

MASTER'S RECITAL

A Short Discussion on the Problems of Performance

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BACH

Fantasia and Fugue - G Minor

The Fantasia and Fugue in g minor was written during the Weimar period of Bach's life (1708-1717), and was performed by Bach in 1720 at Hamburg on the historic occasion of his meeting with Buxtehude and Reinken. The performance drew considerable praise for both the composition and his virtuosity.

The Fantasia is rhapsodic in style with florid running passages and bold suspensions and modulations. In contrast to this are two eloquent polyphonic interludes using the same figure winding around in different voices.

The fugue is in three sections as is usual with the big fugues by Bach. The first section is on tonic and dominant harmonies. The second section or middle section is in D Flat major, the relative major, and the third and final section returns to G Minor, the tonic. From the beginning, the first voice plays the subject in the tonic G minor. At the 4th measure the second voice in the alto enters on the dominant. The next voice is the tenor in the tonic key then the bass or pedals on the dominant. In measure 22, after some sequential passages the subject is sung again in the soprano in G minor. That is followed by the subject in the alto in D minor and then in the pedal in G minor again. Beginning in

measure 25 there is a hidden cadence that remains to enter the bass on the subject in G minor in measure 29. At measure 36 a definite cadence marks the end of the first section and a move to the relative major in measure 37 is the beginning of the second section. The pedals are tacet from measure 37 through the middle section. In measure 55 the subject appears in the tenor in F major which gives a feeling of movement toward the third section. In measure 64 a pedal D sounds and lasts for two measures which gives a strong return to G minor in measure 65. The subject starts in the tenor in the piano score then is played as the alto. With all the other notes, the melody is hard to see and on the piano difficult to be made clear. In measure 73 the key moves to subdominant with the subject in the soprano. Measure 77 has an inverted pedal point while the bass plays a variation on the main theme - then sequences - then moves into the key of E Flat major with the subject in the alto. In measure 94 the subject returns in the soprano in G minor with only the bass playing with it. (two voices). In measure 104 a third voice, the tenor, enters with the subject again in G minor. In measure 111 the pedals play the subject again in G minor followed by sequences to the big cadence at the end.

The sectional fugue was one of the forerunners of the sonata-allegro form. The first section with the theme in the tonic and dominant, the second section in the relative major,

and contrasting to the first, then the return to the tonic in the third section.

The edition used for this performance is a transcription for piano by Franz Liszt. In contrasting the two extant transcriptions (Liszt and Busoni), we find, as may be expected, that the Liszt transcription is of a more romantic treatment. The Fantasie is broader and perhaps a little slower than would be done on the organ. The dynamic markings are more extreme for greater contrast and there are many crescendi and diminuendi. In the first measure of the first short polyphonic section Liszt calls for "sempre marcatissimo", making for a broader effect.



With a considerable number of marks for slowing down and speeding up the feeling of freeness is given; however the overall rhythm to any great extent in the freer sections.

Because of the massive nature of the piece a pianist may be inclined to pound out the chords trying to emulate the sound of an organ. This must be guarded against. Even though the piece was written for organ, if it is being played on a piano, it is a piano piece. A transcriber sets himself to a difficult task in trying to make a great piano piece from a great organ piece. Technically speaking, the music is not the same anymore. Liszt

has used his creative genius and his understanding of the piano to create, in a sense, a new work of art.

In view of this, any argument that the Liszt transcription is not true to Bach is invalid. In opposition to the school that would perform the music as Bach must have, I have read this music as I feel Bach would have played it today. This thrown in with Liszt's romantic and pianistic treatment gives us a rather different composition than Bach played in his day. We cannot and should not hope to emulate the sound or total presentation the Fantasie and Fugue would be given on the organ.

As in the case of any fugue, the fugue theme must always predominate at every new entry. This on the piano presents few problems if a proper understanding of the importance is realized. In playing a fugue on a piano, there is no place where the underlying voices can be thought of as a sort of chiaroscuro. It is not to be heard that way. This being the case, each voice must maintain its independence. Problems arise here for there is great difficulty for one in remembering and consciously thinking of each voice. Obviously it must be remembered and thought of in hand patterns. The lower part of the right hand is sometimes playing staccato and the upper part legato, or vice versa. The same is true in the left hand. In a perfect performance no quarter may be asked or given on this score. Each voice must always appear the same except of

course for dynamic intensity.

As mentioned before, the memory is the main problem of a fugue of this magnitude. It pays to practise this fugue, for memory, with the metronome set on fifty per quarter note. At this tempo you must consciously know all the notes. There is no possible way of slipping over any section. Playing at home alone one may not know or need to know consciously every note for the momentum and muscular reaction can carry you through but on performance under stress, nothing replaces knowing quite consciously all the notes at all times.

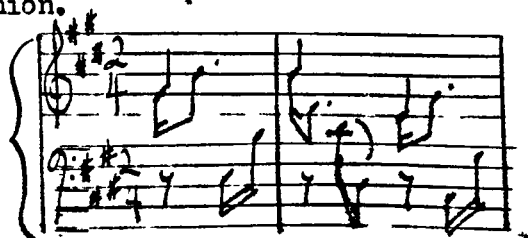
I have chosen a fairly slow tempo so that I can be certain of maintaining complete control at all times.

BEETHOVEN

Sonata, Opus 109

This sonata as the opus number indicates is a very late work of the composer being followed by only two more sonatas. This piece, written in 1820, is a good illustration of how free the forms became to Beethoven in his later years.

The Sonata, opus 109 is free in form and rather romantic in nature. The first movement starts quietly (*dolce*) with the principal figuration of the movement which later reoccurs in the second variation of the third movement in a slightly altered fashion.



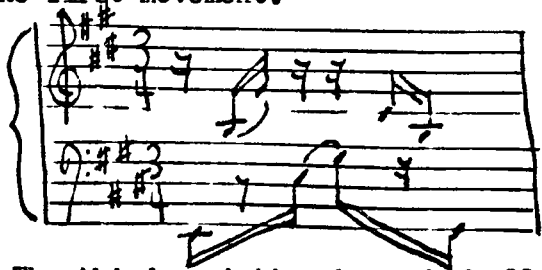
At measure 10 there is a section marked *adagio espressivo* in three-four which strongly suggests a cadenza. After a short melody we shall call B, there begins an improvisational section that is very much a cadenza in nature. The A theme returns to be carried further at measure 18. A sort of development ensues that leads up to the second B section with its improvisational style in three-four (measure 61). A coda starting on measure 69 follows using the A figuration broken only by slow chords in the middle. The movement ends quietly after the A figure moves quite lively up a crescendo to a sudden piano and ritard to the final chord.

The scherzo second movement is in six-eight and marked prestissimo. It is a sonata allegro form, having a short development section of 35 measures, with a codetta on the end.

The third and last movement is a theme and six variations. The theme, marked andante, is sober and almost religious sounding marked by an ascending bass line at the beginning.

The first variation is very expressive if played properly but could sound trite if one is not careful. The dotted 8th and 16th rhythm must be very strict and conform to the proper phrasing to give the variation the correct style.

The second variation is a sort of double variation and is largely made up of a figure similar to the principle figuration in the first movement.



The third variation is marked allegro vivace. First the left hand has descending 16th notes against the melody of 8th notes in the right hand after each four measure phrase. This is double counterpoint at the 15th. That is, the two lines are two octaves apart, one on top then the other.

The fourth variation is in nine-eight with 16th notes ascending in groups of three while the melody is of three notes that repeat over and over in different voices. A B section uses the 16th note figure and to some extent develops that figure.

The fifth variation is a contrapuntal piece using different figures against each other.



A B section alters the principle theme somewhat.



The sixth variation brings back part of the original theme. The first three bars in three-four are accompanied by continuous eighth notes on B in both hands. This changes to nine-eight time. As the variation progresses the accompaniment becomes a trill in 16th notes then 32nd notes in three-fourth e to a free trill finally. The melody also doubles in time as it progresses (quarters, eighths, sixteenths). The accompaniment centers around B for the entire variation except for four beats. The accompaniment becomes a pechal note trill until the right hand takes it again. The variation ends with a return to the original theme played in a quasi religioso style. The sonata ends quietly at

the end of the original theme.

The difficulties involved in playing the 109 sonata are many and complex. First, a proper conception of the sonata as a whole is of supreme importance. A student accustomed to playing the earlier Beethoven sonatas may find himself at a loss as to what this later sonata has to say. Attacking the E major sonata as you would the "Waldstein" is nearly fatal and almost irreparable harm will be done when assuming the proper presentation of this work. The earlier sonatas portray Beethoven as most people imagine him, firm and solid compositions with dramatic passages that are more flamboyant than subtle. By contrast the 109 sonata is very delicate, subtle and transparent. The opening figure in the first movement is just a play on harmonies. The melodic essence is exclusively represented by neither the rising and falling arabesques (all of which must be expressively shaded), nor in the notes marked as quarters, but in the combination of both these elements. These figures must be given their precise time for the effect to be achieved. The *adagio espressivo* sections must be played freely with singing tone. Beethoven here exploits the color and quality of the piano in his finest tradition.

In the extension of the second A section, care must be taken to control the tempo. Here a proper conception of the piece is of the greatest importance. Earlier in his life Beethoven may have thundered through this section putting the climax some six measures earlier at measure 45, than he actually did at

measure 51. Subtlety and the elastic spreading of virtual time shows the master at his greatest.

The coda must be played in a somewhat nostalgic style as a recollection in order to round the movement off in perfect satisfaction.

The second movement is *bravura* Beethoven. There are few difficulties in the performance of this movement. Agile technique is of prime importance. In passing one might mention one awkward place for the pianist.



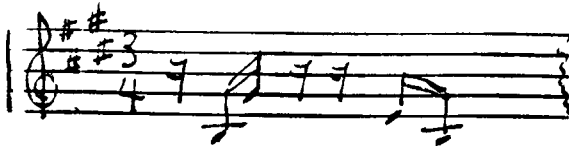
The fingering is difficult and can only be suitably accomplished by pressuring the hand down and pushing into each key to make each note firm and audible. Of the possible fingerings the above will be found to be the best.

In the third and final movement we find a rather typical theme and variations. I say typical because the theme is very simple. Because of this, great care must be taken to play the theme in good taste. The first variation is very expressive if played correctly. The dotted 8th and 16th rhythm must be very strict and conform to the proper phrasing to give the variation its correct presentation. In the B section we find seeds of

in almost Chopinesque figures of chromatics and lush harmonies.



In the second variation we find a figuration similar to the first movement.



These must be played lightly, strictly adhering to the proper phrasing and dynamics. A strict tempo is not necessary but should be fairly free although the general rhythm must be maintained. The *B dolce* section can be made to sound profound in contrast to the arabesques. This is to be measured in good taste. The accompanying halves and quarters must be certainly play an important part in the color presented.

The third variation is a fanciful intermezzo forming an agreeable contrast to the sequel and hence important as a link in the construction of the whole piece. Because of this importance, it must not be degraded as a bravura piece. It should not be played too rapidly, but at such a tempo that the notes sound quite clearly. The *subito piano* must always be observed to maintain the overall rhythm of the piece.

In the fourth variation the pianist must be careful to sing

the melody so there will be no mistake as to what the melody actually is. The 16th notes, which must not be played as triplets on any account, could easily be mistaken for the prime melody. As it happens, the 16th note figure is developed in the B section. In this section, as well as the whole piece, great care must be taken to round off each phrase and section and not jump immediately from one to another. This is a marked characteristic of this piece as well as most of Beethoven's late works.

The tempo of the fifth variation must be held down to a maximum of quarter—92. The staccato voices of this contrapuntal fancy can cause a bumping effect at a greater tempo and one will result with a meaningless exercise. The repetition of the B section must be *sempre piano* to create the marvellous contrast before entering into the sixth and final variation.

The final variation is a difficult piece to play correctly. The melody must always sing out above the accompaniment trills. There is little more to say about this variation. Here again the right conception is an absolute must. The descending fifth finger melody in the right hand must not be rushed but slowly let to settle into the re-entry of the original theme which is marked *quasi religioso*. In spite of the romantic possibility involved, it is a good idea to keep a strict tempo and let the variation subtle rather than romantic.

RAVEL

Sonatine

Although Maurice Ravel at the time of his death in 1937 was regarded as the supreme brilliant and sensitive craftsman among the 20th century composers of France, his youthful years as a composer found him the center of much controversy and at least one major scandal.

Three times in three successive years Ravel tried for the Prix de Rome, and three times he failed to succeed as the winner. With Ravel's fourth entry, The judge refused to qualify him thinking that he was trying to make a fool of the judging committee. As it happened, a Paris newspaper discovered that all the candidates for the much coveted prize that year were pupils of one of the members of the committee. The ensuing scandal brought about the resignation of Theodore Dubois as head of the conservatory. He was replaced by Ravel's much loved teacher, Gabriel Fauré. After all the furor, Ravel lost interest in the prize and did not try for it again.

The Sonatine was written in 1905 when Ravel was still the storm center of France. The composition gained immediate popularity in France and abroad and had been written for a Parisian musical magazine contest.

Upon considering the Sonatine our first impression might be

that the entire piece is, in a sense, small, as the name suggests. This can lead to an erroneous conception. The piece is delicate but not so much because of its sonatina form but more because of the French style employed. Usually the word sonatina means a shorter and easier sonata, often for the practise of younger instrumental students. Sometimes, however, it means a sonata of a rather less serious character, or less developed, but by no means easy. This is the case in Ravel's Sonatine. Generally a sonatina has fewer than the four movements that are normal with the sonata since Beethoven.

The first movement is ABA. The B is a short development. The main difficulties of this movement lie in making the melody sing above the chiaroscuro effect of the accompaniment. However the accompaniment must not be hazy as in a Debussy manner but of a true Ravel nature. The fingering of the piece is complicated by the close approximation of the hands.

The intimate lyricism, simplicity and delicacy of the first movement may lead to a "too pale" reading of the piece. Full range must be used in the dynamic coloring so as to achieve the satisfaction of the ending.

The second movement, (Mouvement de Menuet) gentle in speech yet curiously intent in expressive quality, holds no real problems for performance except for exact readings of the markings for interpretation. A familiarity with French music is presupposed for a proper reading of this work.

The last movement (Anime) is of corruscating brilliance

throughout. From the first note, the sparks begin to fly and are broken only by short thematic passages that round out the rhythmic balance of the piece. Here again we find some difficulty in the hands being close together in places. In some passages one hand is over the other. The movement generally calls for flashing, agile technique but without a hint of bravura. In the last movement as well as the entire piece, we find that everything is composed into the music. How to read each section is simplified by Ravel's profuse markings. This does not make it easy to read, of course, for the pianist must determine the degree. Here as mentioned before, a familiarity with modern French music is invaluable.

As is the case in much modern music, Ravel used the ~~Aeolian~~ modes in the Sonatine. An example is the cadence at the end of the first theme in the second movement where he uses the aeolian mode.

A pattern is set which generally occurs in the left hand that must be always softly underlying the melody.



The whole piece is made up of set patterns that make it fairly easy to grasp and remember. With all the tempo changes, care must be taken to remember the tempo prima.

All in all the most difficult part of the Sonatine is achieving the delicate French sound while at the same time

making the most of the lush quality of the music.

CHOPIN

Etude Opus 10, No. 5

The first set of Etudes (op. 10) was published in 1833. Chopin spoke of them as a study in his own manner. There is no need here to go into the revolutionary importance of these études. These studies cannot be taken as such and left without further comment. They have both a material and spiritual aspect. These studies are often played on programs and are heroic concert pieces.

Because of their actual title and original intention, the Etudes in performance are vehicles for showing off technique and can be played as such. That is not the full story however, for not only are they for technique, but they emerge as studies for musicianship and interpretation.

The G flat major Etude is rather typical of the flashiness of the Etudes yet each one has sections for subtle shadings and gentle roundings of form that satisfies the most demanding aesthete. There is an interesting problem involved here. What is beautiful in Music? Here are technical studies of the stature of great art, therefore one must say beautiful. Instead of creating studies composed of endless difficult figures played in all keys such as Pischna or a short piece employing difficult passages

as found in Clementi ("Gradus ad Parnassum"), Chopin has found a difficult figure and added to it the sections necessary for form and arrived at a work of art. Each Etude is beautiful partly because it satisfies. In the G Flat Major Etude there is nothing more to be said. The possibilities have been explored and there is nothing else. Of course there are many other aspects in beauty but I mention only this to point up the fact that this Etude, as all the others, cannot be played merely with good technique, but must also be given a sympathetic reading, to bring out the sheer beauty of the work.

Because of the above fact, performance of the G flat major Etude is very difficult. To begin with the key places most of the action on the black keys. In this work Chopin employs a method which he developed on a very broad scale and with most purposeful effect in later etudes. The melodic and thematic material is entrusted to the left hand while the right hand carries on the given etude figure in the shape of a sparkling commentary on it, predominating only at occasional moments. Hence, the right hand is never to be subordinated. In the left hand, the occasional answering part should be very discreetly brought out by means of slurs and accents. The end product is a delicate balance between the spiritual and the material.

On the technical side, the right hand figure must be played

with a relaxed turning wrist. Each note must sing out clearly and above all evenly. The staccati in the left hand must be very short. A sensible tempo must be chosen and strictly adhered to so as not to slow down on difficult parts and speed up in the easier passages.

BARTOK

Allegro Barbaro

Bartok was probably the greatest of the Hungarian composers. After having achieved some success as a composer, he set himself to collecting and arranging Magyar, Slovak and Roumanian folk songs as well as tunes from other countries. He collected six thousand of these in what is probably the most exhaustive collection in history.

Bartok was influenced in turn by Brahms, Dohnanyi and Debussy which resulted in a sort of neo-classicism. Stravinsky also had a strong influence on Bartok as many of his compositions illustrate.

The Allegro Barbaro comes from Bartok's early second period of work. The name is quite appropriate for the music in that barbaric is the most descriptive word for it. The proper style

is rather difficult to capture and maintain. The strong Hungarian flavor is rife throughout all the works of this period.

To get the style of this piece, the melody must be sharp and biting; the accompaniment full of energy. The rhythm of the piece holds some difficulty in that the melody starts on the second beat each time, giving it an unusual rhythmic quality. The extreme dynamics must be exploited to the utmost degree to arrest the barbaric quality and in this case to connect the short sections of the piece.

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