

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: THE DEVELOPMENT OF PIANO VARIATIONS IN
THE ROMANTIC ERA

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The purpose of this study is to illustrate the development of piano variations as a genre during the Romantic era. In order to facilitate this examination of piano variations techniques, a brief look at the types of variation procedures used by composers of previous eras will assist in understanding developments that later occurred in the Romantic period.

Throughout the Baroque era, composers preferred the fixed-bass, fixed-melody, and harmonic forms of variation. The crowning achievement of Baroque keyboard music, Bach's *Goldberg Variations* (1725), contains examples of the "constant-harmonic" method in its collection of 30 variations, each of which maintains both the bass and harmonic structure of the themes.

While most composers of the classical period favored the "melodic-outline" form of variation, Haydn developed hybrid variation procedure that exhibits recurrence of material rather than repetition, alternating variation (ABABA), rondo variation

(ABACA), and ternary variation (ABA). Haydn, Mozart and early Beethoven variations also exhibit simpler textures than do their Baroque predecessors.

The nineteenth century produced numerous compositions that display variation techniques, some based on such older, classical models as melodic-outline variation and hybrid variation, others in the style of the character variation or free variation. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Beethoven and Schubert used such classical variation techniques as melodic-outline variations and hybrid variations. Beethoven's late sonatas displayed such new means of expression as variation, fugue, and dramatic recitatives. The third movement of the *Sonata in E major, Op.109* (1820) has a theme and six variations of the melodic-outline type.

Johannes Brahms was particularly fond of composing variations for piano. Among the best known examples of formal-outline variations are those found in the *Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Handel, Op. 24* (1861). Character variations, in which styles are characterized by the retention and variability of particular elements, also flourished during the Romantic period.

César Franck's *Variations Symphoniques* (1885) are, perhaps, among the most important examples of free variations. This composition is a one-movement work consisting of three sections, *Introduction, Variations, and Finale* (all movements played "attaca"). This work combines two independent classical formal structures, the concerto and the variation.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PIANO VARIATIONS
IN THE ROMANTIC ERA

by

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First Recital

Variations Symphoniques

César Franck (1820-1890)

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op.43

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

Second Recital

Sonata in C minor, D.958

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Abegg Variations, Op.1

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Handel, Op. 24

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Third Recital

Impromptu in B flat major, D. 935, No. 3

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Sonata in E major, Op.109

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Etudes Symphoniques, Op.13

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

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