rachmaninov <i>Variations on a Theme of Chopin</i> and Other Piano Works	Biret, Idil	1999	CD	Naxos Music Library
Variations	Tiu, Albert	2002	CD	Arktos
Rachmaninov Piano Sonata No. 2, <i>Variations on a Theme of Chopin</i>	Sherbakov, Konstantin	2003	CD	Naxos Music Library
Sergei Rachmaninoff: Sonata No. 2, <i>Variations on a Theme of Chopin</i>	Mikkola, Laura	2005	CD	Aeon
Twentieth Century Variations on Borrowed Themes	Ko, Kyung Nim	2005	CD	University of Maryland
Yevgeny Sudbin: Rachmaninov	Sudbin, Yevgeny	2005	Online Resource	BIS
Edition Klavier-Festival Ruhr: Variationen	Andaloro, Giuseppe et all	2006	Online Resource	Cavi-music

<b>Recording Title</b>	<b>Performer</b>	<b>Release Date</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Label</b>
Rachmaninoff: <i>Variations on a Theme of Chopin</i> , Beethoven: <i>Thirty-Three Variations on a Waltz By Diabelli</i>	Richter, Sviatoslav	2006	Online Resource	Pipeline Music
Rachmaninoff	Wild, Earl	2008	Online Resource	Ivory Classics
Piano Sonata No. 2; <i>Morceaux de Fantasia</i> ; <i>Variations on a Theme by Chopin</i>	Rodriguez, Santiago	2011	CD	Brilliant Classics
Sergei Rachmaninoff: Complete Works for Solo Piano	Shybayeva, Hanna et all	2012	Online Resource	Etcetera
A Tribute To Rachmaninoff in Honor of Solomon Mikowsky (Part 2) November 15, 2013	Farouk, Wael	2013	CD	Roosevelt University
Variations: Beethoven <i>Eroica Variations</i> , Rachmaninoff <i>Chopin Variations</i> , Copland <i>Piano Variations</i>	Korsantia, Alexander	2014	CD	Piano Classics
Rachmaninoff Variations	Arimori, Hiroshi	2014	Online Resource	Fontec Inc.
Marianna Prjevalskaya Plays Rachmaninoff: Variations on Themes by Chopin and Corelli	Prejevalskaya, Marianna	2015	Online Resource	not listed
Rachmaninov: Variations	Trifinov, Daniil	2015	CD	Deutsche Grammaphon
Medtner, Rachmaninov	Paley, Alexander	2016	Online Resource	La Musica
Ruth Laredo Plays Rachmaninoff: The Complete Works for Solo Piano	Laredo, Ruth	2016	Online Resource	Sony Classical

**Recordings of Ferruccio Busoni's *Ten Variations on Prelude by Chopin, BV 213a***

<b>Recording Title</b>	<b>Performer</b>	<b>Release Date</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Label</b>
Busoni Complete Piano Works: Album III	Johansen, Gunnar	Unknown	LP	Artist Direct
John Ogdon: Liszt & Busoni Improvisations	Ogdon, John	Unknown	LP	Seraphim
The Piano Works	Madge, Geoffrey Douglas	1987	CD	Phillips Digital Classics
Busoni: Piano Works	Blumenthal, Daniel	1994	CD	Pavane Records
Opere per Pianoforte	Mariotti, Giuseppe	1997	CD	Fone
Busoni: Late Piano Music	Hamelin, Marc Andre	1998	CD	Hyperion Records
Spencer Myer Plays Preludes & Variations	Myer, Spencer	2007	CD	Harmonia Mundi
Chopin, Busoni, Mompou	Kaoru, Bingham	2009	CD	Meridian
Daria Rabotkina, Piano	Rabotkina, Daria	2009	CD	Eastman School of Music
Piano Transcriptions and Paraphrases	Groschopp, Holger	2009	CD	Capriccio
Hommage a Chopin	Plowright, Jonathan	2010	CD	Hyperion Records
Hommages a Mozart, Bach & Chopin: Piano Works	Pontinen, Roland	2011	Online Resource	CPO