

THE ART OF PIANO TRANSCRIPTION AS CRITICAL COMMENTARY

By

GLENN DAVID COLTON, B. Mus.

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THE ART OF PIANO TRANSCRIPTION AS CRITICAL COMMENTARY

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AUTHOR: Glenn David Colton, B. Mus. (Memorial University)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Alan Walker

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ABSTRACT

The art of piano transcription represents a lengthy historical trend spanning musical idioms as diverse as fourteenth-century keyboard intabulations and twentieth-century recompositions. Part of the piano transcription's development has been the insightful role of the genre as a vehicle of critical commentary, a purpose which the transcription fulfils in a manner different from all other modes of music criticism. It is a commentary on one artist's ideas through the creativity of another artist in what might be described succinctly as "music about music."

A brief introductory section of the thesis documents the piano transcription's historical and terminological framework while the opening chapter describes the "practical purposes" of the genre, with emphasis on the factors contributing to the transcription's overwhelming prominence in the nineteenth century. Chapter Two discusses the artistic merit of the genre as an independent art form whose ultimate value must be judged not on pre-conceived biases, but rather on the intrinsic musical qualities of each work.

Chapter Three documents the critical role of the piano transcription by: 1) outlining the historical development of the genre's critical potential, 2) describing the various compositional means by which the transcriber assumes the role of critic and 3) undertaking a detailed examination of several

transcriptions fulfilling this unique function, including: a) J. S. Bach's transcription of Vivaldi's Violin Concerto in D major, Op. III, No. 9; b) Franz Liszt's transcription of the song "Moja Pieszczotka," Op. 74, No. 12, by Frédéric Chopin; and c) two operatic fantasies based on Georges Bizet's *Carmen* - the first by Ferruccio Busoni (*Chamber Fantasy on Bizet's "Carmen"*), and the second by Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji (*Pastiche on The Habanera from "Carmen" by Bizet*).

By altering and recomposing the original models through various compositional means, piano transcriptions offer insightful commentary on the original works. The uniquely creative means of expressing such commentary enables the transcription to reveal provocative insights into the original works which may otherwise have remained latent and unexplored. It is for this reason, perhaps more than any other, that piano transcriptions continue to be valued to the present day.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of transcribing music for keyboard instruments is by no means a new one and, in fact, the earliest known prototypes for the genre may be found in the early fourteenth-century Robertsbridge Manuscript.¹ This early source contains keyboard intabulations of vocal polyphony which frequently elaborate the upper part by adding florid figuration in a manner idiomatic to the keyboard. Other sources containing early keyboard transcriptions include the fourteenth-century Faenza Manuscript (which includes intabulations of vocal music by Machaut, Landini and others) and the Buxheimer Orgelbuch (1470).² With the advent of music printing and the increasing availability of instruments in the sixteenth century, these intabulations became widely disseminated throughout Germany, Italy, Spain and France.³

The Baroque era was marked by a rising interest in many different types of instrumental music. Consequently, the practice of transcribing music from one instrumental medium to another evolved during the late seventeenth

¹Malcolm Boyd, "Arrangement," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: MacMillan, 1980), I, pp. 627-8.

²Ibid., pp. 627-8.

³Ibid., p. 628.

and early eighteenth centuries, concurrent with the rise of the instrumental concerto.⁴ J. S. Bach, for example, transcribed a total of sixteen instrumental concertos of other composers.⁵ Of these, the transcriptions of Vivaldi's violin concertos are widely regarded as the pinnacles of his output of transcriptions. The instrumental transcriptions of Bach and his contemporaries were thus natural extensions of the tradition of keyboard intabulation, as Theodor Göllner has noted:

When Walther and Bach arranged orchestra concertos for keyboard instruments, they were simply following an old organist's custom of transcribing ensemble music for solo instrument. This practice, known as intabulation, was widely spread during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and forms the historical background for Bach's keyboard arrangements.⁶

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the art of keyboard transcription continued to evolve, with Ludwig van Beethoven as one of its most notable practitioners. Indeed, Beethoven's contribution to the genre includes transcriptions of his symphonies, overtures, chamber, and vocal works.⁷

⁴ibid., p. 629.

⁵Norman Carrell, *Bach The Borrower* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967), pp. 244-8.

⁶Theodor Göllner, "J. S. Bach and the Tradition of Keyboard Transcriptions," *Studies in Eighteenth Century Music*, ed. H. C. Robbins Landon (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 254.

⁷Maurice Hinson, *The Pianist's Guide To Transcriptions, Arrangements and Paraphrases* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p.

It was during the nineteenth century, in fact, that the piano transcription reached the apex of its development. During this century, the rise of the piano as the dominating instrument in both the home and concert hall gave rise to two distinct classes of transcriptions: 1) those which provided simple reductions of the original score for the use of amateur musicians and 2) those utilized by concert pianists to display dazzling feats of virtuosity.

Standing at the forefront of nineteenth-century transcribers was Franz Liszt, whose voluminous transcriptions range from his meticulously faithful "partitions" of Beethoven's nine symphonies to a very free and original recomposition of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Liszt's transcriptions are remarkable not only for their diversity and magnitude, but also for their musical depth. In many of his operatic paraphrases, for example, Liszt not only elaborated on a succession of themes, but also organized and developed the musical material into a dramatic, coherent whole. Hector Berlioz once made the following observation with regard to Liszt's transcriptions:

The fantasies contain much of Liszt's own genius, not to mention his wonderful pianistic idiom. He scattered his own pearls and diamonds among them lavishly.⁸

21.

⁸Richard Charles Bellak, "Compositional Technique in the Transcriptions of Franz Liszt," Ph.D. Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1976, p. xxix.

The Romantic tradition of virtuoso transcriptions initiated by Liszt and his contemporaries was subsequently absorbed by such artists as Ferruccio Busoni and Leopold Godowsky, both of whom carried the Lisztian brand of transcription into the twentieth century. Of the two, Godowsky was best known for his polyphonic elaborations of Strauss waltzes while Busoni's name has become closely associated with the music of J. S. Bach.⁹

Despite its many detractors and obsolete utilitarian function, the piano transcription as a genre has continued to survive in our own epoch, the twentieth century. New transcriptions continue to be written, while nineteenth-century transcriptions are currently enjoying an unprecedented resurgence on both the concert stage and in the recording studio. Recent transcriptions, such as Glenn Gould's of Wagner (1973) and Ronald Stevenson's of Eugène Ysaÿe's violin sonatas (1982), serve as convincing testimony to a genre which has found a lasting place in the musical repertoire.

In achieving a precise definition of the term "transcription," it is necessary to attempt to reconcile any possible discrepancies between the terms "transcription" and "arrangement." Curiously, many conflicting opinions have been put forth regarding this distinction, resulting in ambiguous nomenclature.

⁹Charles Suttoni, "A Study of The Piano Fantasies Written On Opera Themes in the Romantic Era," Ph.D. Diss. New York University, 1973, p. 328.

Stephen Davies, for instance, has argued that a transcription must achieve greater faithfulness to the original than an arrangement,¹⁰ while Evelyn Howard-Jones has stated the opposite case:

Arrangements I would call a playing of the notes in another medium, transcriptions a re-creation or making-over with regard to their imaginative and creative content.¹¹

The *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, moreover, has defined transcription as "the adaptation of a composition for a medium other than its original one...",¹² while arrangement is described in similar fashion as "the adaptation of a composition for a medium different from that for which it was originally composed..."¹³

Ferruccio Busoni, in discussing "The Value of Transcriptions," also utilized the terms interchangeably:

It is only necessary to mention J.S. Bach in order, with one decisive blow, to raise the rank of the *transcription* to artistic honour in the reader's estimation. He was one of the most prolific *arrangers* of his own and other pieces. (my italics)¹⁴

¹⁰Stephen Davies, "Transcription, Authenticity and Performance," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 28/3 (Summer 1988), p. 218.

¹¹Evelyn Howard-Jones, "Arrangements and Transcriptions," *Music and Letters*, 16/4 (October 1935), p. 305.

¹²Willi Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 56.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁴Ferruccio Busoni, *The Essence of Music and Other Papers*, trans. Rosamond Ley (1957; rpt. New York: Dover, 1965), p. 87.

Under the general heading of transcriptions, it is necessary to mention several distinct branches of the craft, distinguishable by the extent to which they alter the original. These range from the most literal transcriptions which take as their primary aim the re-creation of the musical contents of the original in a pianistic medium, to those in which the original work is freely recomposed. The latter genus of transcription, usually derived from operas, encompasses a diversity of terms, including "Paraphrase," "Reminiscence," and "Fantasy." Indeed, the casual manner in which these titles were designated is exemplified to perfection by one of Liszt's works, published by Schlesinger in 1841 under the title *Réminiscences de Robert le Diable. Valse Infernale*. A subsequent newspaper advertisement announced the work as *Fantaisie brillante sur des motifs de Robert le Diable de Meyerbeer*, while still another advertisement labelled the work a *Grande-fantaisie*.¹⁵

Of these various designations, the term most frequently employed is "Paraphrase," a word which may be used to denote all of the afore-mentioned titles in which the original work is freely recomposed. The *Harvard Dictionary of Music* defines paraphrase as follows:

In the nineteenth century, a solo work of great virtuosity in which popular melodies, usually from operas, were elaborated (as in Liszt's *Rigoletto: Paraphrase de Concert*, 1860); such pieces could also be called *Fantasia* or

¹⁵Suttoni, pp. 34-5.

Reminiscence and were distinguished from works attempting to be faithful transcriptions.¹⁶

These faithful transcriptions, then, lie at the opposite end of the "transcriptive spectrum" from the operatic paraphrases and are comprised of works which provide a relatively literal translation of the original work into a pianistic medium. Liszt's transcriptions of Beethoven's nine symphonies are prime specimens of this species of transcription, and were given the designation "partitions" (literally, "scores") by Liszt. The intended faithfulness of these "partitions" is clearly stated in Liszt's own words:

I will, at least, endeavour to overcome the worst difficulties and furnish the pianoforte-playing world with as faithful as possible an illustration of Beethoven's genius.¹⁷

Between the extremes of partition and paraphrase lies a third species of transcription less easily categorized than the other two. While many works still bear a close resemblance to the musical material of the original, the creativity of the transcriber often results in a much freer translation than merely adapting the work to a new medium, but also involves modification of the original by such means as the thickening of the harmonic texture or the addition of new melodic material. Liszt's transcriptions of Schubert's songs are representative of this type of transcription. The difficulty in categorizing these

¹⁶Apel, pp. 642-3.

¹⁷Arthur Tollefson, "The Liszt Pianoforte Scores of the Beethoven Symphonies," *Piano Quarterly*, 23/89 (1975), p. 48.

works is that they frequently do not behave categorically like either literal transcriptions or paraphrases, yet maintain characteristics of both. Within Liszt's transcriptions of Schubert's songs, for example, there are many which verge on literal transcription (e.g. "Die junge Nonne"), while others display the techniques of recomposition associated with the operatic paraphrase (e.g. "Auf dem wasser zu singen").¹⁸

Categorization of transcriptions, therefore, is not always a simple question of "paraphrase versus partition," since the precise degree to which the original work is altered often varies from work to work, even in transcriptions of similar works by the same composer. The following diagram will illustrate the distinctions between the various classifications of transcriptions mentioned here, and will also provide an indication of approximately where some selected works fall within the spectrum of transcriptions. With the piano transcription's historical and terminological framework thus established, the chapters which follow will examine the value of the genre from both a practical as well as an artistic perspective and, moreover, will reveal the insightful role performed by the transcription as a musical prototype in the art of critical commentary.

¹⁸David Wilde, "(Liszt's) Transcriptions for Piano," *Franz Liszt: The Man and His Music*, ed. Alan Walker (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1970), pp. 179-81.

THE TRANSCRIPTIVE SPECTRUM

PARTITIONS

PARAPHRASES

J.S. Bach (1685-1750):
Transcriptions of Vivaldi Violin
Concertos

Franz Liszt: (1811-86)
Partitions of Beethoven Symphonies

Liszt: Transcriptions of Chopin
Songs

Liszt:
*Reminiscences of
Norma* (Bellini)

Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924): Transcriptions of works by J.S. Bach

Busoni: *Chamber
Fantasy On
Carmen* (Bizet)

**Kaikhosru
Sorabji**
(1892-
1988):
*Pastiche On
The
Habanera
from
Carmen*
(Bizet)

**Leopold
Godowsky** (1870-
1938):
Symphonic
Metamorphoses On
Themes from
Johann Strauss

Glenn Gould (1932-82):
Transcriptions of Richard
Wagner's music dramas

CHAPTER ONE

MUSIC FOR USE: THE PRACTICAL PURPOSES OF PIANO TRANSCRIPTIONS

Purely practical considerations have often initiated important artistic achievements.¹

David Wilde wrote these words with reference to piano transcriptions, specifically those of Franz Liszt. Yet the judgement applies equally well to numerous works of art, both musical and non-musical. As with any work of art, transcriptions possess the potential to reveal artistic qualities of the highest standards, regardless of the utilitarian circumstances upon which they were founded. It is with this in mind that the following chapter documents the practical functions of piano transcriptions. This discussion will provide an understanding of the circumstances which contributed to the piano transcription's rise to prominence, as well as the practical implications of the genre for composers, performers, and the musical public. It is through an understanding of these practical considerations that the artistic value of piano transcriptions (to be discussed in Chapter Two), may be brought into clearer focus. The practical purposes of the piano transcription to be discussed are: 1) the piano transcription as a recording, 2) pedagogical function: the transcriber

¹Wilde, p. 168.

as student, 3) development of piano technique/piano design, and 4) extension of the pianist's repertoire.

I. The Piano Transcription as a Recording

Our current age might rightly be summarized as an era of rapid and varied communication- the age of computers and Fax machines, compact discs and digital audio cassettes, and the many other outgrowths of our twentieth-century technology which are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Such was not the case, however, in nineteenth-century society, an age in which the only means of hearing a piece of music was to be present at a live performance. Aside from the obvious absence of recordings or radio, a further hindrance to the dissemination of music was the lack of quick and efficient means of travel, a problem especially acute for orchestras. The inevitable result was a lack of public accessibility to much of the musical repertoire, particularly in the case of large-scale productions such as operas and orchestral works.

(a) Public Accessibility

The nineteenth-century piano transcription thus arose from a desire to acquaint the musical public with works which would otherwise be inaccessible. The importance of this motivating influence has been underpinned by Stephen Davies, who observed that "...it is unlikely that the practice of

transcription would have achieved the importance it has done if it had not been the case that the practice served this socially useful function."²

One aspect of this socially useful function was the piano transcription of operatic music. Such works were often published prior to the first performance of the opera from which they originated, thereby serving the public as an introduction to the original work. For many people, in fact, attending an opera at all was difficult due to travel considerations. Thus the opera arrangement often became the only format in which these works were known.

The vast majority of these transcriptions were simple reductions which could be found on the music desks of most homes in Europe.³ It was in this manner that works such as the *Fantasy on Rossini's Semiramide*, Op. 134, by Ferdinand Ries served the musical public. One reviewer, writing in an 1824 volume of *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, issued the following comment on Ries's work:

Semiramide has been spoken of as the opera to be conducted by Rossini in this country. Those persons to whom the score is inaccessible may acquire some information of its style from this Fantasia, which contains seven of the pieces, united by short original phrases.⁴

²Davies, p. 220.

³The transcriptions of Liszt, Thalberg and others fall into a different category which will be discussed presently.

⁴Suttoni, "Piano Fantasies," p. 53.

Similar remarks were made in *La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* (1834), with regard to three operatic fantasies from Czerny's *Souvenir théâtral: Norma, La Straniera, and Montecchi e Capuletti*:

The sole merit of such works is to contain no great difficulties, and at the same time to provide those who have been unable to hear the Italian operas at the theater with the occasion of becoming familiar with many gracious themes.⁵

In both of the afore-mentioned instances, the publication of the piano version preceded the first performance of the opera. The *Gazette* reviewer, for example, mentioned Czerny's Fantasy on *Norma* in 1834, while Bellini's original opera was not performed in Paris until December of 1835.⁶

The operatic paraphrases of Liszt, Thalberg, and others formed the second class of opera transcriptions. These elaborate, technically demanding compositions introduced many operas to European audiences through the agile hands of the piano virtuosos. Perhaps the ultimate example of such a transcription preceding the performance of the original work is Liszt's transcription of the Act 3 finale from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. In a concert of orchestral excerpts from the opera, given before the work was first staged in 1865, Wagner designated the prelude "Liebestod," while the Act 3 finale was

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

given the title of Isolde's "Verklärung."⁷ Liszt, however, had other ideas and attached the name "Liebestod" to his transcription of the Act 3 finale. Due to the length of time required for the opera to travel throughout Europe, it was not Wagner's designation but rather Liszt's which was accepted and continues to be recognized to the present day.⁸ It is almost as if, in the eyes of the public, Liszt's version was the original while Wagner's work was an operatic copy of Liszt's piano version! Perhaps transcription, like beauty, may also be in the eye (or ear) of the beholder.

Liszt evidently took it upon himself to make similar efforts to bring the music of Beethoven to the public. Curiously, Beethoven's symphonies were still relatively new to much of the musical public as late as 1860.⁹ Liszt's stated mission to bring Beethoven's symphonies to the public is acknowledged in the preface to his Beethoven symphony transcriptions:

Whoever seriously wishes to extend his knowledge or to produce new works can never devote too much reflection and study upon them. For this reason every way or manner of making them accessible has a certain merit...¹⁰

⁷Charles Suttoni, "Liszt's Operatic Fantasies and Transcriptions," *Journal of the American Liszt Society*, 8 (1980), p. 8.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Arthur Tollefson, "The Liszt Pianoforte Scores of the Beethoven Symphonies," *Piano Quarterly*, 23/89 (1975), p. 48.

¹⁰Franz Liszt, *Preface to the Beethoven-Liszt Symphony Transcriptions*, trans. C. E. R. Mueller (Rome, 1865; rpt. Melville: Belwin Mills), p. 1.

Aside from Liszt's masterful transcriptions, the public could also acquaint itself with Beethoven's symphonies through any one of a number of weaker transcriptions written by virtuoso-composers such as Hummel, Kalkbrenner and Czerny.¹¹

Liszt's efforts to publicize orchestral music were directed toward a number of his contemporaries, including Hector Berlioz. In his meticulous transcription of the *Symphonie fantastique*, completed by Liszt at age 22, he furnished the public with an accessible version of Berlioz's revolutionary work during a time in which, as Sacheverell Sitwell has observed, "the *Symphonie fantastique* was given, perhaps once in five years"¹² The value of this transcription in achieving an acquaintance with Berlioz's compositional art has been pointed out by Ernest Newman (as quoted by Herbert Westerby):

If any young musician wants to get to the innermost secret of this art, I would recommend to him the close study of Liszt's piano arrangement of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*- a masterpiece, if ever there was one, not only of poetic understanding, but of technical ingenuity.¹³

¹¹Suttoni, "Piano Fantasies," p. 251.

¹²Sacheverell Sitwell, *Liszt* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934; rpt. London: Columbus, 1988), p. 23.

¹³Herbert Westerby, *Liszt: Composer and His Piano Works* (London: William Reeves), pp. 191-2.

(b) Promotion of the Original Composer's Music

◀ A second consequence of the piano transcription's "record-like" function was that it promoted the music and reputations of the composers of the original works. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine a more potent publicity tool than transcriptions by Liszt, a figure whose legendary playing skills and celebrated reputation brought instant notoriety to any piece of music he touched. It was in this manner that Liszt's transcriptions of Schubert's songs (1838-56) promoted the name of Schubert which, up until that time, was not widely recognized outside of Vienna.¹⁴ These works, numbering 56, represent part of Liszt's deep devotion to Schubert's music. Other manifestations of this devotion include transcribing Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy* for piano and orchestra, conducting the first performance of Schubert's opera *Alfonso and Estrella* in Weimar, and editing a volume of Schubert's piano works.¹⁵ ▶

Even more intriguing is Liszt's loyal admiration for the music of Richard Wagner, a sentiment he displayed by becoming an outspoken champion of Wagner's operas. It was in 1849, in fact, that Liszt not only conducted the first Weimar performance of *Tannhäuser*, but also transcribed the work's overture for piano. Wagner, evidently appreciative of the gesture,

¹⁴Alan Walker, "Liszt and the Schubert Song Transcriptions," *Musical Quarterly*, 67/1 (1981), p. 52.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 53.

informed Liszt that the transcription "was like a wonderful dream come true."¹⁶

Wagner's expression of gratitude is an insightful revelation which contradicts the popular notion of the transcriber as one who exploits the music of others for the sole purpose of personal gain. In this instance, it was Wagner, not Liszt, who stood to benefit the most from the favourable publicity generated by Liszt's transcription, a view substantiated by the fact that Liszt had retired from the concert stage in 1847, two years previous to the *Tannhäuser* transcription.¹⁷

No less grateful was Giacomo Meyerbeer who, in a letter to Liszt regarding the first of Liszt's set of illustrations of Meyerbeer's *Le prophète* (1849-50), made the following remarks:

I shall not wait for the arrival of that letter to tell you how happy I am that one of my songs impresses you as worthy to be used as a motive for one of your piano compositions, destined to be heard throughout Europe and intoxicate those who have had the good fortune to hear them played by your wonderful, poetic fingers. However, I feel more honoured at the mark of sympathy you offer me in dedicating your work to me, for if it is an honour to see my name linked with yours, it is even more agreeable to me that you make it known in this manner that we are friends.¹⁸

¹⁶Richard Wagner, *Briefwechsel*, third ed., ed. E. Kloss (Leipzig, 1910), I, p. 13.

¹⁷Suttoni, "Liszt's Operatic Fantasies," p. 7.

¹⁸La Mara, ed. *Letters of Franz Liszt*, trans. Constance Bache (1894; rpt. New York: Haskell House, 1968), pp. 204-5.

The nineteenth-century piano transcriber, as epitomized by Franz Liszt, thus also formed a vital link between composers and the musical public.

II. Pedagogical Function: The Transcriber As Student

In considering the practical functions of piano transcriptions, one cannot overlook the pedagogical element inherent in the transference of an entire piece of music into a new medium. Transfers require not only a detailed knowledge of the piano, but also the knowledge and understanding of how to convey the musical impact of vocal and instrumental music in a pianistic medium. The very act of transcribing a symphony for piano, for example, reveals to the transcriber the complexities of orchestration, the idiomatic qualities of the various orchestral instruments, and fosters a creative approach to the piano in order to convey the musical equivalents of the original composition in a pianistic medium. No other type of piano composition makes similar demands on the composer.

There is evidence to suggest, in fact, that even acknowledged masters of composition such as Bach attained valuable musical knowledge and practical experience in the craft of composition through the transcription of music for keyboard. Forkel, for example, has stated that Vivaldi's violin concertos provided Bach with a guide to the solution of many problems

connected with his keyboard compositions.¹⁹ Marc Pincherle, as quoted by Norman Carrell, has provided an accurate summary of Vivaldi's influence on Bach's compositional art:

...It was through the mastery gained by the study of, and work on Vivaldi's compositions, that Bach was enabled to produce such a magnificent piece as the Italian Concerto in 1735.²⁰

The use of pre-existing musical material as a valuable learning tool in the art of composition is an idea expressed by Johann Mattheson in *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (The Perfect Conductor, 1739), in which he emphasizes the value of learned invention as opposed to unteachable inspiration: "If the inspiration does not come, then the teaching of the invention and imagination must help."²¹ The craft of learned invention, as described by Mattheson, provides the composer with the necessary raw materials to build a strong compositional craft by utilizing "specialties such as modulations, small phrases, turns, skilful and agreeable tunes, melodic leaps- all of which are to be collected through much experience and through intense listening to good

¹⁹Norman Carrell, *Bach The Borrower* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967), p. 247.

²⁰Ibid., p. 248.

²¹Frederick Dorian, *The Musical Workshop* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1947), p. 190.

music."²² Though by no means unique to the art of keyboard transcription, Mattheson's views are clearly consistent with the genre's pedagogical benefits, as exemplified by Bach's transcriptions of Vivaldi's violin concertos. Indeed, Mattheson might well have been talking about transcriptions when he rationalized that the new is never anything but a novel permutation of the old, and that the specialties of composition, even when previously employed by other composers, "could be arranged in such a way that the result can be considered an invention of one's own."²³

The pedagogical uses of transcription, however, were by no means restricted to the musical minds of the eighteenth century. Franz Liszt, standing at the forefront of nineteenth-century transcribers, was stimulated to explore new aspects of his compositional art by attempting to reproduce on the piano the musical effects of both vocal and orchestral music. The task of transcribing Beethoven's nine symphonies for piano, for example, presented Liszt with unique compositional challenges, of which he was evidently aware:

How instill into transitory hammers of the piano, breath and soul, resonance and power, fullness and inspiration, colour and accent?²⁴

²²Dorian, p. 190.

²³Ibid., p. 191.

²⁴Tollefson, p. 48.

One such challenge confronted Liszt in his transcription of Beethoven's first symphony. From the opening measure, Liszt was faced with the problem of how to notate for piano the effects of sustained woodwinds and pizzicato strings simultaneously. His solution was to create the pizzicato effect by a spread leap in the left hand (see Example 1-1).²⁵ Liszt's addition of an "Ossia" version for this passage, as well as numerous other instances in the Beethoven symphony transcriptions where alternative versions are indicated, reveals that he was constantly grappling with the problems of transference inherent in the process of transcription and, in many instances, was not content to provide only one solution to a particular problem. In this instance, the

The image shows a musical score for the piano transcription of the opening of Beethoven's Symphony No. 1. It consists of two systems of staves. The top system is labeled "Ossia" and the bottom system is labeled "Adagio molto." The music is in G major and 3/4 time. The piano part is written for the left hand, with a spread leap in the first measure. The score includes dynamic markings such as "sp", "p", "cresc.", and "ten.", and articulation markings like "ten." and "Streicher". The score is divided into four measures by vertical dotted lines.

Example 1-1: Beethoven-Liszt, Symphony No. 1.

²⁵Wilde, p. 171.

alternative version, while more difficult technically, provides a much richer harmonic texture. By surmounting such problems, Liszt opened up new possibilities to his compositional imagination, possibilities which may have remained unexplored were he not challenged by the orchestral complexities of Beethoven's source material.

III. The Transcriber As Developer of Piano Technique/Piano Design

As a consequence of the new creative possibilities revealed to the piano transcriber, new aspects of piano technique were uncovered as transcribers devised methods which allowed the piano to assume both vocal and orchestral qualities. The paramount importance Liszt placed on an orchestral concept of playing is evidenced by the meticulous care with which he denoted the instrumental designations in his transcriptions of the Beethoven symphonies. A letter to Breitkopf and Härtel dated August 26, 1863 reveals Liszt's advice to pianists in this regard:

With this in view I have frequently noted down the names of the instruments: oboe, clarinet, kettle-drums, etc., as well as the contrasts of wind and string instruments. It would certainly be highly ridiculous to pretend that these designations suffice to transplant the magic of the orchestra to the piano; nevertheless I don't consider them superfluous. Apart from some little use they have as instruction, pianists of some intelligence may make them a help in accentuating the grouping of the subjects, bringing out the chief ones, keeping the secondary ones in the

background, and- in a word- regulating themselves by the standard of the orchestra.²⁶

Successful execution of these demands requires both a formidable technique and keen interpretative sense on the part of the pianist in order to express the complexities of the orchestral texture at an appropriate tempo.²⁷

No less pianistic prowess is required for a successful interpretation of Liszt's Schubert song transcriptions. While Liszt's Beethoven symphony transcriptions require an orchestral concept of piano playing, these song transcriptions confront the pianist with the dual challenge of not only portraying the vocal qualities of the melody, but also of making this melody resonate clearly and distinctly amidst elaborate accompanimental figuration, as found in Liszt's transcription of "Auf dem Wasser zu singen" (see Example 1-2). To do so requires a virtuosic technique as well as a sensitivity to the lyrical and poetic qualities of the original songs.

The image shows a musical score for Liszt's transcription of Schubert's "Auf dem Wasser zu singen". The score is written for piano and voice. The vocal line is in the treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is in the bass clef. The tempo/mood marking is "Sempre distinto il canto." The score includes dynamic markings such as "Ped." and "p".

Example 1-2: Schubert-Liszt, "Auf dem Wasser zu singen."

²⁶Tollefson, p. 48.

²⁷Ibid., p. 48.

The most daring advances in the field of piano technique arising from the process of transcription are to be found in the operatic paraphrases, which dominated the piano repertoire for much of the nineteenth century. As was the case with the symphony and song transcriptions, opera stimulated the imagination of composers to devise creative methods of capturing both vocal and orchestral qualities in a pianistic medium. More than any other type of transcription, however, the operatic paraphrase served as a vehicle for showcasing the transcendent technique of a rising class of nineteenth-century virtuosos. A major factor contributing to the mass appeal of these works, in fact, was the visual and aural spectacle created by the dossier of pianistic effects with which each virtuoso was armed. Most virtuosos, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century, performed their own paraphrases and, in doing so, sought to display their skills to audiences in the most impressive manner possible. This deliberate quest for new pianistic figurations, brilliant passagework, and innovative effects resulted in significant advances in the field of piano technique.²⁸

In the case of many such works, most notably those of Liszt and Thalberg, there were no doubt few pianists who could reproduce the effects of the transcribers themselves. Liszt's pupil Carl Tausig,²⁹ for example, spoke of

²⁸Suttoni, "Piano Fantasies," p. 341.

²⁹Tausig was himself a gifted pianist and transcriber.

how no other pianist could come close to matching Liszt's performances of his own paraphrases:

You raise no objections to my interpretation of the "Don Juan" Fantasia? Well, I tell myself that I have not yet conquered the difficulties, I have only attacked them. He only is superior to them - only He! This is the secret of the impression He makes!³⁰

One of the most gifted of these musical acrobats was the Swiss-born pianist Sigismund Thalberg, considered by many to be Liszt's only serious rival as a pianist in his lifetime. Thalberg naturally chose the technical devices used in his paraphrases on the basis of his strengths as a pianist. Thus characteristic features of his paraphrases include the frequent use of a singing legato melody over an elaborate accompaniment, a device which exhibited the extraordinarily lyrical tone quality of his playing. Thalberg's favourite weapon was an effect which presented the melody in the middle register of the piano with alternating hands, while a florid accompaniment floated above and below it. This so-called "thumb melody" effect astonished listeners to such an extent that patrons would often stand up to catch a glimpse of how it was accomplished.³¹ The technique, which occurs in Thalberg's fantasy on Rossini's *Mosè*, proved a very influential device and was adopted by Liszt not only for use in his operatic

³⁰Wilhelm von Lenz, *The Great Pianists of Our Time*, trans. Madeleine R. Baker (New York: G. Schirmer, 1889; rpt. New York: Da Capo, 1973), p. 98.

³¹Richard Hoffman, *Some Musical Recollections of Fifty Years* (1910; rpt. Detroit: Information Coordinators, 1976), p. 86.

5paraphrases (e.g. *Reminiscences of Norma*), but also in his original piano works, such as the concert etude "Un sospiro."³²

One of the more popular compositional devices employed by transcribers in the operatic paraphrases was a technique whereby melodies first presented individually are later combined at the climax of the piece. The technique, known as the "Reunion des thèmes," may be found in Liszt's *Reminiscences of Robert le Diable*, after Meyerbeer's opera,³³ and also in Thalberg's *Fantasy and Variations on Bellini's Norma*. (see Example 1-3).³⁴

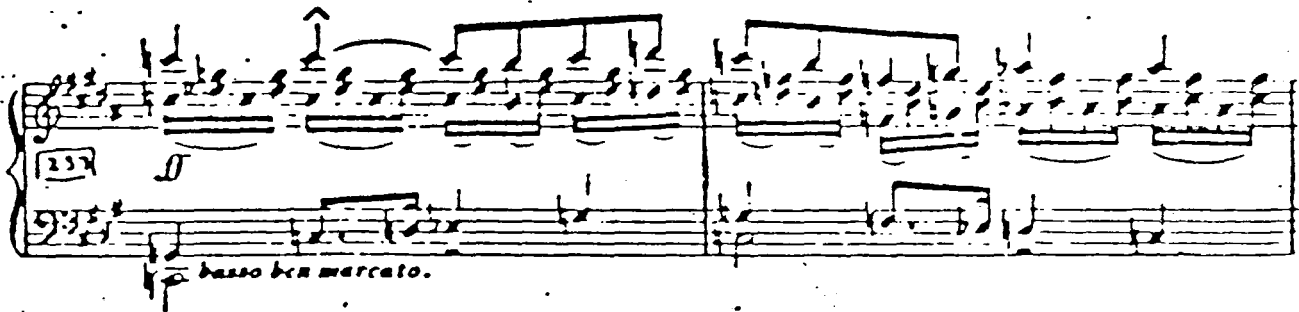
It is in the paraphrases of Liszt, however, which some of the most remarkable developments in piano technique took place. Liszt's paraphrases are noteworthy not merely for daring physical feats and entertaining tricks, but also for technical devices which are ideally suited to the thematic material of the original. A case in point is Liszt's *Don Juan Fantasy*, a paraphrase Busoni has likened to a "pianistic summit."³⁵ In his transference of the duet "Là ci darem la mano" to the piano, Liszt has ingeniously notated the music as a true duet, placing Don Juan's music in the baritone register and Zerlina's in the soprano

³²Suttoni, "Liszt's Operatic Fantasies", p. 5.

³³Ibid., p. 5.

³⁴Suttoni, "Piano Fantasies," p. 170. The themes combined by Thalberg are the opening chorus from Act 1 ("Ite sul colle, o Druidi"), and the chorus of the Act 2 Finale ("Padre, tu piangi").

³⁵Busoni, *The Essence of Music*, p. 92.



Example 1-3: Sigismund Thalberg, *Fantasy and Variations on Bellini's Norma*.

(see Example 1-4). This treatment serves as a striking contrast to Thalberg's Fantasy Op. 14 and Kalkbrenner's Fantasy Op. 33, both of which utilize "Là ci darem la mano" merely as a theme from a duet.³⁶ While Liszt's treatment requires a virtuosic technique, it is virtuosity which serves the important musical purpose of simulating two contrasting voices through a change in register.

Perhaps one of the most formidable challenges thrust upon the pianist by Liszt occurs in the Grand Concert Fantasy on Bellini's *Sonnambula*. Once again, the climactic combination of themes is presented, only with one diabolical twist added. Accompanying the combination of themes is a lengthy trill, the consequence of which was an effect so astonishing that one listener actually approached Liszt and asked to see the sixth finger he was rumoured to

³⁶Suttoni, "Piano Fantasies," pp. 287-8.

have between his fourth and fifth (see Example 1-5).³⁷ The monumental impact of Liszt's operatic paraphrases on piano technique was perhaps best summarized by Johannes Brahms, who once informed student Arthur Friedheim that "whoever really wants to know what Liszt has done for the piano should study his operatic fantasies. They represent the classicism of piano technique."³⁸

DUETTO
Andantino

p e dolce

parlando

Example 1-4: Liszt, *Don Juan Fantasy*.

³⁷Suttoni, "Liszt's Operatic Fantasies," p. 6.

³⁸Arthur Friedheim, *Life and Liszt*, ed. Theodore L. Bullock (New York: Taplinger, 1961), p. 138.

8

ben marc. i due Temi

mfz

cantando espr.

8

8

8

PIANO
7 OCTAVES

poco a poco più animato

p sciolto

Detailed description: This page contains five systems of musical notation for Liszt's Grand Concert Fantasy on Bellini's "Sonnambula". Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The first system begins with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). It features a melodic line in the treble and a supporting bass line. Performance markings include *mfz* and *cantando espr.*. The second system continues the piece with similar notation and includes fingerings (e.g., 2, 4, 2) and dynamic markings like *mfz* and *f*. The third system shows further melodic and harmonic development. The fourth system is a short section marked "PIANO 7 OCTAVES" in the bass clef. The fifth system concludes with a treble clef and a key signature change to one flat (B-flat), marked *poco a poco più animato* and *p sciolto*.

Example 1-5: Liszt, *Grand Concert Fantasy on Bellini's "Sonnambula."*

In discussing the technical advances resulting from transcription, one must remember that in many instances the successful execution of these technical devices was contingent not only upon the abilities of the pianist, but also the physical capabilities of the instrument. It is revealing, in fact, to note that the rise of the piano transcription in the nineteenth century was accompanied by a series of vast mechanical improvements to the piano, including an increased range (from six to seven octaves), increased responsiveness to touch, greater sonority, sturdier construction, and the ability to execute rapid repeated notes. The virtuosos, of course, were quick to exploit the developing potential of the instrument by utilizing the new resources available to them and devising methods of displaying these resources in their transcriptions. The increased range of the instrument to seven octaves, for example, was advantageous to Liszt in his quest to enable the piano to appropriate the sounds of an orchestra:

In the compass of its seven octaves it can, with but a few exceptions, reproduce all traits, all combinations, all figurations of the most learned, of the deepest tone-creations, and leaves to the orchestra no other advantages, than those of variety of tone-colours and massive effects- immense advantages to be sure.³⁹

Furthermore, the virtuoso transcriptions functioned as a stimulus for many of the more revolutionary advances in piano design. Some virtuosos,

³⁹Liszt, Preface to the Beethoven-Liszt Symphony Transcriptions.

such as Herz and Clementi, took a "hands on" role in this development by making their own contributions to the field of piano design.⁴⁰ The presence of rapid repeated notes in many transcriptions, such as those intended to mimic the effects of a violin tremolando or vocal recitative, created a demand for instruments which could facilitate such technical challenges. The difficulty with the older pianos was that each key needed to return to its level to give emphasis to the sound of the following note, a task made implausible in passages of extremely rapid figuration or complex rhythms. To make these technical demands attainable to the pianist, a new type of key action was required whereby the note could sound at two different levels of the key, without the need for the key to rise to its full height in order to restrike.⁴¹

Thus stimulated by the demands of the virtuoso, Sebastien Erard of Paris undertook the task of inventing a key action that would combine a powerful stroke with a light, flexible touch, making possible the extremely rapid repetition of notes. The design was completed in 1821, and patented in England that same year by his nephew Pierre Erard. The invention has formed the basis

⁴⁰Rosamond E.M. Harding, *The Piano-forte: Its History Traced To The Great Exhibition of 1851*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 156.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 156.

of nearly all modern double escapement actions found in today's grand pianos.⁴² The technical wizardry displayed in the virtuoso transcriptions also spawned some very forgettable attempts to make the popular device of rapid note repetition accessible to players of less than virtuosic skill. One such device, invented by a certain Chevalier de Girard, operated on the principle of a single key depression triggering a rapid succession of hammer blows. The device, labelled the "tremolophone," has been described by one witness as producing "such a flood of repeated notes in all regions of the keyboard that this stutter-figure shortly becomes unbearable."⁴³ Fortunately, most of the inventions stimulated by the demands of virtuoso transcriptions did not result in such comical consequences.

Some effects even looked forward to mechanical inventions as yet undiscovered. At one point in his transcription of Beethoven's first symphony, Liszt notated a passage consisting of four measures of tied chords (see Example 1-6). The preferred method of performing this passage is with the use of the "middle" or "sostenuto" pedal, which allows selected notes to vibrate while damping others. This technique, unavailable to Liszt at the time in which this transcription was written, was not perfected until 1874 by Steinway.⁴⁴

⁴²Harding, p. 158.

⁴³Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), p. 405.

⁴⁴David S. Grover, *The Piano: Its Story From Zither to Grand* (London: Robert Hale, 1976), p. 143.

Even in 1886, 21 years after the Beethoven symphony transcriptions were published, a Chickering grand built for Liszt was not equipped with this device.⁴⁵ Thus in his desire to enable the piano to reproduce orchestral effects, Liszt foreshadowed future developments in piano design.

Example 1-6: Beethoven-Liszt, Symphony No. 1.

IV. Transcription As Extension Of The Pianist's Repertoire

In considering the immense popularity of the piano transcription in the nineteenth century, one cannot help but be struck by the staggering number of such works performed and published during that time period. According to Whistling's *Handbuch der musikalischen Literatur* (1828), Austro-German publishers issued approximately 3150 works which fall under the headings of "Rondos, Fantasien, Capricen, Divertimenti, Potpourris, arrangierte Opern,

⁴⁵Wilde, p. 185.

u.s.w.," between 1800 and 1827.⁴⁶ In comparison, the same source also lists a total of 1800 sonatas for all instrumental combinations during the same period.⁴⁷ The demand for transcriptions of all kinds, particularly those of operatic music, was of such proportions that a single work could often spawn an entire fleet of transcriptions. Meyerbeer's opera *Le prophète* (1849), for example, resulted in over thirty piano compositions based on its themes.⁴⁸ In a similar manner to the categories put forth earlier in this thesis⁴⁹, these works can generally be divided into two designations: 1) simple reductions and 2) virtuoso transcriptions.

The first type of transcription, while of questionable musical worth, merits consideration if for no other reason than for its domination of the music publishing industry at that time. The reasoning behind this domination can be linked to a combination of social, economic, and musical factors. One important influence was the Industrial Revolution in Europe and the resulting emergence of the middle class. This new middle-class market created a demand for an abundant supply of commodities in all facets of life, including music, and resulted in what we today would term the "music industry." This industry was

⁴⁶Suttoni, "Piano Fantasies," p. 46.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 46.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 46.

⁴⁹See pages 12-14.

comprised of "publishers, instrument makers, impresarios, and professional performers, all of whom sought to benefit from active participation in a bourgeois consumer market."⁵⁰ The instrument which best met the demands of this new market was the piano. Through technological advances brought about by the Industrial Revolution, pianos became less expensive to produce and more accessible to the public.⁵¹ In short, it was the perfect household instrument for the middle class.

Another factor to consider is the vast popularity of operatic music at that time. The influence of opera, in fact, permeated all levels of society. Even in areas where operas were seldom performed, operatic melodies could be heard in ballrooms, salons and churches. Suttoni, citing an article from *La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, has reported that organists often played variations on opera themes as voluntaries in Parisian churches during the Restoration of the 1820s, and that operatic melodies, such as "Fin ch'han dal vino" from *Don Giovanni*, were often supplied with Latin texts.⁵² It is not surprising, therefore, that when amateur players sought out repertoire to play on their pianos, piano versions of operatic melodies ranked second to none, a

⁵⁰Robert Lynn Edwards, "A Study of Selected Song Transcriptions by Franz Liszt," D.M.A. Diss., Performance Pedagogy. University of Oregon, 1972, p. 3.

⁵¹Rey M. Longyear, *Nineteenth Century Romanticism in Music*, 3rd. ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1988), p. 334.

⁵²Suttoni, "Piano Fantasies," p. 16.

situation of which composers and publishers were all too willing to take advantage. The piano transcription thus satisfied a market demand by providing the piano-owning public with music which was both familiar and playable to amateurs. As Arthur Loesser has noted, they were characteristically "brilliant, but not difficult."⁵³

With the huge market demand for such music, numerous composers applied their talents to this commercial field of composition and often reaped substantial financial rewards. Franz Hüntten, for example, received as much as 600 to 800 francs per printed page, making him one of the highest-paid composers of the age. In comparison, Frédéric Chopin sold the English and French rights to his Preludes Op.28 for a total sum of 1500 francs.⁵⁴

Typical of the entrepreneurial spirit of these composers was Henri Herz, a man of diverse interests who also achieved fame as a skilled virtuoso and piano maker.⁵⁵ Shortly after the opening of Meyerbeer's opera *Les Huguenots* on February 29, 1835 in Paris, Herz sought to capitalize on the work's immense popularity by issuing a fantasy on *Les Huguenots* under his name. Herz, however, was not on good terms with Schlesinger, the official publisher of the music for *Les Huguenots*, and thus was unable to negotiate

⁵³Loesser, p. 291.

⁵⁴Suttoni, "Piano Fantasies," p. 104.

⁵⁵Harding, p. 198.

with Schlesinger for the sale of such a fantasy. Undeterred, Herz devised a scheme whereby he could capitalize on the work's popularity without consulting Schlesinger. In the opera, Meyerbeer incorporated the tune of the famous hymn *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*. This loophole provided Herz with the opportunity he needed and, without pilfering a single note from Meyerbeer and Schlesinger, he printed his own work entitled *Fantasy on the Protestant Chorale Sung in Meyerbeer's Huguenots*.⁵⁶

The transcriptions of Herz, Hünten, and dozens of similar-minded composers who catered to the amateur market represent an enormous volume of music which, while of questionable merit, provided musical entertainment to thousands of amateur musicians and dominated music publishing for much of the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ Moreover, these works are symbolic of European society of the time and mirror the material demands of a rising middle class. Felix Mendelssohn once described Herz's symbolic role in nineteenth-century society as follows:

After all, I like him; he is certainly a characteristic figure of these times, of the year 1834; and as Art should be a mirror reflecting the character of the times- as Hegel or someone else probably says somewhere- he certainly does reflect most truly all salons and vanities, and a little

⁵⁶Loesser, pp. 359-60.

⁵⁷The merit of these works is questionable on account of 1) the superficiality of the music and 2) the blatant commercial aspirations of its creators.

yearning, and a great deal of yawning, and kid gloves, and musk, a scent I abhor.⁵⁸

Just as these amateur-oriented transcriptions dominated music publishing for much of the nineteenth century, the virtuoso transcriptions of Liszt, Thalberg and others ruled supreme on the concert stage. It could be argued, in fact, that piano transcriptions formed the foundation for the very existence of the modern piano recital. Until 1839, the piano's use as a solo instrument was primarily reserved for salons or smaller venues, except in instances when a pianist would appear in a concert hall on the same programme as orchestral overtures or vocal numbers. In that year, however, Liszt became the first pianist to present an unaccompanied solo recital not in an intimate setting, but in the splendour of one of Europe's great concert halls.⁵⁹ The event took place in Rome, and Liszt's thoughts on it are revealed in a letter to the Princess Belgiojoso:

Imagine that, wearied with warfare, not being able to put together a programme that would have common sense, I have ventured to give a series of concerts all by myself, affecting the Louis XIV style, and saying cavalierly to the public, 'le concert, c'est moi.' For the curiosity of the thing, I copy a programme of my soliloquies for you:

1. Overture to William Tell, performed by M. Liszt.

⁵⁸Felix Mendelssohn, *Letters*, trans. and ed. Felix Moscheles (1888; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1971), p. 112.

⁵⁹Harold C. Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, rev. ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), pp. 129-30.

2. Fantasy on reminiscences of "I Puritani," composed and performed by the above-named.
3. Studies and Fragments, composed and performed by the same.
4. Improvisations on a given theme, still by the same.⁶⁰

The piano recital would likely have assumed its rightful place in the concert hall with or without piano transcriptions in the pianist's repertoire. Yet it is not unreasonable to conclude that the piano transcription dramatically accelerated the process. One cannot help but wonder what the audience reaction to Liszt's 1839 Rome concert might have been had the programme been comprised not of fantasies and improvisations, but a set of Beethoven sonatas. If contemporary evidence is any indication, he might well have been heckled off the stage to chorus of derisive jeers! On April 3, 1841, for example, Liszt performed on a program at the Paris Conservatoire devoted to the music of Beethoven. At one point in the proceedings, he commenced playing the *Kreutzer Sonata*, Op.47 in A minor, with violinist Lambert Massart. After the first movement was completed, an audience member shouted "Play *Robert le Diable*," a chant which was taken up by the entire hall with the type of robust enthusiasm one would expect from a stadium full of baseball fans cheering their favourite athlete. When Liszt asked "Shall I play the 'Robert' fantasy after the sonata?", the deafening reply from the audience was "Play it now!" This he did,

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 129-30.

while the bewildered Massart stood aside and waited.⁶¹ At another concert in Milan, Liszt's decision to place one of his etudes on the programme prompted one patron to exclaim: "I came to the theatre to be entertained, not to hear somebody practice!"⁶²

It is not known who spoke those infamous words of wisdom, yet they encapsulate the sentiments of a large majority of concert-goers in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Entertainment was the reason they came. For most, the opportunity of witnessing their favourite virtuoso unfold their favourite melodies amidst feats of technical acrobatics was infinitely more gratifying than listening to the sober music of "older composers." Consequently, piano transcriptions (particularly those based on operas) came to be expected by most audiences as cherished staples of the concert repertoire.

Sigismund Thalberg's concert repertoire, for example, consisted primarily of twelve of his more popular operatic fantasies.⁶³ Many of Liszt's transcriptions were also partly conceived for purposes of extending his own repertoire, including many of his operatic paraphrases and the Schubert song transcriptions.⁶⁴ On June 9, 1827, Liszt gave a Saturday morning concert at

⁶¹Loesser, p. 378.

⁶²Ibid., p. 377.

⁶³Schonberg, p. 189.

⁶⁴Walker, "Liszt and the Schubert Song Transcriptions," p. 57.

the Argyll Rooms in London in which he joined with three other pianists to perform Moscheles' arrangement for eight hands of the overture to Cherubini's *Les deux journées*. Liszt then played in a quartet by Moscheles for voice, violin, harp and piano before improvising on themes from Weber's *Freischütz* and concluding with a performance of his own fantasy on *Rule Britannia*.⁶⁵

Even in the latter stages of the nineteenth century, as audiences were becoming increasingly sophisticated and more "serious repertoire" (such as the piano music of Schubert and Beethoven) was frequently included on concert programmes, performances of operatic and song transcriptions were not infrequent (see Anton Rubinstein's concert programmes in Table 1, p. 48). The repertoire was further supplemented by an array of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bach transcriptions (such as those of Tausig and Busoni), as well as several Strauss waltz transcriptions from the same period (such as those of Godowsky). All of these various types of transcription remained fixtures in the pianist's arsenal throughout the first half of the twentieth century (see Hofmann's concert programmes in Table 1, p. 51).

To reveal the full extent of the transcription's impact on piano repertoire, it is necessary to go beyond the repertoire of Liszt and Thalberg, whose stature as performers of virtuoso transcriptions has been well-

⁶⁵William Wright, "Liszt's 1827 Concert Appearances in London: Reviews, Notices, Playbills, and Programs," *Journal of The American Liszt Society*, 29 (Jan.-June 1991), p. 63.

documented. John Field, for example, played a fantasy by Henri Herz on Rossini's *William Tell* at a Paris concert in 1831, while Brahms played Thalberg's *Don Juan Fantasy* and Döhler's fantasy on *William Tell* at his early concerts in Hamburg in 1848-9.⁶⁶

The antithesis of the flamboyant brand of nineteenth-century virtuosity was perhaps best exemplified in the person of Clara (Wieck) Schumann, a "classical" pianist who deliberately set out to be a "keeper of tradition."⁶⁷ Schumann's stated opposition to the virtuosic works of Liszt and others is therefore not surprising. In her diary, she issued the following commentary on Liszt's compositional abilities:

Liszt was a bad composer — in this respect he did harm to many people, but this is not so serious, as his compositions lack all the qualities which have been mentioned as belonging to him as a virtuoso; they are trivial, wearisome, and they will soon disappear now that he is gone.⁶⁸

Despite such harsh criticism, however, it seems that even Schumann was not immune from the powerful presence of the piano transcription in the concert repertoire. In fact, not only did she include in her repertoire several

⁶⁶Suttoni, "Piano Fantasies," p. 57.

⁶⁷Schonberg, p. 235.

⁶⁸Edwards, p. 45.

transcriptions of Liszt and Thalberg, but also those of Franz Hüntten, whose works were arguably some of the most "trivial" of all.⁶⁹

It must be mentioned here that Schumann ceased performing transcriptions in 1844 and devoted the balance of her playing career to original piano works, most frequently those of Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Mendelssohn, Schubert, and Robert Schumann. Numerous explanations have been advanced for this unequivocal rejection of transcriptions, including the powerful presence of her husband, Robert Schumann, and the knowledge that her stature as an artist was secure enough that she no longer felt obliged to cater to public tastes.⁷⁰ Yet even as late as 1841, Schumann was evidently aware of the overwhelming appeal of the virtuoso transcriptions to concert audiences, despite her growing distaste for virtuosic display:

Concert pieces like Henselt's Etudes, Thalberg's Fantasies, Liszt, etc. have become quite repugnant to me...*I will play them only if I need to for a concert tour.* (my italics)⁷¹

The table which follows details the presence of piano transcriptions in the repertoires of Clara Schumann, Anton Rubinstein, and Josef Hofmann. The purpose of this table is to document the powerful presence of the piano

⁶⁹George Kehler, *The Piano in Concert* (London: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 1982), II, pp. 1184-1187.

⁷⁰Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and The Woman* (Ithaca,: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 263-4.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, pp. 263-4.

transcription in the pianist's repertoire between the mid nineteenth- and mid twentieth-centuries. Schumann's transcription performances demonstrate the full extent of the transcription's dominating influence on mid-nineteenth century repertoire, affecting even a figure who openly despised virtuosic display. The programs of Anton Rubinstein reveal the lingering presence of transcriptions in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, as well as the predominance of Liszt's transcriptions in the repertoire. Especially noteworthy is the fact that in the sixth of a series of seven "historical recitals" performed in New York in 1873, Rubinstein chose to play a total of 14 transcriptions (13 by Liszt, 1 by Thalberg), as representative of nineteenth-century piano repertoire. These transcriptions comprised the bulk of the evening's program. In comparison, the original piano works of Schubert, Mendelssohn and Weber were compressed into a single concert, thus collectively receiving approximately the same attention as the transcriptions. A similar set of transcriptions appeared on the program of the fifth of a series of "historical recitals" given by Rubinstein in Vienna in 1885.⁷² Josef Hofmann's transcription performances spanned a total of 59 years and displayed a great deal of diversity in terms of the types of transcription performed. Especially noteworthy is the emerging prominence of Bach and Strauss transcriptions in Hofmann's repertoire shortly after the beginning of the twentieth century.

⁷²Kehler, pp. 1093, 1097.

Collectively, the transcriptions performed by these pianists provide a representative sampling of the piano transcription's presence in the concert repertoire between the years 1831 and 1946, a period encompassing the apex of the transcription's domination of piano repertoire.

Table 1: Selected list of transcriptions performed by Clara (Wieck) Schumann, Anton Rubinstein and Josef Hofmann.

CLARA (WIECK) SCHUMANN: TRANSCRIPTIONS PERFORMED (1831-44)

DATE	PLACE	TRANSCRIPTIONS PERFORMED
Oct. 26, 1831	Grosser Saal des Rathauses Arnstadt, Thüringen	Rossini-Hüntten: <i>Rondo à 4 mains</i> (über ein Thema aus Elizabeth, von Rossini)
Dec. 13, 1831	Saal des Stadtbaues, Cassel	Rossini-Hüntten: <i>Rondo à 4 mains</i> (über ein Thema aus Elizabeth, von Rossini)
Dec. 6, 1841	Saal des Gewandhauses, Leipzig	Donizetti-Liszt: <i>Fantasie über Themen aus Lucia di Lamermoor</i>
Jan. 31, 1842	Saal der Löbl. Schwarzen-Haupter, Rīga	Rossini-Thalberg: <i>Fantasie über Themas aus "Mosè" von Rossini</i>
Feb. 2, 1844	Saal des grossen Clubs, Mitau	Schubert-Liszt: "Erlkönig" Rossini-Thalberg: <i>Fantasie über Themas aus "Mosè" von Rossini</i>
Mar. 8, 1844	La salle de Madame d'Englebert, au pont de Casan, St. Petersburg	Rossini-Thalberg: <i>Fantaisie sur les thèmes de "Donna del Lago" de Rossini</i>

ANTON RUBINSTEIN: TRANSCRIPTIONS PERFORMED (1842-85)

DATE	PLACE	TRANSCRIPTIONS PERFORMED
Jan. 9, 1842	Saal der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Wien	Donizetti-Liszt: <i>Andante aus Lucia der Lammermoor</i>
Jan. 23, 1842	Saal der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Wien	Rossini-Thalberg: <i>Fantasie über Themas aus "Mosè" von Rossini</i>
May 10, 1858	Eden Théâtre, Paris	Schubert-Liszt: <i>Barcarolle</i> ; "Le Roi des Aulnes"
May 10, 1869	Oberer Saal des Stadt-Casinos, Basel	Schubert-Liszt: <i>Valse No. 6</i>
Feb. 19, 1872	Grosser Musikvereinsaal, Wien	Schubert-Liszt: "Morgenständchen"

DATE	PLACE	TRANSCRIPTIONS PERFORMED
May 20, 1873	Steinway Hall, New York	<p>Mozart-Thalberg: <i>Don Juan Fantasy</i></p> <p>Mozart-Liszt: <i>Don Juan Fantasy</i></p> <p>Schubert-Liszt: "Erlkönig," <i>Valse</i>, <i>Soirées de Vienne</i></p> <p>Meyerbeer-Liszt: "Le Moine"</p> <p>Rossini-Liszt: "Soirées Musicales," "La Gita in Gondola," "La Regatta," "La Serenata," "La Danza," <i>Stabat Mater</i>, <i>Cujus animam</i></p> <p>Donizetti-Liszt: <i>Andante aus der Lucia der Lammermoor</i></p>
Mar. 25, 1875	Kleiner Redoutensaal, Budapest	Schubert-Liszt: "Erlkönig"
Mar. 28, 1875	Grosser Musikvereins-Saal, Wien	Schubert-Liszt: "Erlkönig," "Auf dem Wasser zu singen"
Mar. 3, 1878	Grosser Musikvereins-Saal, Wien	Schubert-Liszt: "Auf dem Wasser zu singen," "Erlkönig"
Jan. 29, 1879	Halle	Schubert-Liszt: "Erlkönig"
Mar. 10, 1880	Helsinki	Schubert-Liszt: "Erlkönig"

DATE	PLACE	TRANSCRIPTIONS PERFORMED
May 28, 1881	Music Hall, Edinburgh	Schubert-Liszt: "Erlkönig"
Feb. 23, 1882	Salle Erard, Paris	Rossini-Liszt: "La Gita in Gondola," <i>Valse- Caprice</i>
Mar. 30, 1884	Concert du Chatelet, Paris	Schubert-Liszt: "Le Roi des Aulnes"
Dec. 4, 1885	Grosser Musikvereins- saal, Wien	Mozart-Thalberg: <i>Don Juan-Fantasy</i> Rossini-Liszt: "Soirées Musicales," " La Gita in Gondola," "La Regatta Veneziana," "La Serenata," "La Danza" Schubert-Liszt: "Auf dem Wasser zu singen," "Ständchen," "Erlkönig" Meyerbeer-Liszt: <i>Reminiscences of Robert le diable</i>

JOSEF HOFMANN: TRANSCRIPTIONS PERFORMED (1887-1946)

DATE	PLACE	TRANSCRIPTIONS PERFORMED
Nov. 14, 1887	St. James Hall, London	Chopin-Liszt: "Chant Polonais," <i>Valse in A Flat</i>
Mar. 4, 1897	The Great Hall of Russian Noble Assembly, Moscow	Wagner-Liszt: <i>Tannhäuser Overture</i>
Mar. 3, 1898	Carnegie Hall	Schubert-Liszt: "Gretchen am Spinnrade," "Erlkönig"
Mar. 11, 1898	Carnegie Hall	Chopin-Liszt: "Deux Chants Polonais"
Jan. 2, 1902	Music Hall, Chicago	Wagner-Liszt: <i>Tannhäuser Overture</i>
Jan. 4, 1902	Music Hall, Chicago	Bach-Liszt: Fugue in A minor
Feb. 12, 1904	Towarzystwo Muzyczne w Krakowie	Bach-Liszt: Prelude and Fugue in A minor
Dec. 25, 1904	Carnegie Hall	Bach-Liszt: Prelude and Fugue in G minor Wagner-Liszt: <i>Tannhäuser Overture</i>
Feb. 19, 1905	Music Hall, Chicago	Mozart-Liszt: <i>Don Juan Fantasy</i>

DATE	PLACE	TRANSCRIPTIONS PERFORMED
Feb. 12, 1908	Community Concert Association, Nashville	Bach-Busoni: Chaconne Schubert-Liszt: "Du bist die Ruh"; "Die Forelle"
Jan. 29, 1916	Carnegie Hall	Gluck-Sgambati: "Mélodie" (from Alceste) Beethoven-Rubinstein: <i>Marche from Ruines d'Athènes</i> Strauss-Godowsky: <i>Fledermaus (Waltz)</i>
Jan. 27, 1917	Carnegie Hall	Bach-d'Albert: Prelude and Fugue in D major Gluck-Brahms: Gavotte
Feb. 4, 1918	National Theatre, Washington, D.C.	Wagner-Liszt: <i>Tannhäuser Overture</i>
Mar. 10, 1918	Carnegie Hall	Strauss-Godowsky: <i>Fledermaus (Waltz)</i>
Nov. 22, 1919	Carnegie Hall	Strauss-Godowsky: <i>Fledermaus (Waltz)</i>
Feb. 8, 1920	Carnegie Hall	Schubert-Liszt: "Hark, Hark, the Lark"; "Erlkönig"
Jan. 14, 1922	Carnegie Hall	Schubert-Liszt: "Die Forelle"
Dec. 18, 1927	Carnegie Hall	Beethoven-Rubinstein: <i>March from Ruines d'Athenes</i>

DATE	PLACE	TRANSCRIPTIONS PERFORMED
Mar. 24, 1929	Carnegie Hall	Mozart-Liszt: <i>Don Juan Fantasy</i>
Mar. 15, 1930	Carnegie Hall	Bach-Liszt: Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue Schubert-Liszt: "Du bist die Ruh"
Mar. 14, 1931	Carnegie Hall	Mozart-Liszt: <i>Don Juan Fantasy</i>
Jan. 20, 1933	Carnegie Hall	Bach-d'Albert: Prelude and Fugue in D major Gluck-Sgambati: "Mélodie" (from Alceste) Handel-Brahms: Theme, Variations, and Fugue
Mar. 19, 1933	Carnegie Hall	Bach-d'Albert: Prelude and Fugue in D Handel-Brahms: Theme, Variations and Fugue Strauss-Godowsky: <i>Fledermaus (Waltz)</i>
Jan. 5, 1934	Carnegie Hall	Wagner-Liszt: <i>Tannhäuser Overture</i>
Jan. 18, 1934	Eaton Auditorium, Toronto	Bach-d'Albert: Prelude Wagner-Liszt: <i>Tannhäuser Overture</i>

DATE	PLACE	TRANSCRIPTIONS PERFORMED
Jan. 19, 1935	Carnegie Hall	Bach-Liszt: Prelude and Fugue in A minor
Oct. 18, 1935	Sala Filharmonji, Warsaw	Strauss-Godowsky: <i>Fledermaus</i> (Waltz)
Jan. 23, 1936	Eaton Auditorium, Toronto	Gluck-Sgambati: "Mélodie (from Alceste)"
Feb. 8, 1936	Carnegie Hall	Gluck-Sgambati: "Mélodie (from Alceste)"
Dec. 5, 1936	The Beethoven Club, Memphis	Albéniz-Godowsky: <i>Tango</i>
Dec. 10, 1936	Academy of Music, Philadelphia	Albéniz-Godowsky: <i>Tango</i>
Jan. 30, 1937	Carnegie Hall	Albéniz-Godowsky: <i>Tango</i>
Apr. 10, 1938	Carnegie Hall	Schubert-Godowsky: <i>Moment musical</i>
May 10, 1938	Stary Theatr, Krakow	Schubert-Godowsky: <i>Moment musical</i>
1939-40	Community Concert Association, Nashville	Bach-Busoni: Chaconne Schubert-Liszt: "Du bist die Ruh," "Die Forelle" Mozart-Liszt: <i>Don Juan Fantasy</i>

DATE	PLACE	TRANSCRIPTIONS PERFORMED
Mar. 30, 1940	Carnegie Hall	Bach-Busoni: Chaconne Schubert-Liszt: "Die bist die Ruh," "Die Forelle"
Nov. 19, 1940	Community Concert Association, Chattanooga	Bach-Liszt: Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue
Mar. 8, 1941	Carnegie Hall	Bach-Liszt: Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue
Mar. 22, 1942	Carnegie Hall	Bach-d'Albert: Prelude and Fugue in D minor
Feb. 28, 1946	Academy of Music, Philadelphia	Strauss-Godowsky: <i>Fledermaus (Waltz)</i>

CHAPTER TWO

THE VALUE OF PIANO TRANSCRIPTIONS: MAKING A CASE FOR ARTISTIC MERIT

Transcription occupies an important place in the literature of the piano; and looked at from a right point of view, every important piano piece is the reduction of a big thought to a practical instrument. But transcription has become an independent art; no matter whether the starting point of a composition is original or unoriginal. Bach, Beethoven, Liszt, and Brahms were evidently all of the opinion that there is artistic value concealed in a pure transcription; for they all cultivated the art themselves, seriously and lovingly.¹

Busoni's adulatory remarks project the image of a vibrant art form whose creative possibilities extend far beyond the practical purposes attributed to the transcription in the preceding chapter. The most provocative assertion revealed by Busoni's remarks is contained in the phrase "an independent art." While some may argue that the transcription is neither independent nor an art, this is precisely where the key to understanding and evaluating the merits of transcription lies. While it may be impossible to divorce the transcription entirely from its original model (and, indeed, comparisons between the transcription and the original often provide fascinating new insights into the original work), the

¹Busoni, *Letters To His Wife*, p. 229.

transcription may also be regarded as an artistically viable medium which should be valued for its intrinsic creative properties. The present chapter, then, will seek to dispel the myths surrounding the transcription and will state a case for the genre's artistic value.

I. Twentieth-Century Misconceptions

The transcription's mid-twentieth century decline was, to a certain extent, fuelled by the increased attention devoted to exact reproduction of the composer's intentions, a trend which intensified as a result of the "Authenticity" movement. Predictably, the transcription was eclipsed as the "purist approach" rose to prominence since, on the surface at least, the transcriber's sacrilegious distortion of the original composer's ideas ran counter to the "sanctity of the Urtext."²

Much of the negative response to transcriptions has been directed toward the Romantic transcriptions of Liszt and his contemporaries, a view based on the somewhat misguided premise that the nineteenth century was the age of irresponsibility whereas ours is the age of authenticity.³ I use the word

²Richard Tetley-Kardos, "Piano Transcriptions - Back For Good?" *Clavier*, 25/2 (February 1986), p. 18.

³Hans Keller, "Arrangement: For or Against?" *Musical Times*, 110 (January 1969), p. 23.

"misguided" because it was neither the obligation nor the desire of nineteenth-century musicians to fulfil any ambiguous moral commitment to the original composers with regard to reproducing their intentions. Thus any comparisons between authenticity in nineteenth- and twentieth-century interpretations must be made with the knowledge that the two ages functioned under diametrically opposed aesthetic principles. While our modernist aesthetic may make it very easy to scoff at the romantic "distortions" of Bach, the interpretative goals of the nineteenth century reveal a clear predilection towards subjective re-creation as opposed to objective reconstruction. This is not to say that the nineteenth-century aesthetic was superior or that our modernist viewpoint is invalid, but merely to suggest that we should re-examine our conception of nineteenth-century transcriptions within the paradigms in which they were created, not those of our modernist philosophy.

Furthermore, by removing subjective re-creation from the interpretative process, modernist performances leave their imprint on a work no less than do the impassioned renderings (and transcriptions) of the Romantics. Richard Taruskin has touched on this concept in describing the interpreter's "inescapable presence" in a work:

The suspension of personality in a modernist performance immediately stamps the performance as such, and is therefore paradoxically tantamount to an assertion of

personality. We impose our esthetic on Bach no less than did Liszt, Busoni or even Stokowski.⁴

II. Transcription and Authenticity

In many instances, the transcription of a work has even resulted in a musical product which is, in certain respects, *more* authentic than strict adherence to the printed text of the Urtext score. In the Bach transcriptions by Liszt and Busoni, for example, passages of octave doubling represent a preservation rather than a distortion of Bach's original sonorities since, unlike the original instruments (harpsichord, organ), the piano lacks the built-in coupling devices required to add octaves to the notes automatically. In compensating for this deficiency by writing octaves into the score, this type of transcription thus achieves a much closer approximation of Bach's intended sound and character than "original texts" which provide only a skeletal outline of the music.⁵ Another transcription which preserves the character of the original work is Busoni's transcription of Bach's Chaconne from Partita No. 2 for Solo Violin, BWV 1004. Bach's Chaconne, a technically demanding violin piece, would sound far too thin if it were transferred note-for-note to the piano and,

⁴Richard Taruskin, "On Letting The Music Speak For Itself: Some Reflections On Musicology and Performance," *Journal of Musicology*, 1 (July 1982), p. 347.

⁵Gyorgy Sandor, "Are Transcriptions Dead?" *Music Journal*, 27 (October 1969), p. 23.

moreover, would lack the tension inherent in the original since it would present no comparable difficulties for a competent pianist. Busoni's solution was to re-create the work so that the transcription matches the original in both richness of sound and technical demands.⁶ In doing so, he has preserved the tension inherent in the original work by creatively modifying its contents for a new medium.⁷

III. Transcription versus Variation Form

Curiously, the variation form has not fallen under the watchful eye of puritan scrutiny although it too must be found guilty of most, if not all, of the transcription's alleged crimes. It is true that variations, unlike transcriptions, do not take an entire composition as source material. Yet like transcription, variation form is also based on borrowed material and also alters the original work. Variations, however, are actually lauded for deviating from the original and are considered more ingenious the more they do so.⁸ Busoni observed this

⁶Davies, p. 224.

⁷This is not to suggest, however, that the creativity of the transcriber always results in a preservation of the original work's character. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, many transcriptions present a complete transformation of the sound and character of the original work. It is a testament to the vast potential of the genre's creative possibilities that both consequences are possible.

⁸This judgement does not apply equally to the virtuosic variations of Herz, Hüntten and other nineteenth-century composers whose primary stimulus was commercial gain. The variations of these composers, like their transcriptions, must be regarded as weak compositions due to the superficiality of the music.

peculiar paradox when he noted that "arrangements are not permitted because they change the original whereas the variation is permitted although it *does* change the original." (my italics)⁹ Why is it, for example, that the musical minds of our post-World War II era regard such works as Brahms' *Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Handel* as worthy, autonomous works of art while Liszt's Bach transcriptions fall immediately under a menacing shadow of suspicion? As evidence of this perplexing double standard we may examine the concert career of the twentieth-century pianist Claudio Arrau, whose early performances (1916-31) featured a number of transcriptions, while from 1932 to 1978 there were no transcriptions performed on any of Arrau's concerts listed by Kehler, coinciding with the increased prominence of the "purist approach."¹⁰ During the same 46-year time span, variations appeared on 18 of Arrau's 69 concerts listed in the same source.¹¹ Similar statistics are found in the concert programmes of Alfred Brendel and Maurizio Pollini,¹² both of whom have frequently performed variations while virtually discarding transcriptions.¹³ A

⁹Busoni, *The Essence of Music*, p. 88.

¹⁰Kehler, pp. 41-6.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 41-6.

¹²Ibid., pp. 169, 991-2.

¹³The absence of transcriptions in Brendel's repertoire is particularly revealing considering his well-known fondness for the music of Liszt, the composer whose output included an unprecedented number of them.

case could be made, however, for the view that variations, in certain cases, may actually represent a lesser level of artistic merit than transcriptions, since the variation form generally imposes a fixed schema upon the work which confines the presentation of musical ideas to a rather predictable pattern.¹⁴

Furthermore, if the variation form is to be acquitted of all charges of plagiarism, then the same fate should be rightfully bestowed upon the transcription. Alan Walker has extolled the transcriber's innocence thusly:

Since every great arranger puts in far more than he takes out, and since nothing is destroyed anyway, the whole of music benefits. What kind of kleptomaniac gives more than he takes?¹⁵

IV. An Aural Defence

It is appropriate at this juncture to reflect once more upon one of the concepts put forth at the beginning of this chapter: to achieve a true understanding and evaluation of transcriptions, it is necessary to judge these works solely on the basis of their intrinsic musical qualities rather than any manner of pre-conceived biases. Hans Keller has supported this position, suggesting that we (as listeners) "...allow ourselves to react thoughtfully rather

¹⁴This statement does not apply to those works written in variation form after around 1920.

¹⁵Alan Walker, "In Defense of Arrangements," *Piano Quarterly*, 36/143 (1988), p. 26.

than fearfully (or, conversely, orgiastically) to any particular arrangement that may come our way. The very concept of an "arrangement," which we readily find disquieting, means nothing, so long as we don't know what has been arranged, what the purpose of the re-creative act is, and how the job has been done."¹⁶

The simplest and most meaningful way of accomplishing this task is by focusing on perceived aural phenomena, a test which the transcription passes with flying colours. Consider, for example, Liszt's *Petrarch Sonnets*, piano works which sound as convincingly original as the *B minor Sonata*, the *E flat major Concerto*, or any other specimens of Liszt's original piano music, even though they are actually transcriptions of songs. The piano versions of the *Sonnets* are even listed in the collected works of Liszt as original works, forming part of the *Années de Pèlerinage, Deuxième Année, "Italie."*¹⁷ A further testament to the aural anonymity of Liszt's transcriptions is the famous *Liebstraum No. 3*, a work best known in its piano version although it is actually a transcription of the song "O lieb, so lang du lieben kannst." It would seem, therefore, that the staunchest defenders of the transcription's artistic value are ultimately our own ears.

¹⁶Keller, p. 23.

¹⁷Franz Liszt, *Années de Pèlerinage (Deuxième Année - Italie)* (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 1974), pp. 14-32.

V. Psychological Conceptions

A further contention of Keller is that it is not enough to suggest that one particular version of a work is superior simply because it was conceived first but, on the contrary, several equally valid transcriptions may, and in some cases should, co-exist as legitimate performance alternatives, irrespective of chronology.¹⁸ One need look no further than Bach's *The Art of Fugue*, in fact, to uncover an idealistic work divorced entirely from the constraints of performance medium. This work presents an infinite number of equally authentic performance options, since Bach left no indications as to the intended medium.

The Art of Fugue is doubly significant in that it illustrates the psychological conception held by Busoni and others of the musical idea as being a distinct and separate entity from the performance medium through which it is transmitted. In Busoni's view, the initial step of notating the original thought is tantamount to transcription and, moreover, determines the ultimate shape of the idea to a much greater extent than the second step of transcribing it from one medium to another:

Notation is itself the transcription of an abstract idea. The moment that the pen takes possession of it the thought loses its original form. The intention of writing down an idea necessitates already a choice of time and key. The

¹⁸Keller, p. 24.

composer is obliged to decide on the form and the key and they determine more and more clearly the course to be taken and the limitations. Even if much of the idea is original and indestructible and continues to exist this will be pressed down from the moment of decision, into the type belonging to a class. The idea becomes a sonata or a concerto; this is already an arrangement of the original. From this first transcription to the second is a comparatively short and unimportant step. Yet, in general, people make a fuss only about the second.¹⁹

VI. Creative Autonomy in Twentieth-Century Transcriptions

In order to ascertain fully the transcription's artistic merit, it is necessary to pose the following basic, but nonetheless vital question: Why have transcribers continued to practice their art throughout the course of the twentieth century? Indeed, there would seem to be every good reason for the genre to evaporate completely from the musical soundscape since it has: 1) long outlived its utilitarian functions and 2) fallen into unprecedented disrepute amongst both scholars and performers. Both circumstances are unique to this century, posing the seemingly trite but inevitable question, "Why bother?" The answer lies in the inescapable fact that twentieth-century transcriptions, more than those of any other period, are the product of a single creative impulse: the desire to create an autonomous work whose artistic integrity matches (or

¹⁹Busoni, *The Essence of Music*, pp. 87-8.

surpasses) that of the original (to be discussed presently).²⁰ While numerous examples of such transcriptions exist from previous centuries, it cannot be denied that the primary motivational source for many others stemmed from purely practical considerations, even in some instances where high levels of artistic merit were achieved (as discussed in Chapter One). By inspiring gifted musical minds of our own age to partake of the craft (even during periods in which it was unfashionable to do so), the transcription as a genre has stated a convincing case for its own artistic worth as an enduring art form. As Marc-André Roberge has observed, "the importance of creative transcription, which is closer to composition than to arrangement, shows the existence of a tradition in twentieth-century music which should not be dismissed as negligible, even though it may run against the striving after originality which has long been fundamental for many creators of the twentieth century."²¹

(a) Glenn Gould

Among the prime specimens of twentieth-century creative transcription are the Wagner transcriptions of the legendary Canadian pianist

²⁰Joseph N. Straus, *Remaking The Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 45.

²¹Marc-André Roberge, "The Busoni Network and the Art of Creative Transcription," *Canadian University Music Review*, 11/1 (1991), pp. 82-3.

Glenn Gould. Completed in 1973, Gould's transcriptions included the *Meistersinger* prelude, the "Rhine Journey" from *Götterdämmerung*, and the *Siegfried Idyll*.²² Gould's output of transcriptions, a little-known facet of his creativity, also includes transcriptions of works by Richard Strauss and Sibelius.²³ The creative impetus behind the Wagner transcriptions may be linked to Gould's preoccupation with Romantic music, a tendency which continued to grow during the last years of his life (a somewhat startling revelation, considering the overwhelming emphasis generally placed on Gould's renowned Bach interpretations). Wagner's music, in particular, was one of his great passions.

One of the products of this passion was a masterful reconstruction of Wagner's music in pianistic terms, a task which he set out to accomplish in a manner even more radical than the imaginative transcriptions of Liszt:

The Liszt transcriptions, on the other hand, whether of Beethoven or Wagner, tend to be relentlessly faithful, in that if the orchestral texture is thick, Liszt will reproduce that thickness on the piano, and of course a thickness on the piano doesn't sound good, let's face it... Now, there are certain places where the timpani have a theatrical role, as in the beginning of the *Rhine Journey*, and where you

²²Otto Friedrich, *Glenn Gould: A Life and Variations* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1990), p. 252.

²³Geoffrey Payzant, *Glenn Gould: Music and Mind* (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1978), p. 85.

just can't avoid it. But apart from such moments I took a solemn oath that there wouldn't be anything other than the occasional punctuation from the timpani and that I would try to re-create the pieces as though somebody like Scriabin, who really knew something about the piano, as Wagner did not, had had a hand in it.²⁴

Gould's goal, therefore, was evidently to create artistically viable works which possessed much worthier attributes than mere re-workings of the original scores for a new medium. These transcriptions represented an attempt to create independent, idiomatic piano pieces which, to use Gould's own words, did not "sound like transcriptions."²⁵ One excellent example of Gould's pianistic reconstruction of Wagner may be found near the beginning of the *Siegfried Idyll*, where a violin solo is underpinned by an F-sharp major chord which is held for four bars:

If you imagine that... on the piano, you'll realize that the lower notes are bound to be inaudible by the end of the phrase. You can reinforce it, you can hit it again, but I chose not to. What I did rather, was to invent a dialogue between two offstage horns, one in the tenor and one in the alto, that try to mimic each other, and they go on like this between themselves, and it's gorgeous... forgive me for saying so, but it's gorgeous.²⁶

²⁴Jonathan Cott, *Conversations With Glenn Gould* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1984), p. 67.

²⁵Payzant, p. 87.

²⁶Cott, p. 70.

Other aspects of Gould's transcriptions reveal a clear disposition towards reinterpreting Wagner's romantic sentimentality as viewed through the transparent lens of a modernist aesthetic viewpoint. In his *Meistersinger* transcription, for example, the final appearance of the "mastersinger's" march theme is taken at an unusually brisk tempo while in the *Siegfried Idyll*, the descending lullaby theme is introduced in an overt, unsentimental manner (unlike the original version).²⁷ Gould's "de-sentimentalization" of Wagner may, in this respect, be regarded as the musical counterpart of Harold Bloom's concept of *kenosis*, a term used in poetry to denote the phenomenon which occurs when the later poet re-creates images from a predecessor by emptying them of all excesses:

The later poet, apparently emptying himself of his own afflatus, his imaginative godhood, seems to humble himself as though he were ceasing to be a poet.²⁸

The principles of *kenosis*, in fact, abound in the works of twentieth-century artists seeking to distance themselves from the excesses of romanticism.²⁹

Gould's transcriptions, moreover, expanded the expressive potential of the genre by creating polyphonic effects previously unheard of, even by Liszt and Godowsky. He accomplished this task by doing what neither Liszt nor

²⁷Benjamin Folkman, Liner Notes to "Glenn Gould Conducts Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll*" (CBS Records, 1973, 1990), p. 4.

²⁸Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 14.

²⁹Straus, pp. 57-8.

Godowsky could have ever hoped to achieve, adding extra voices (and hands) ad infinitum by means of studio recording techniques. It is this point at which the term "creative transcription" becomes subsidiary to "creative cheating," a word Gould amply depicted as follows:

In order to accommodate the extraordinarily dense polyphony in the "Meistersinger Vorspiel," (I) wrote the last three minutes or thereabouts as though for a piano primo-piano secundo duet... and simply over-tracked the material when recording. Consequently, the transcription, strictly speaking, would not be reproducible- except, of course, by two pianists playing in concert- and is effectively realisable only via recording.³⁰

(b) John Cage

Another fascinating genus of transcription has evolved as an outgrowth of the twentieth-century post-tonal manipulation of tonal music. The stylistic clash created by this process, causing original and recomposed elements to remain distinct, has resulted in an intriguing musical hybrid since, unlike the transcriptions of previous centuries (such as Vivaldi-Bach or Beethoven-Liszt), the original composer and subsequent transcriber do not share a common musical language.³¹ These transcriptions are thus a scene of struggle between both styles and means of pitch organization in which: 1) the

³⁰Friedrich, p. 253.

³¹Straus, p. 44.

tonal harmony of the original is undermined, expunging our normal way of interpreting familiar music, and 2) the original work is reheard in light of post-tonal pitch-class set manipulation and/or indeterminate considerations.³²

Perhaps one of the most provocative of these reworkings is John Cage's transfiguration of the "symphonic drama" *Socrate* by Erik Satie,³³ a work given the pungent designation of *Cheap Imitation* (a title Cage intended to correspond to Satie's own inventive titles).³⁴ Curiously, Cage first transcribed the work as a relatively "faithful" two-piano arrangement to accompany a choreography of *Socrate* by Merce Cunningham.³⁵ *Cheap Imitation*, however, is not merely the consequence of a medium change but, moreover, represents a fundamental permutation of the musical language.

Cage's manipulation, in short, consisted of re-creating the chromatic modality of Satie's original by means of "I Ching" chance operations, named after the Chinese book of oracles he frequently turned to as the inspirational source behind his indeterminate compositions.³⁶ In undertaking this process,

³²Straus, p. 72

³³Alan M. Gillmor, *Erik Satie* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1988), p. 220.

³⁴Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing With Cage* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1988), p. 80.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶John Cage and Daniel Charles, *For The Birds* (London: Marion Boyars, 1981), pp. 43-4.

Cage was evidently faced with a host of compositional difficulties stemming from the unique challenge of transcribing (or, more aptly, "translating") the *Socrate* into the language of indeterminacy:

Therefore, my questions to the *I Ching* ... were: Which of the seven modes, if we take as modes the seven scales beginning on white notes and remaining on white notes, which of those am I using? Second: Which of the twelve possible chromatic transpositions am I using? Third question: Now for this phrase for which this transposition of this mode will apply, which note am I using of the seven to imitate the note that Satie wrote? And where he repeated a note I also repeated the chance-given note — but then for each note I asked again which note I am to use and I maintained the rhythm and that was all. For the second and third movements I maintained the intervallic relationships for half a measure. Otherwise, I asked these questions all the time.³⁷

As a consequence of Cage's indeterminate reworking of Satie, a phenomenon has been evoked which Bloom refers to as an *apophrades* or, literally, "the return of the dead."³⁸ As Bloom states, with reference to poetry, "the uncanny effect is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work."³⁹ The effect of this phenomenon is that "the tyranny of time almost is overturned, and one can

³⁷Kostelanetz, p. 80.

³⁸Straus, p. 73.

³⁹Bloom, p. 141.

believe, for startled moments, that (the later poets) are being imitated by their ancestors."⁴⁰ This achievement, fully consistent with the twentieth-century transcriber's quest for autonomy, temporarily distorts the historical continuum and gives *Cheap Imitation* the ironic impression of Satie imitating the indeterminate style of Cage.

As the preceding discussions have sought to illustrate, the piano transcription as a twentieth-century genre has a strong artistic defence in the new and innovative means by which transcribers have endeavoured to create vital, independent art forms. Some scholars have even argued that the genre has reached the pinnacle of its artistic potential in this century:

The desire to recompose the works of one's predecessors seems to be almost as old as Western music itself. In the twentieth century, however, that predilection has reached a peak of intensity and, for several reasons, produces unprecedented kinds of recompositions.⁴¹

The art of piano transcription, therefore, may be regarded as an autonomous genre whose ultimate value stems not from the source of the musical material, but rather from its intrinsic artistic merit, which may be measured in direct proportion to the creative gifts of the transcriber. In short, the transcription, irrespective of prevailing fashion, will always possess the potential to realize artistic aims of the highest standards so long as there are

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Straus, p. 44

creative minds inspired to partake of the craft. Arthur Schopenhauer's definition of "genius," in fact, might well have been conceived with the transcriber in mind:

What really distinguishes and characterizes the Philistine and the man of genius (in their perfect state the two are really only ideal persons and in concreto they are to be found only approximately this) is that the Philistine is reconciled to and satisfied with life, whereas the man of genius can never be... To the man of genius life always appears as something strange, and instead of putting up with it, he wants to make of it something different from what it is.⁴²

⁴²Arthur Schopenhauer, *Manuscript Remains* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), I, pp. 117-18.

CHAPTER THREE:

THE ART OF PIANO TRANSCRIPTION AS CRITICAL COMMENTARY

The work of great commentators, like Scartazzini upon the *Divina Comedia*, like Conington upon Virgil, like Montague Summers upon the Restoration Dramatists.¹ (Ernest Newman on transcriptions).

It is perhaps fitting that a music critic should affirm the role of commentator as fulfilled by the transcriber, a role which embodies the essence of music criticism itself. Unlike the commentary of Newman, however, the transcription discusses music in its own language, casting the original work in a new light of which mere words are incapable. It is the reflection of one artist's ideas via the creativity of a second artist, thereby stimulating reconsideration of the original work. It is precisely the nature of this task which makes the art of transcription a uniquely creative activity, a provocative species of critical commentary. Achieving ends far greater than merely restating the contents of the original work, transcription also requires re-creating, re-shaping and re-evaluating the original work as viewed through the imagination of the transcriber. This distinction between mechanical reproduction and creative re-casting, vital to the comprehension of the transcription's critical potential, is an idea Stephen Davies has expressed using the analogy of portraiture:

¹Larry Sitsky, *Busoni and The Piano* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 297.

Even where portraiture takes as its aim the faithful depiction of the sitter's appearance, it is in the very nature of this activity that this is to be achieved creatively. Inevitably such a portrait comments on, as well as recording, the appearance of the sitter. And, hence, the portrait continues to be of interest in the presence of the sitter or in the presence of mechanical reproduction of the sitter's appearance.²

To take this analogy one step further, the extent to which the portrait sheds new light on its subject is directly proportional to the artistic gifts of the painter. Thus transcriptions (as well as transcribers) may, to a certain extent, be evaluated on the basis of their effectiveness in commenting on the original work.³ Robert Schumann noted this concept as follows:

It all amounts to the old question of whether the reproductive artist may set himself above the creative one, whether he be allowed to modify the latter's works for his own creative purposes. The answer is easy. A bungler is ridiculous when he does it badly; an intelligent artist may do it as long as he does not destroy the identity of the original.⁴

Clearly, the aspect of critical commentary inherent in the process of transcription requires a gifted artist capable of commenting on the music of J. S. Bach, for example, in Bach's own terms (music). It is therefore the role of

²Davies, p. 220.

³Evaluation of a transcription is also based upon the degree of creativity and artistic integrity displayed in the music, as discussed in Chapter Two.

⁴Robert Schumann, "Franz Liszt," *On Music and Musicians* (1946; rpt. New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), pp. 154-5.

critical commentary which provides the most convincing evidence for the artistic value of piano transcriptions and is one of the primary reasons that the genre has outlived its utilitarian functions.

I. Self-Transcriptions

As a testament to the piano transcription's critical capacity, one need look no further than the multiplicity of "self-transcriptions" which exist, whereby composers have transcribed their own works for piano. Indeed, the list of composers who have partaken of this activity is an impressive one: J. S. Bach, Handel, Beethoven, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky, Liszt, Brahms, Debussy, Hindemith, Stravinsky, Bartók and many others.⁵ In undertaking these transcriptions, the process often becomes much more than a simple transference of the original work into a pianistic idiom, but rather an exercise in self-criticism.

In the case of Liszt, this critical capacity manifested itself in the constant re-shaping of his compositions, such as the 45 transcriptions of his own songs. Far from basic idiomatic transfers, these song transcriptions often contain substantial alterations to the musical substance of the original, thus serving more as *revisions* than duplicates of the original work. Liszt's self-

⁵Maurice Hinson, *The Pianist's Guide To Transcriptions, Arrangements, and Paraphrases* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 4-142.

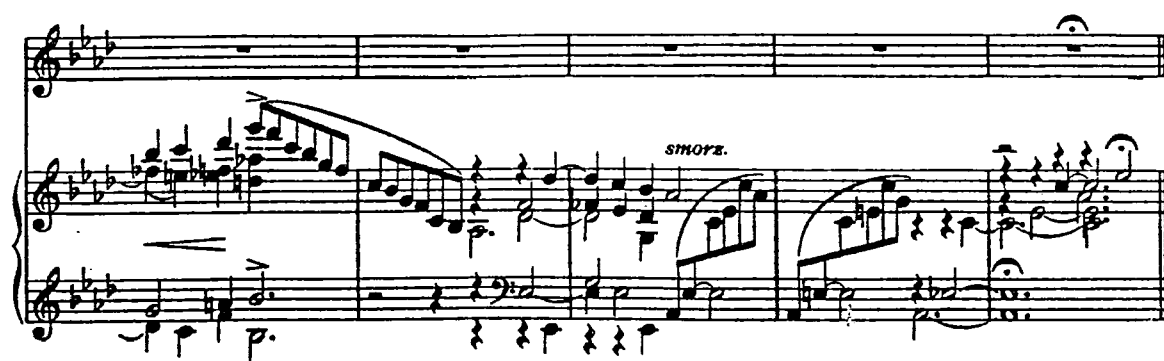
transcriptions, then, formed a natural extension of his penchant for revision, a habit clearly in evidence in the manuscripts of such original works as the Sonata in B minor.⁶

✓ An excellent example of Liszt's capacity for self-criticism may be found in his piano transcription of the song "O lieb, so lang du lieben kannst" (c. 1850), which he transformed into the famous *Liebesträum No. 3*. Among the alterations to the original found in the transcription, one of the most notable is the complete elimination of an entire section of the original song. More exhaustive changes occur at the very end of the piece, where Liszt has eliminated the last six measures of the song and replaced them with newly composed music (see Example 3-1).⁷ Aside from these obvious additions and deletions, Liszt has also introduced many subtle gestures into the transcription which create a greater sense of intensity than the original song. Among these are 1) the use of a greater number and variety of expressive markings, 2) the shortening of certain rhythmic figures (giving a sense of momentum) and 3) the expansion of the two piano interludes from the song into full cadenzas (see Example 3-2).⁸

⁶Sitwell, pp. 346-9.

⁷Guy Wuellner, "Liszt's *Liebesträum No. 3*. A Study of "O lieb" and its Piano Transcription," *Journal of The American Liszt Society*, 24 (1988), pp. 46, 66-7.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 46, 55, 58.



A musical score for Liszt's "O lieb, so lang du lieben kannst." The score is written for piano and features three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a common time signature. The middle staff is a treble clef with a key signature of three flats and a common time signature. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of three flats and a common time signature. The music is characterized by a dense, flowing texture with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. A dynamic marking of *p.* (piano) is present at the beginning. A tempo marking of *SMOYZ.* (Smoorz) is also present. The score ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Example 3-1a: Liszt, "O lieb, so lang du lieben kannst."



A musical score for Liszt's "Liebestraum No. 3." The score is written for piano and features two staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a common time signature. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of three flats and a common time signature. The music is characterized by a dense, flowing texture with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. A dynamic marking of *p.* (piano) is present at the beginning. The score starts at measure 79, indicated by a small number above the first measure. The score ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Example 3-1b: Liszt, *Liebestraum* No. 3.

*
- bern stehst und klagst.
a tempo
armonioso
p

Example 3-2a: "O lieb," mm. 26-8.

21
quasi cadenza
25
p

Example 3-2b: *Liebestraum No. 3*, mm. 21-5.

Clearly these changes represent an effort on the part of Liszt to provide a transcription which surpasses the original in both intensity of expression and

economy of writing. It is no coincidence that the piano version of the work has surpassed the original in terms of public recognition.

Further instances of Liszt's capacity for self-criticism may be found in his recomposition of the piano piece *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, which was transformed twenty years later as *Pensées des morts* (No. 4 of a set of ten pieces forming the cycle *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*),⁹ and also in his piano transcriptions of the *Three Petrarch Sonnets* (songs). In the latter instance, the transcriptions not only achieved far greater public recognition than the original songs, but eclipsed the originals to such an extent that they are listed in the collected works of Liszt as original works, forming part of the *Années de Pèlerinage, Deuxième Année, "Italie."*¹⁰

The preceding discussion has been aimed at establishing the concept of self-criticism in transcriptions by the composer him/herself. This generally accepted practice has long been viewed as part of the composer's moral right to modify his/her own works for creative purposes and, in instances where these transcriptions have far surpassed the originals in terms of artistic merit, they have been accorded their rightful place among the great works of musical literature. The point at which scholars begin to question this practice,

⁹Richard Charles Bellak, "Compositional Technique in the Transcriptions of Franz Liszt," Ph.D. Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1976, p. 14.

¹⁰Liszt, *Années de Pèlerinage*, pp. 14-32.

however, is in cases where the work transcribed was originally conceived by a different composer. It is as if the transcriber's creative license has been revoked, with alterations to the original no longer viewed as insightful commentary but musical blasphemy. Theodor Göllner has noted this peculiar double standard with respect to the transcriptions of J. S. Bach:

As long as Bach took his own compositions as the basis for these transcriptions, musical scholars and critics have never seriously objected to the procedure. But in the case of pieces which were originally the creations of other composers the reaction has generally been one of amazement and lack of understanding.¹¹

Such an approach, as prevalent as it has been in this "Urtext Age" in which we live, is both illogical and inconsistent with the facts of music history. Both writers and composers, in fact, have been asserting the critical value of piano transcriptions for centuries.

II. Critical Transcriptions: A Historical Perspective

To reaffirm this conclusion, we may retrace the origins of keyboard transcriptions to the keyboard intabulations of vocal polyphony found in the fourteenth-century Robertsbridge Manuscript. Even these early arrangements were not simple note-for-note reductions, but featured florid elaboration of the

¹¹Göllner, pp. 253-4.

vocal line (as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis).¹² The seventeenth-century transcriptions by J. S. Bach and others, descendants of early keyboard intabulation practices, supplemented the techniques of melodic elaboration with harmonic and contrapuntal alterations, as well as more radical recompositions of entire passages.¹³ These works arose from a Baroque philosophy which postulated that it was not the origin of the musical material which mattered but "only what the composer had done with the borrowed material:...its artful disposition, elaboration, decoration."¹⁴ The critical component inherent in this process has been succinctly stated by Johann Mattheson, who underscored the need for transcriptions and, indeed, borrowings of all kinds (i.e. works utilizing existing material) to eliminate deficiencies in the original works and to develop the latent musical potential of the originals:

Borrowing is a permitted matter, but one has to pay back the loan with interest. One must arrange imitations in such a way that they acquire a better and more beautiful appearance than those models from which they are taken.¹⁵

It is undoubtedly in the nineteenth-century transcriptions of Liszt and his contemporaries that the art of piano transcription was treated with the

¹²Boyd, p. 627.

¹³To be discussed later in this chapter.

¹⁴Dorian, p. 192.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 192.

greatest diversity of critical approaches. The voluminous transcriptions of Liszt alone range from "partitions" of Beethoven's nine symphonies to operatic paraphrases which frequently transform the original to such an extent that they bear a closer resemblance to original works than transcriptions. This diversity of approaches produced some fascinating specimens of commentary which reflect on the originals in unique and multifarious ways.

With respect to the critical insight contained in Liszt's transcriptions, Camille Saint-Saëns reasoned that these works shed new light on the inner meaning of a work in a manner analogous to Liszt's penetrating interpretations of classic piano repertoire:

When interpreting the classics, he did not substitute his own personality for the author's, as do so many performers; he seemed rather to endeavour to get at the heart of the music and find out its real meaning- a result sometimes missed by even the best of players. This moreover, was the plan he adopted in his transcriptions. The Fantasia on "Don Juan" sheds unexpected light upon the deeper meanings of Mozart's masterpiece.¹⁶

Also voicing the critical power of Liszt's transcriptions was the twentieth-century critic and composer Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji, who spoke of Liszt's ability to "possess" a work, transforming it so that the artistic merits of the transcription surpass those of the original (thereby exposing the demerits of the original

¹⁶Camille Saint-Saëns, "Liszt The Pianist," *Outspoken Essays On Music*, trans. Fred Rothwell (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), p. 78.

work). Sorabji also attributed the same "possessiveness" to his contemporary, Ferruccio Busoni, who carried the Lisztian brand of virtuosic transcriptions (and pianism) into the twentieth century. Sorabji's thoughts regarding Liszt's *Fantasy on Bellini's Norma* were as follows:

The Norma Fantasy is in some respects the most remarkable (fantasy) of all. Very nearly every conceivable musical and pianistic device of treatment is turned on to Bellini's themes, and it is here that one feels the power that was also Busoni's- that power of seizing upon extraneous themes and so charging them with his own peculiar quality that, without actual alteration, they lose all semblance of their original physiognomy, and become "controlled," to use an expression borrowed from the spiritists, or "possessed." Bellini's themes never had by themselves the grandeur and magnificence that Liszt is able to infuse into them.¹⁷

As an intriguing footnote to the critical potential of Liszt's transcriptions, it is revealing to note that Liszt was harshly critical of what he perceived to be a proliferation of ineffectual music criticism in his day and espoused the view that artists themselves should become critics. As he asserted in the "Dramaturgische Blätter" (Dramaturgic Papers), published in conjunction with his work at Weimar, "criticism itself must become creative."¹⁸ While Liszt's remarks were issued with reference to written criticism, they nonetheless present fascinating possibilities for the way we perceive his piano

¹⁷Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji, *Around Music* (London: Unicorn Press, 1932), p. 195.

¹⁸Max Graf, *Composer And Critic* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1947), p. 219.

transcriptions (works which are in themselves exquisite specimens of one artist's commentary on another).¹⁹

Accompanying Busoni as a twentieth-century descendant of the Lisztian tradition of virtuoso transcriptions was Leopold Godowsky (1870-1938). While Godowsky was perhaps the most gifted pianist since Liszt, the label "virtuoso" was one which he vehemently rejected, as the stated aim of his transcriptions was not to dazzle but rather to develop the contrapuntal potential of the original works to previously unheard of heights:

Virtuosity is a fault, not a virtue. And I, who detest virtuosity as such, have been branded a virtuoso...This is really unfair, as what I have accomplished is, in fact, a free musical polyphony along modern polyphonic lines. Modern polyphony is not close-range polyphony, like that of Bach. It is more spread out, more extended.²⁰

It was this type of treatment which Godowsky applied to his well-known paraphrases of waltzes by Johann Strauss. These works, the *Symphonic Metamorphoses on Themes from Johann Strauss's "Kunstlerleben,"* "Fledermaus" and "Wein, Weib und Gesang," are characterized by a dense interaction of harmonic and melodic ideas, or, as A. Lockwood has labelled them, "Johann Strauss waltzing with Johann Bach."²¹ By transforming the

¹⁹To be discussed later in this chapter.

²⁰Jeremy Nicholas, *Godowsky: The Pianist's Pianist* (Northumberland: Appian, 1989), p. 70.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 69.

simple nature of Strauss's originals into intricate specimens of polyphonic mastery, Godowsky has commented on the original works by re-creating them in ways never anticipated by Strauss. In at least one of these pieces, *Die Fledermaus*, Godowsky intended the transcription as a commentary on not only an individual composition, but a composer's style as well. In this instance, Godowsky has introduced a bizarre twist by commenting on Richard Strauss in a transcription of a work by Johann Strauss:

This morning I wired you that the Valse (Fledermaus) was ready for the Berlin recital. I just finished writing it. I believe I have done something quite good. Aside from what you know of the Valse, I have added several original features. Between the second theme of the first valse and the first theme of the second valse, I introduce a very short parody on Richard Strauss (something like Till Eulenspiegel and a bit of Salomé cacophony). It is rather amusing, not unmusical but queer, stranger than the beginning.²²

The critical role of the piano transcriber remains no less evident in transcriptions of recent years, such as those of Scottish composer and writer Ronald Stevenson (b. 1928). In 1982, for example, Stevenson transcribed for piano the six unaccompanied violin sonatas of Belgian composer Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931). The most notable act of commentary contained in these transcriptions occurs in the second movement of the first sonata, in which

²²Nicholas, p. 68.

Stevenson has added a third part to Ysaÿe's two-voice fugue.²³ It is as if Stevenson approved of the fugal concept but found Ysaÿe's application of this concept to be in need of further development. As to the motivation behind Stevenson's transcriptions, it is not surprising to discover the influence of three critical transcribers from the past: "This is proof of what I have learned from Bach, Busoni and Godowsky."²⁴

As the chain of transcribers continues to unfold, it becomes readily apparent that the practice of commenting on the works of others via the art of piano transcription is a time-honoured tradition which continues to shed new light on its original models.

III. Techniques of Commentary Revealed Through Transcription

Before proceeding with a detailed examination of some specific examples to illustrate the critical role of the piano transcription, it is first necessary to outline the various means by which the piano transcriber assumes the role of commentator. Generally, these techniques may be divided into two basic species:

²³Malcolm MacDonald, *Ronald Stevenson: A Musical Biography* (Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland, 1989), p. 81.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 81.

(a) Deletion/Recomposition Of Original Material

This variety of commentary includes the transcriber's omission of entire passages of the original work and often the replacement of these passages with newly-composed music, the deletion of repetitions in instances of a recurring theme, as well as the selection of only certain pieces as the basis for an operatic paraphrase (while omitting others). An excellent example of this "selective brand" of transcription is Liszt's *Fantasy on Bellini's "Norma."*

(b) Alteration/Amplification Of Original Material

Unquestionably the greatest number of devices contributing to the piano transcription's critical function fall under the headings of alterations to or enhancements of the original work. These devices include: changes in time signature, tempo, dynamic and expression markings, tonality, harmonic texture, rhythmic figuration, and atmosphere of the original as well as expansion of the melodic line and manipulation of the original thematic material (e.g. theme(s) treated contrapuntally, juxtaposition of two or more themes, simulation of male and female voices through register change). These alterations generally reflect upon their models in one or both of the following ways: i) by implying that an alternative means of expressing a particular aspect of composition (rhythm, harmony, tempo, etc.) would create a more effective musical product for the new medium and ii) by developing or enhancing aspects of the original in ways which create new possibilities not foreseen by the original composer.

This type of amplification was evidently Godowsky's intent in transcribing three solo violin sonatas and three solo cello suites by Bach:

I have not merely transcribed, but have created new contrapuntal parts and introduced occasional harmonic modifications, while fully availing myself of the developments of our modern pianoforte and the strides we have made in the technique of piano playing. I state my endeavour has been to develop the polyphony and the harmony in the spirit of the master and his period. At times aesthetic considerations have prompted me to deviate slightly from this reverential attitude, a course I believe Bach would not have disapproved, in view of the amazing harmonic modernisms so frequently found in his compositions and considering his very free amendments of his own and other composers' works. On several occasions, I have been tempted to slightly modify the architectural design in order to give the structural outline a more harmonic form. Thus, when the return of the first subject of a movement seemed imperative, I have interpolated a part of the main idea before the close of that movement. I wish to make clear that I have never introduced any themes, motives or counter melodies which were not a logical outgrowth of the inherent musical content.²⁵

IV. "Case Studies" in the Art of Piano Transcription as Critical Commentary

With the framework for the piano transcription's critical value thus established, a closer examination of several transcriptions will illuminate the concepts presented to this point. The works I have chosen as "case studies" in the art of piano transcription as critical commentary are: Bach's transcription of

²⁵Nicholas, p. 116.

Vivaldi's Violin Concerto in D major (which Bach transcribed as his Clavier Concerto in D major, BWV 972), Liszt's transcription of Chopin's song "Moja Pieszczotka," and two operatic fantasies based on Bizet's *Carmen* - the first by Ferruccio Busoni (*Chamber-Fantasy on Bizet's "Carmen"*) and the second by Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji (*Pastiche on the Habanera from "Carmen" by Bizet*).

These works have been chosen firstly to present a wide historical perspective (from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries) and, secondly, to provide an equal representation of instrumental, operatic and song-based transcriptions. It is hoped that this will allow the full scope of the piano transcription's critical value to be delineated. The paraphrases of Busoni and Sorabji have been purposely chosen as a comparative study of how two different transcribers issue commentary on the same model. Wherever possible during the course of these examinations, an attempt will be made to consider any possible correlation between the transcriber's verbal commentary (i.e. reviews, letters, etc.) and the aspects of commentary revealed through transcription. Such relationships are vital in ascertaining whether or not the aspects of commentary contained in the transcription are 1) acts of conscious criticism or 2) natural outgrowths of the transcriber's creativity which are incidental to the transcriber's stated views on the original composer or work.

VIVALDI-BACH CLAVIER CONCERTO IN D MAJOR, BWV 972

Bach's keyboard transcriptions of Vivaldi's violin concertos form some of the earliest and most fascinating specimens of commentary revealed through the process of transcription. Bach's transcriptions, in fact, may be regarded as forerunners of the creative transcriptions of Liszt, Busoni and others, many of whom not only transcribed works by Bach, but also looked upon Bach's own transcriptions as prototypes in the art of piano transcription. On this matter, the thoughts of Busoni are revealing:

It is only necessary to mention J. S. Bach in order, with one decisive blow, to raise the rank of the transcription to artistic honour in the reader's estimation.²⁶

The Violin Concerto in D major, one of approximately 220 concerti Vivaldi wrote for violin,²⁷ was first published in 1712 by Roger in Amsterdam as Op. III, No.9 and later in London as Op. III, No.7.²⁸ The three-movement work was originally scored for solo violin and orchestra (Violin I, II, Viola, Cello, Violone, and Cembalo). Bach's transcription of the work was published after his

²⁶Busoni, *The Essence of Music*, p. 87.

²⁷Walter Kolneder, *Antonio Vivaldi: His Life and Work*, trans. Bill Hopkins (1965; rpt. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), p. 45.

²⁸Sarah Elizabeth Hanks, "The German Unaccompanied Keyboard Concerto in the Early Eighteenth Century Including Works of Walther, Bach, and Their Contemporaries," Ph.D. Diss. University of Iowa, 1972, pp. 282-3.

death as No. 1 of "Sixteen Concertos for Clavier,"²⁹ which date from Bach's Weimar period of 1708-17.³⁰

As mentioned previously in this chapter, Vivaldi's violin concertos formed the models for six of the eleven of Bach's clavier concertos whose original authorship is known. This apparent preference for Vivaldi is all the more impressive, considering the host of composers who furnished Bach with models or points of departure for new compositions (Carrell lists a total of 27).³¹ Alfredo Casella has described Bach's relationship to Vivaldi as follows: "Who was his greatest admirer and who perhaps alone in his time could understand all the greatness of this musician's genius."³²

As to the reasoning behind Bach's transcriptions, the most plausible scenario is that the works were conceived for Bach's own study purposes, although closer examination reveals a much deeper artistic commitment than a mere note-for-note transfer. Despite his admiration for Vivaldi, these transcriptions are the works of a critical mind, unhesitating in his willingness to alter and transform the original models.

²⁹Vivaldi, *Violin Concertos* (Milan: G. Ricordi, 1965), Tomo 414, p. 1.

³⁰Hanks, p. 153.

³¹Carrell, pp. 227-30, 244-7.

³²Kolneder, p. 103.

In considering the devices of commentary exemplified in Bach's Clavier Concerto in D major, BWV 972, some of the alterations may be attributed to an attempt to make the music idiomatic to the keyboard. This would account for many of the alterations to the original bass line, such as mm. 11-15 of movement 1, where the single notes of the cello line would sound quite mundane on the keyboard and would have to be constantly restruck to keep sounding. In its place, Bach has quite logically inserted a broken chordal figure which allows for greater musical interest and continuity of sound when played on a keyboard (see Example 3-3).

While such idiomatic changes are in themselves devices of commentary which invite comparison with Vivaldi's original, Bach's transcription extends far beyond the limits of idiomatic transference to include important aspects of alteration and recomposition which have direct critical implications. These changes may be grouped into the aforementioned categories of Deletions/Recompositions and Alterations/Amplifications.

Musical score for Example 3-3a: Vivaldi: Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 3, No. 9, mm. 12-14. The score is in D major and 4/4 time. It features a violin part with a rapid sixteenth-note run in the first measure, followed by a more melodic line. The piano accompaniment consists of a simple bass line in the left hand and chords in the right hand.

Example 3-3a: Vivaldi: Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 3, No. 9, mm. 12-14.

Musical score for Example 3-3b: Bach, Clavier Concerto in D major, BWV 972, mm. 9-15. The score is in D major and 4/4 time. It features a solo violin part with a melodic line and a piano accompaniment with a complex texture of chords and moving lines. A star symbol is placed above the first measure of the piano part.

Example 3-3b: Bach, Clavier Concerto in D major, BWV 972, mm. 9-15.

(a) DELETIONS/RECOMPOSITIONS

The original thematic material of Vivaldi's Concerto has been largely maintained in Bach's version. The one notable exception occurs at mm. 155-9 of the third movement (Allegro), at which point Bach has replaced Vivaldi's melody with a passage containing only the outline of the original melody (the first and last notes of each measure adhere to Vivaldi's model), while at the same time maintaining Vivaldi's overall harmonic plan (see Example 3-4). The radical nature of Bach's recomposition is all the more striking when compared with his relatively faithful adherence to Vivaldi's original melodies elsewhere in the work.

(b) ALTERATIONS/AMPLIFICATION

(i) Melodic Alterations

Aside from the addition of passing tones, neighbour tones and the recomposed passage mentioned above, further alterations of Vivaldi's original melodies are scarce and generally involve the alteration of two or three notes within the context of Vivaldi's original thematic outline. One such instance occurs at m. 79 of the second movement, where Bach has varied a series of alternating minor second intervals by introducing four new pitches in an ascending scalar pattern (see Example 3-5).

Example 3-4a: Vivaldi, mm. 153-9.

Example 3-4b: Bach, mm. 151-9.

A musical score for Example 3-5a, Vivaldi, mm. 78-9. The score is written for a string quartet and piano. It consists of six staves. The top staff is a single melodic line with a complex rhythmic pattern, marked with an asterisk (*). The second staff is a single melodic line. The third staff is a single melodic line. The fourth and fifth staves are a pair of staves, likely representing a string pair, with a simple rhythmic pattern. The sixth staff is a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) representing the piano accompaniment, which is mostly silent.

Example 3-5a: Vivaldi, mm. 78-9.

A musical score for Example 3-5b, Bach, m. 79. The score is written for a grand piano. It consists of two staves. The top staff is a single melodic line with a complex rhythmic pattern, marked with an asterisk (*). The bottom staff is a single melodic line with a simple rhythmic pattern.

Example 3-5b: Bach, m. 79

(ii) Harmonic Enrichment/Alteration

Bach's harmonic changes in the transcription are generally of two types: 1) those which enrich existing harmonies and 2) those which change the implied harmony of the original (see Example 3-6). In both of the instances mentioned above, the harmonic changes serve the function of increasing the level of dissonance in the transcription. These alterations occur frequently throughout Bach's transcription, especially the addition of a seventh to the dominant chord. Aside from the example mentioned, other such instances of harmonic alterations include m. 48 of the first movement, mm. 59, 85 of the second movement, and mm. 88, 97, and 99 of the third.

(iii) Contrapuntal Development

Bach's most significant alteration is unquestionably the contrapuntal development of Vivaldi's original thematic material. This device perhaps best suits the heading "amplification," as Vivaldi's essentially homophonic texture is expanded into an intricate web of contrapuntal mastery. In certain instances, for example, Bach embellishes the original by adding an inner voice, creating a three-voice texture which is much more effective than a 2-voice texture on keyboard instruments (see Example 3-7). In other places, Bach has added newly created imitative passages where Vivaldi's original texture was simple homophony (see Example 3-8).

IV

Example 3-6a: Vivaldi, mm. 3-5.

ii6₅

Example 3-6b: Bach, m. 5.

Example 3-7a: Vivaldi, mm. 125-31. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a complex texture with multiple staves. The top staff has a melodic line with a trill (tr) and a dynamic marking of *ff*. The middle staves show woodwinds and strings, with a 'Tutti' marking. The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment with figured bass notation (4, 1, 7, 1, 6, 7) and a dynamic marking of *ff*.

Example 3-7a: Vivaldi, mm. 125-31.

Example 3-7b: Bach, mm. 126-8. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The right hand has a trill (tr) and a dynamic marking of *ff*. The left hand has a dynamic marking of *ff*.

Example 3-7b: Bach, mm. 126-8.

Musical score for Example 3-8a, Vivaldi, mm. 37-40. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has five staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The second system has five staves: Flute, Clarinet, Bassoon, Cello, and Double Bass. The music features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with dynamic markings such as *ff* and *f*.

Example 3-8a: Vivaldi, mm. 37-40.

Musical score for Example 3-8b, Bach, mm. 37-42. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has two staves: Treble and Bass. The second system has two staves: Treble and Bass. The music features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with dynamic markings such as *(Solo)* and *(Tutti)*.

Example 3-8b: Bach, mm. 37-42.

This example also illustrates the increased freedom with which Bach treated the bass line in his transcription, elevating it from the simple tonal function it performed in Vivaldi's concerto to the level of an equal partner with the melody line in the polyphonic plot. Evidence of this newly formed partnership may be found throughout the transcription, such as in mm. 45-7 of the first movement (in which the bass-line motion mirrors that of the melody line). In some instances, Bach has even given the bass line a more important thematic function than the upper parts. In mm. 95-100 of the third movement, for example, Bach has performed this type of thematic role reversal by introducing greater rhythmic motion and melodic interest in the bass line, thus relegating the upper parts to an accompanimental role (see Example 3-9). By exploring the contrapuntal potential of the work, Bach has revealed new creative possibilities which were evidently not foreseen by Vivaldi. By inviting comparison with Vivaldi's model, Bach's transcription reflects on the following aspects of the original work:

1. its melodic content;
2. tonal plan;
3. means of thematic development.

A musical score for Example 3-9a, Vivaldi, mm. 94-100. The score is written for a string quartet (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass) and a keyboard instrument (Piano). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score begins with a dynamic marking of *f* (forte) and a star symbol (*). The Violin I and II parts feature rapid sixteenth-note passages. The Viola and Cello/Double Bass parts play a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The Piano part provides harmonic support with chords and a bass line.

Example 3-9a: Vivaldi, mm. 94-100.

A musical score for Example 3-9b, Bach, mm. 95-100. The score is written for a keyboard instrument (Piano). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score begins with a dynamic marking of *f* (forte). The right hand plays a series of chords, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The score ends with a *Solo* marking and a final chord.

Example 3-9b: Bach, mm. 95-100.

CHOPIN-LISZT "MOJA PIESZCZOTKA"

Though Frédéric Chopin composed few songs, the genre was nonetheless a logical expressive medium for a composer who excelled in smaller works of a poetic nature (such as the nocturnes and mazurkas for piano). The 19 "Polish Songs," Op. 74, were composed between 1829 and 1847 but were not collected and published until after Chopin's death, by Julian Fontana (1857).³³ The texts are invariably by Chopin's acquaintances: Stephen Witwicki, Adam Mickiewicz, Bogdan Zaleski, and Sigismund Krasinski.³⁴ "Moja Pieszczotka" (My Darling), Op. 74, No.12 (1837), is a large-scale mazurka in an ABA form with a long coda and is based on a text supplied by Mickiewicz.³⁵

In addition to Liszt, other piano transcribers who have taken Chopin's music as models include Isidor Philipp, Johannes Brahms, Charles Czerny, Alfred Cortot, Camille Saint-Saëns, Giuseppe Ferrata, Joe Furst, Rafael Joseffy, Max Laistner, Aleksander Michalowski, Moritz Rosenthal, Michael Zadora,

³³Bernard Jacobson, "The Songs (of Chopin)," *Frédéric Chopin: Profiles of The Man and the Musician*, ed. Alan Walker (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1966), p. 190.

³⁴James Huneker, *Chopin: The Man and His Music* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), p. 317.

³⁵Jacobson, p. 204.

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji, and Leopold Godowsky.³⁶ Of these, Godowsky deserves special mention for his "Fifty-Three Studies Based on Chopin Études," a set of works which established new frontiers for piano technique. Godowsky described his transcriptions as follows:

The fifty-three studies based upon twenty-six Études of Chopin have manifold purposes. Their aim is to develop the mechanical, technical and musical possibilities of pianoforte playing, to expand the peculiarly adapted nature of the instrument to polyphonic, polyrhythmic and polydynamic work, and to widen the range of possibilities in tone colouring.³⁷

Liszt's transcription of "Moja Pieszczotka" was completed in 1857 as part of a set of six transcriptions of Chopin songs (the other transcriptions being of nos. 1, 2, 14, 4, and 5 respectively).³⁸ The cyclical quality of the set is enhanced by the fact that five of the six tonalities outline a C minor chord (G major, G minor, E flat major, C minor, G flat major, C minor).³⁹ Collectively, these works form an integral part of Liszt's manifold song transcriptions, a body of works which also includes transcriptions of songs by Arcadelt, Beethoven, Hans von Bülow, Dessaur, Donizetti, Robert Franz, A. Goldschmidt, E. Lassen,

³⁶Hinson, pp. 36-8.

³⁷Ibid., p. 37.

³⁸Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years 1848-1861* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), p. 48.

³⁹Riccardo Risalti, Liner Notes to Arcadia M15356 (1983), cols. 2-3.

Mercadante, Meyerbeer, Mozart, Rossini, Rubinstein, Schubert, Robert and Clara Schumann, Spohr, Weber, and Count Wielhorsky.⁴⁰

The inspiration behind Liszt's Chopin song transcriptions may be traced to a life-long admiration of Chopin's work, a sentiment best expressed in Liszt's own words: "In analyzing the works of Chopin we meet with beauties of a high order, expressions which are quite new, and a harmonic tissue which is as original as it is erudite."⁴¹ Following Chopin's death in October of 1849, this admiration seemingly intensified into reverence, as Liszt devoted much of his creative energy toward erecting suitable musical and literary monuments in Chopin's honour. It is revealing, in fact, to note that in the five years following Chopin's death, Liszt composed the following "Chopinesque" works: *Mazurka brillante* (1850), two polonaises (1851), two ballades (1845-48, 1853), and *Berceuse* (1854).⁴² Equally revealing is his book on Chopin, *F. Chopin par F. Liszt*, a work Liszt set out to write immediately following Chopin's death. Writing with astonishing celerity, Liszt completed the 206-page book on Jan. 14, 1850. M. Escudier published the work in a series of articles in *La France musicale* (Feb. 9-Aug. 17, 1851), while the complete book was issued by the same

⁴⁰Sitwell, pp. 346-9.

⁴¹Irving Kolodin, *The Critical Composer* (Freeport, New York: Books For Libraries Press, 1969), p. 118. Excerpt quoted from Liszt's book on Chopin, titled *F. Chopin par F. Liszt*.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 146.

publisher in 1852.⁴³ In a letter to Escudier dated Feb. 4, 1851, Liszt discusses his Chopin biography (see Example 3-10).⁴⁴ The following excerpt, translated by Constance Bache, is taken from the opening paragraph of the letter:

My dear Sir,

The proofs of the first articles of my biographical study of Chopin ought to have reached you some days ago, for I corrected and forwarded them immediately on my return to Weimar. You will also find an inclination of how I want them divided, which I shall be obliged if you will follow. Both on account of the reverence of my friendship for Chopin, and my desire to devote the utmost care to my present and subsequent publications, it is important to me that this work should make its appearance as free from defects as possible, and I earnestly request you to give most conscientious attention to the revision of the last proofs. Any alterations, corrections, and additions must be made entirely in accordance with my directions, so that the definitive publication may satisfy us and rightly fulfil the aim we have in view. If therefore your time is too fully occupied to give you the leisure to undertake these corrections, will you be so good as to beg Chavée (as you propose) to do me this service with the scrupulous exactitude which is requisite, for which I shall take the opportunity of expressing to him personally my sincere thanks?⁴⁵

⁴³Edward N. Waters, "Chopin By Liszt," *Musical Quarterly*, 67 (1961), pp. 170-1.

⁴⁴Original letter reproduced with the kind permission of the McMaster University Archives (from the Franz Liszt Collection). The original letter contains added significance in that it verifies Liszt's authorship of the Chopin biography. Liszt's authorship had long been questioned.

⁴⁵La Mara, ed., *Letters of Franz Liszt*, trans. Constance Bache (1894; rpt. New York: Haskell House, 1968), pp. 112-13.

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sur le rapport de Liszt, et dans celui d'un

de ses fonctions, peut-être même populaires.

Example 3-10: Liszt, letter to M. Escudier, February 4, 1851.

Liszt's Chopin song transcriptions may, in certain respects, be considered the musical counterparts of his literary tribute. Both were issued in the years following Chopin's death as a monument to his genius and reveal Liszt's inner thoughts on Chopin's music. The two paths diverge, however, in the means of expressing these thoughts as well as the picture of Chopin's music these thoughts reveal. While the book deifies Chopin with unequivocal approbation, the song transcriptions reflect on Chopin's music in a much more critical light, despite their origins as a musical tribute. The following examination of Liszt's transcription of "Moja Pieszczotka" will reveal the nature of this reflection.

(a) ALTERATIONS/AMPLIFICATION

(i) Melodic Alterations

Aside from freely recomposed passages (to be discussed presently), the primary devices of melodic alteration employed by Liszt are: 1) addition of a single note or change in accidentals, 2) cadential prolongations of an existing phrase, 3) addition of improvisatory flourishes between phrases. A primary example of the second type of alteration may be found in m. 8 of the transcription, where Liszt has interpolated a one-measure cadential prolongation between the final two notes of Chopin's original phrase (see Example 3-11). Similarly, mm. 25-6 are typical of Liszt's addition of newly-composed improvisatory flourishes between phrases (see Example 3-12). In both of these

instances, Liszt has amplified Chopin's relatively clear phrase structure and injected a sense of restless ambiguity which delays the arrival of the expected cadence (the sense of restlessness is further enhanced by the presence of sudden ritardandos, fermatas, and whispering pianissimos).

Musical score for Example 3-11a, Chopin's "Moja Pieszczotka" mm. 7-8. The score is in G major, 3/4 time. It shows a piano introduction with a fermata and a ritardando marking.

Musical score for Example 3-11b, Chopin-Liszt's "Moja Pieszczotka" mm. 6-9. The score is in G major, 3/4 time. It shows a piano introduction with a fermata and a ritardando marking, followed by a section marked "rit. smorz." and "sempre dolcissim."

Example 3-11a: Chopin, "Moja Pieszczotka," mm. 7-8.
 b: Chopin-Liszt, "Moja Pieszczotka," mm. 6-9.

Example 3-12: Liszt, mm. 22-8.

(ii) Rhythmic Alterations

Liszt's subtle rhythmic changes generally serve the purpose of providing a greater sense of momentum by varying Chopin's rather static figuration. The most effective of these alterations is the shortening of eighth or quarter notes to a sixteenth note upbeat pattern (see Example 3-13). The effect of this new motif is to create the impression of an intense "sigh of longing" and is a device Liszt frequently employed in his compositions at especially impassioned moments.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Such as in *Étude d'Exécution Transcendante No. 11, "Harmonies du soir,"* in which the motif appears appropriately in a passage marked "Più lento con intimo sentimento" (see Example 3-14).

zi - bki bly - sną srod ko - ra - li; ach! ach! uten - czas, ach!

46 *stretto*

Example 3-13a: Chopin, mm. 46-52.

stretto

Example 3-13b: Liszt, mm. 52-7.

Piu lento con intimo sentimento.

una Corda.

accompagnamento quasi Arpa.

sempre arpeggiato

rinforz.

Example 3-14: Liszt, "Harmonies du soir."

Significantly, the motif occurs in the "Moja Pieszczotka" transcription on the passionate exclamation of the word "Ah!" Other instances of Liszt's rhythmic alterations occur at mm. 16 and 28. Through these subtle rhythmic alterations, Liszt has amplified the expressive potential of Chopin's original material by infusing it with a greater sense of intensity than that possessed by the original model.

(iii) Harmonic Alterations

In several instances throughout the transcription, Liszt enriches Chopin's original harmonic texture by doubling the melody line at the interval of a third. The first instance of this doubling occurs in mm. 12-13, where thirds are added both above (m. 12) and below (m. 13) the melody (see Example 3-15).

(iv) Accompanimental Figuration

Throughout the transcription, Liszt has transformed Chopin's rather static figuration into a smoothly flowing eighth-note pattern which infuses a degree of fluidity into the transcription, creating an effect strikingly similar to accompanimental figuration found in Chopin's nocturnes.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Interestingly, Liszt subtitled his transcription of "Moja Pieszczotka" with the word "Nocturne."

Mo - ja pie - szczo - tka, gdy w uie - so - tej chwi - li
po - co cre - - scen - -

Tad. *

Example 3-15a: Chopin, mm. 7-12.

Tad. *

Example 3-15b: Liszt, mm. 11-13.

(b) DELETIONS/RECOMPOSITIONS

In terms of Liszt's more radical changes, it is revealing to note that the most striking instances of recomposition occur at crucial moments of the text. In mm. 32-9, for example, he introduces a radical departure on the phrase "I tylko chciałbym słuchać!" ("and I'd only want to listen!"). Liszt's newly-composed passage illustrates the text with a greater sense of intensity and conviction than the original by employing expressive devices such as trills, a wider melodic range, accent markings, and sudden shifts in tempo and dynamics (see Example 3-16). Indeed, heightening the intensity at crucial textual moments is a recurring feature of Liszt's transcriptions, as evidenced by his transcription of Schubert's "Gretchen am Spinnrade," in which passages of octave doubling and thickening of texture closely coincide with the increased intensity of the text.⁴⁸

Liszt's most exhaustive transformation of a passage occurs in mm. 63-86 of the transcription with the introduction of an entirely new climax to the piece (mm. 61-75 of the original song are deleted) (see Example 3-17). Once again, this passage contains important textual implications, coinciding with the words "Usta pomykam i słuchać nie żadam, tylko całować!" (I close her mouth and I do not ask to listen, only to kiss!), on which the original song ends. Significantly, Liszt's most passionate utterances are reserved for this, the emotional climax of the poem.⁴⁹

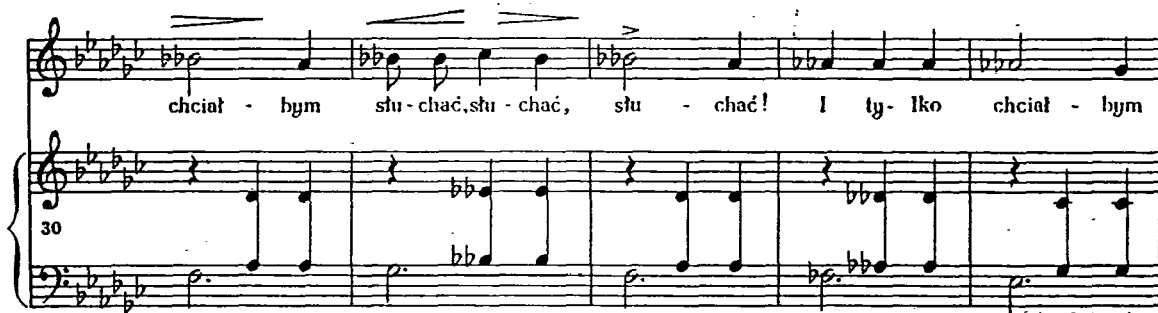
⁴⁸Walker, "Liszt and the Schubert Song Transcriptions," pp. 60-61.

⁴⁹If an analogy is permissible, Chopin's "kiss" projects the image of a tender "peck on the cheek," while Liszt's portrayal reveals more passionate intentions.



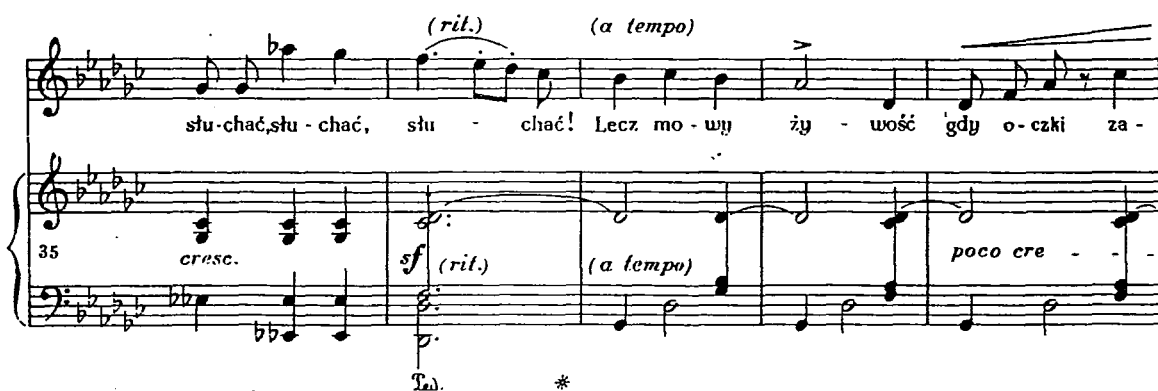
nie śniem prze - ry - wać, nie śniem, nie śniem od - po - wia - dać i ty - lko

25



chciał - bym słu - chać, słu - chać, słu - chać! I ty - lko chciał - bym

30



słu - chać, słu - chać, słu - chać! Lecz mo - wy ży - wość gdy o - czki za -

35

cresc. *sf (rit.)* *(a tempo)* *poco cre - - -*

Ed. *

Example 3-16a: Chopin, mm. 25-39.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piano piece, likely by Liszt, spanning measures 29 to 39. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef.

- System 1 (Measures 29-32):** Features complex rhythmic patterns with slurs and accents. Fingering numbers (1-5) are indicated above notes. A double bar line with a star (*) is present at the end of measure 32.
- System 2 (Measures 33-36):** Includes performance markings: *rit.* (ritardando) and *pp* (pianissimo). The instruction *agitato* is written below the bass staff. Fingering and slurs continue.
- System 3 (Measures 37-39):** Features the instruction *più appassionato* (more passionate) above the treble staff. The piece concludes with a final cadence.

Example 3-16b: Liszt, mm. 29-39.

- ed * acce - le - ran - do

- gła - dam, u - sta po - my - kam i. słu - chać nie za - dam, ty - -

60

ed acce - le ran do

rall. - *f* - *poco* - - *a* -

- lko ca - to - - wać, ca - to - - wać, ca -

rall. - - *poco* - - - *a* -

67

poco *a tempo*

- to - - - - wać! ca - to - wać!

poco *a tempo*

73

Example 3-17a: Chopin, mm. 60-79.

accelerando

più accelerando e stringendo molto

ff con somma passione marcatis.

sempre ff

Ossia.

Example 3-17b: Liszt, 63-79

Liszt's imaginative sensitivity for textual considerations (a natural impulse for one who frequently found inspiration in literary stimuli), invites immediate comparison with Chopin's rather simple textual depiction and captures the expressive potential of the text in a more heightened manner than the original work. Liszt's musical commentary on Chopin's literary sensitivity has been subsequently reaffirmed by Bernard Jacobson, who observed that Chopin's songs "...catch the moods of their poems with great perception and sensitivity, but he does not show the same imaginative feeling for words as his German counterparts."⁵⁰

The picture of Chopin's song which emerges from Liszt's transcription may be summarized as a process of expansion and intensification, in which the miniature quality of the original work is transformed into a "larger than life" creation. As a by-product of this metamorphosis, Liszt's transcription has served as insightful commentary on many aspects of Chopin's song, including its:

- 1) simple melodic structure;
- 2) rather static rhythmic and accompanimental figuration;
- 3) lack of intensity and sensitivity to textual considerations.

Although it is impossible to state with absolute certainty what Chopin's response may have been to Liszt's transcription, there is reason to

⁵⁰Jacobson, p. 188.

suspect that he may have been less than enamoured with Liszt's musical commentary. In fact, Chopin was reportedly so offended by Liszt's review of one of his piano recitals (Aug. 26, 1841) that relations between the two were irrevocably damaged (despite the generally favourable tone of the review).⁵¹ Chopin's reaction to the news that this concert was to be reviewed by Liszt speaks volumes about the sense of uneasiness he felt toward the prospect of having Liszt pass judgement on his work, as described by Ernest Legouvé:

He (Chopin) had asked me to review (his public concert), but Liszt had claimed that honour. I hastened to give this news to Chopin, who said to me quietly:

"I should have preferred that it be you."

"You cannot think that, my friend! An article by Liszt is a stroke of good fortune for the public and for you. Believe in his admiration of your talent. I promise you that he'll make you a beautiful kingdom."

"Yes," he replied, smiling, "within his own empire."⁵²

BUSONI'S CARMEN VS. SORABJI'S CARMEN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN CRITICAL COMMENTARY

The operatic transcriptions of Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924) and Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji (1892-1988) provide a fascinating case study of how two twentieth-century transcribers issue commentary on the same source material (in this instance, the "Habanera" from Bizet's *Carmen*). The

⁵¹Waters, pp. 176-8.

⁵²Ernest Legouvé, *Soixante ans de souvenirs* (Paris: 1888, 1975), pp. 161-2.

comparisons do not end there either. Busoni's *Fantasia Contrapuntistica* served as the creative impetus behind Sorabji's *Opus Clavicembalisticum*, while Busoni's piano transcription of Bach's *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue* also spawned a transcription of the same work by Sorabji.⁵³ Sorabji's deeply-rooted admiration for Busoni's creative genius is unequivocally depicted in the following passage from *The New Age* (one of several British journals for which Sorabji wrote music criticism),⁵⁴ in which he discusses Busoni's *Indianisches Tagebuch*.⁵⁵

While preserving apparently their outward shape, they undergo a transmutation of character like the people subject to the fluctuations of multiple personalities. Their own usual self is entirely in abeyance, overshadowed by the tremendous personality of the Master of Magic - for Busoni is no less - who is using them. Beautiful, undoubtedly, with that strange extra-human or non-human sinister beauty that is the essence of Busoni's art, and which sets him so absolutely apart and aloof.⁵⁶

As further evidence of the powerful musical connection between Busoni and Sorabji, the two Carmen transcriptions were issued only two years apart, with

⁵³Paul Rapoport, *Opus Est* (London: Kahn and Averill, 1978), p. 163.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁵⁵ Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji, *The New Age*, 36/1699 (April 2, 1925), p. 272.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 272.

Busoni's *Chamber Fantasy* completed in 1920⁵⁷ and Sorabji's *Pastiche* finished in 1922.⁵⁸

The "Habanera" from Bizet's *Carmen* (1875) is extracted from the first act of the opera and represents Carmen's answer to the romantic advances of a group of young men who approach her as she leaves the cigarette factory:

L'amour est un oiseau rebelle
 Que nul ne peut apprivoiser,
 Et c'est bien en vain qu'on l'appelle,
 S'il lui convient de refuser.
 Rien n'y fait, menace ou prière,
 L'un parle bien, l'autre se tait;
 Et c'est l'autre que je préfère
 Il n'a rien dit; mais il me plaît.

Love is free as the wayward breeze,
 It can be shy, it can be bold.
 Love can fascinate, love can tease,
 Its whims and moods are thousand fold.
 All at once it arrives and lingers
 For just how long can't be foretold.
 Then it deftly slips through your fingers,
 For love's a thing no force can hold.⁵⁹

The term *habanera* had its origins as an orgiastic dance of Cuban descent and, indeed, Bizet appeared to grasp its erotic implications

⁵⁷Sitsky, p. 74.

⁵⁸Rapoport, p. 186.

⁵⁹Georges Bizet, *Carmen* (New York: G. Schirmer), pp. 44-5.

intuitively.⁶⁰ Interestingly, Bizet's "Habanera" is itself a transcription, since Bizet had not adapted a folk song (as he had thought), but rather a song entitled "El Arreglito ou la Promesse de mariage" by the Spanish-American composer Sebastián Iradier (1809-65).⁶¹ In addition to Busoni and Sorabji, the list of Carmen transcribers also includes Moritz Moszkowski, Vladimir Horowitz, and Bizet himself, each of whom transcribed the work for piano.⁶²

Busoni's treatment of Bizet's "Habanera" forms a 59-measure section of the *Chamber-Fantasy on Bizet's Carmen*, a work which follows in the Lisztian tradition of presenting the dramatic essence of an opera in compressed form. The structural plan of Liszt's operatic paraphrases, in fact, exerted a direct influence on Busoni's *Carmen Fantasy*, as Busoni reveals:

Liszt's opera fantasies in general are built up in three parts. The piece opens with a detailed introduction, solemn or atmosphere-producing, followed by a lyrical middle episode, from which a bridge is thrown, generally by a modulating, hastening episode (in which the earlier and the coming motives appear) to the Finale which constitutes a movement of more lively character... As a more concrete example: if it were a question of the paraphrase of *Carmen*, the transcriber, following Liszt's example, would begin with the suggestive scene in the market place in Act IV, and in the introduction as contrast to this, would join the pathetic "Carmen" theme built on

⁶⁰Winton Dean, *Georges Bizet: His Life and Work* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1965), p. 228.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Hinson, pp. 27-8.

the gipsy scale. The middle would be composed of the Habanera (followed by variations), the Finale, the bull-ring music."⁶³

The critical role assumed by Busoni's transcription has been succinctly stated by Larry Sitsky:

What we have here is a great artist commenting on an opera he has just seen... what emerges is *Carmen* seen through his mystic vision. The familiar melodies acquire strange colors, as though distorted by a camera lens.⁶⁴

For purposes of the present study, the "Habanera" section will serve as the focus of examination, as it is this section which invites direct comparison with the aspects of commentary contained in Sorabji's *Pastiche on The Habanera from Carmen by Bizet*. The following examination of Busoni's "Habanera" section will demonstrate the nature of this commentary.

(a) ALTERATIONS/AMPLIFICATION

(i) Key

Busoni begins the "Habanera" section in the key of D flat major and then modulates to D minor in measure 24. This modulation serves as a much more striking contrast than Bizet's original tonal scheme, which hovers between d minor and the parallel major. The atmospheric change which Busoni's

⁶³Busoni, *The Essence of Music*, pp. 92-3.

⁶⁴Sitsky, p. 75.

modulation introduces at this point is further accentuated by a new, virtuosic variation of the main theme (to be discussed presently). Furthermore, the choice of D flat major as the key to begin the "Habanera" section suggests a deliberate attempt on Busoni's part to strengthen its associations with Don Jose's aria (also in D flat major).⁶⁵

(ii) Rhythmic Alterations

Busoni's rhythmic changes reveal a desire to vary Bizet's original material in repetitions of the main theme (Bizet's numerous repetitions are virtually unchanging). In mm. 17-25 of Busoni's "Habanera," for example, he has varied the rhythmic pattern of both the melody and the accompanying bass figuration, replacing the habanera rhythm with straight sixteenth notes (see Example 3-18).

(iii) Thematic Development

(a) Mirroring of Themes

In several instances, Busoni manipulates Bizet's themes in new and varied ways aimed at exploiting the polyphonic potential of Bizet's essentially homophonic piece. One notable example occurs in mm. 44-51 of the Habanera section of the transcription.⁶⁶ In this instance, the outline of the main theme is

⁶⁵Suttoni, "Piano Fantasies," pp. 333-4.

⁶⁶Measures numbered from the beginning of the "Habanera" section.

Allegretto, quasi Andantino. *p*

Carmen. *L'amour
Love is*

Sopranos I & II.
(Gigarette - girls)

Tenors.
(Young men)

Basses.
(Workingmen)

Chorus

Allegretto, quasi Andantino. (*♩ = 74*)

Piano. *pp*

est un oi-seau re - bel-le Que nul ne peut ap-pri-voi-ser. Et oser
free as the way - ward breeze, - it can be shy, - it - can be bold. Love can

Example 3-18a: Bizet, "Habanera" from *Carmen*, mm. 1-8.

più con grazia

sempre dolcissimo

con 2 Pedali

sostenuto

Example 3-18b: Busoni, "Habanera" Section from Chamber Fantasy on Bizet's "Carmen," mm. 16-23.

presented in a series of left-hand chords while a newly composed ascending sixteenth-note figure rises above it. Ingeniously, Busoni reverses this pattern beginning at m. 48 so that it mirrors the descending chromatic pattern of the main theme in diminution (see Example 3-19).

(b) Combination of Themes

The influence of the nineteenth-century paraphrase is felt most strongly in mm. 9-17 of Busoni's "Habanera" section, at which point he employs the "Liszt-Thalberg" device of thematic combination. In this instance, Busoni creates a vertical juxtaposition of the main theme and Carmen's second theme ("L'amour est enfant de Bohème") (see Example 3-20). In doing so, he revealed new creative possibilities for Bizet's themes.

(iv) *Expressive Markings*

Busoni introduces a greater quantity and variety of expressive markings than Bizet's original piece, thereby enhancing the improvisatory nature of the fantasy. In certain instances, this enables him to transform completely the atmosphere of Bizet's version. A case in point is the very first measure of Busoni's "Habanera" section, which contains the marking "dolce, vagamente." This term implies a mystical, distant sound quality, unlike the overt nature of Bizet's original statement.⁶⁷

⁶⁷Roebold Hugh Middleton, Jr. "Three Perspectives of the Art of Ferruccio Busoni as Exemplified by the *Toccata*, *Carmen Fantasy* and Transcription of Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz*," D.M.A. Diss. North Texas State University, 1981, pp. 25-6.

Musical score for Example 3-19, Busoni, mm. 44-9. The score is in 3/4 time and features complex piano and bass line textures with numerous fingerings and articulations.

The score is divided into three systems. The first system (mm. 44-46) shows a piano part with intricate sixteenth-note patterns and a bass line with chords and moving lines. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. The second system (mm. 47-49) continues the piano part with similar textures and includes a dotted line above the staff in the first measure. The third system (mm. 50-52) features a piano part with a *spiccato* marking and a bass line with a *marc legg.* marking. Fingerings and articulations are clearly marked throughout.

Example 3-19: Busoni, mm. 44-9.

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of three systems of music. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is written for both the right and left hands.

The first system (measures 6-11) features a complex texture with many chords and triplets. The right hand has several triplets of chords, and the left hand has a steady accompaniment of chords and eighth notes.

The second system (measures 12-17) includes the instruction *con grazia* in the middle of the system. The texture continues with complex chordal structures.

The third system (measures 18-19) includes the instruction *più con grazia* at the beginning, *sempre dolcissimo* in the middle, and *con 2 Pedali* at the bottom. The right hand has a melodic line with grace notes, and the left hand has a dense texture of chords and eighth notes.

Example 3-20: Busoni, mm. 6-19.

(b) DELETIONS/RECOMPOSITIONS

(i) Omission of Thematic Repetitions

Busoni has deleted large sections of Bizet's original piece containing numerous thematic repetitions. By omitting mm. 8-27 of Bizet's original piece, for example, he has eliminated five unaltered statements of the main theme, while subsequent themes are given similar treatment. This brand of "selective transcription" may be partly attributed to Busoni's desire to compress the drama of the opera into a single piano piece. Furthermore, in instances where Busoni does repeat thematic statements, they appear in a highly varied and elaborated form, suggesting that Busoni may have viewed the thematic repetition of the original negatively.

(ii) Recompositions

In many instances, Busoni's recomposition is so extensive that any resemblance to the original is slight. In mm. 26-35, for example, Busoni has notated a passage of sweeping triplet runs that contains only the slightest trace of the original main theme, yet far surpassing the original in terms of musical interest and excitement. Similarly, the main theme is outlined in staccato sixteenth notes amidst a sweeping triplet figure in mm. 36-44. This passage is all the more remarkable in that it is stated in vertical juxtaposition with an eighth-note statement of the main theme and the habanera bass figure, creating a 3-voice effect:



Example 3-21: Busoni, mm. 35-7.

By varying, recomposing and condensing Bizet's original work, Busoni's fantasy has provided commentary on the following aspects of the original:

- 1) its tonal scheme;
- 2) thematic repetitions;
- 3) means of thematic development.

Kaikhosru Sorabji's *Pastiche on the Habanera from "Carmen"* is the second of a group of three pastiches written in 1922, the others being based on Chopin's *Waltz in D flat major, Op. 64, No. 1* ("Minute Waltz"), and the "Hindu Merchant's Song" from Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sadko*.⁶⁸ The "Habanera" Pastiche is 102 measures in length (as compared with the 107 measures of Bizet's original "Habanera") and has the character of a free fantasy, as evidenced by the tempo and character indications at the beginning of the work: "Ad libitum. Avec fantaisie et extravagance."⁶⁹ The principal stimulus behind Sorabji's *Habanera Pastiche*

⁶⁸Rapoport, p. 186.

⁶⁹Marc-André Roberge, Introduction to the Critical Edition of "Pastiche on the Habanera from "Carmen" by Bizet" by *Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji* (Bath,

was undoubtedly Busoni's *Carmen Fantasy* of two years previous. The following excerpt illustrates Sorabji's admiration for Busoni's *Carmen Fantasy* and, moreover, provides his explicit verbal commentary on Bizet's themes:

Another conspicuous example of Busoni's overshadowing power, as I prefer to call it, is the *Fantasia da Camera* upon motives from Bizet's *Carmen*. *The gay and occasionally rather trivial Bizet tunes* become indescribably "charged" and even sinister, undergoing a sort of dissolution and transformation in a manner that is indescribably fascinating and haunting to the mind of the suitably "attuned" listener, so that at the end of the process one almost says to oneself- such is the impression of ineluctable and immense power behind the whole musical business- this is a psychological invasion in musical terms! (my italics)⁷⁰

A further motivational source was Sorabji's attraction to Spanish music and the rhythm of the habanera in particular. It is interesting to note, in fact, that even before Busoni's *Carmen Fantasy* was conceived, Sorabji had already completed the works *Quasi habanera* (1917) and *Fantaisie espagnole* (1919).⁷¹

Like Liszt before him, Sorabji frequently expressed his displeasure with the state of music criticism in general, a sentiment revealed in the article "On The Value of Professional Criticism" (from *Around Music*),⁷² and also in a letter to his friend Frank Holliday, in which he mentions the scarcity of perceptive writers on

England: The Sorabji Music Archive, 1991), pp. iii-iv.

⁷⁰Sitsky, p. 76.

⁷¹Roberge, *Introduction*, p. ii.

⁷²Sorabji, *Around Music*, pp. 167-71.

Like Liszt before him, Sorabji frequently expressed his displeasure with the state of music criticism in general, a sentiment revealed in the article "On The Value of Professional Criticism" (from *Around Music*),⁷² and also in a letter to his friend Frank Holliday, in which he mentions the scarcity of perceptive writers on music (with reference to Ronald Stevenson): "He (Stevenson) is as intelligent and perceptive as they are made... Extraordinary in a professional writer on music!"⁷³ The following section will examine the critical role performed by Sorabji's pastiche in light of 1) the aspects of commentary contained in Busoni's Fantasy and 2) Sorabji's own verbal commentary on Bizet's themes.

(a) ALTERATIONS/AMPLIFICATION

(i) Harmonic Alterations

One of the most immediate and striking alterations introduced by Sorabji is the harmonic transformation of Bizet's original habanera bass figure (which originally outlined a D minor chord), into a series of chords marked by the jarring dissonance of the flattened chord falling on the second beat of each measure:

⁷²Sorabji, *Around Music*, pp. 167-71.

⁷³Original letter quoted with the kind permission of the McMaster University Archives (from the Holliday/Sorabji Collection).

The dissonant effect is so startling (especially following the luxuriant manner of the opening cadenza), that the figure projects a humorous quality, as if mocking the simplicity of Bizet's original motif. Further alterations to the habanera motif occur at measure 58, where Sorabji once again startles the listener by shifting the lowest note of the figure from D to A.

An even more convincing form of harmonic commentary occurs at the conclusion of the pastiche, at which point Sorabji introduces an intriguing twist by ending the work not on a standard authentic cadence (as in Bizet's version), but rather on an unresolved chord:

The image shows a musical score for Sorabji, measure 102. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff begins with a fermata over a chord, with a slur extending from it down to the bass staff. The bass staff contains a series of rhythmic figures, each marked with an accent (>). The first four figures are eighth notes, and the last two are quarter notes. A dynamic marking of *PPP* (pianissimo) is placed above the first quarter note of the fifth figure. The piece concludes with a *secco* marking and a fermata over a final chord. A *rit.* (ritardando) marking is placed below the final chord. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4.

Example 3-23: Sorabji, m. 102.

The tonal ambiguity created by Sorabji's ending invites immediate comparison with Bizet's unambiguous tonal scheme (particularly Bizet's overwhelming proliferation

of tonic harmonies). By denying the affirmation of the tonic key at the end of the work, it is as if he is deliberately "pulling the harmonic rug out from under Bizet's feet!"

(ii) Expressive Markings

The nature of Sorabji's tempo and character markings reveals a clear intent to create a highly divergent atmosphere from Bizet's model. At the beginning of the piece, for example, Bizet's original marking of "Allegretto quasi Andantino" is transformed into an expressive marking with much more dynamic implications: "Ad libitum. Avec fantaisie et extravagance. Sans tempo."⁷⁴

(iii) Thematic Alterations

(a) Register Change

As was the case with Busoni's fantasy, Sorabji continuously varies the register in which the main theme is stated. One notable instance occurs at measure 60 of the pastiche, where Sorabji has transplanted the theme from the uppermost voice to the middle register of the piano (while elaborate figuration fills the upper part) (see example 3-24).

⁷⁴Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji, *Pastiche on the Habanera from "Carmen" by Bizet*, Critical Edition by Marc-André Roberge (Bath, England: The Sorabji Music Archive, 1991), p. 1.

(b) Fragmentation/Combination of Themes

Throughout the pastiche, fragments of Bizet's themes appear and disappear, fading in and out of Sorabji's complex contrapuntal fabric. Measures 39-40 are typical of this type of thematic fragmentation, where a statement of the chorus "Prends garde à toi!" is followed immediately by a descending

Example 3-24: Sorabji, mm. 57-60.

chromatic fragment alluding to the main theme (see Example 3-25). Sorabji's juxtaposition of themes invokes immediate comparison with the thematic manipulation exemplified by Busoni's fantasy. Interestingly, while Busoni employed a vertical combination of themes (following the "Liszt-Thalberg" tradition), Sorabji adopted a different approach by successively fusing two themes together horizontally. A further example of this type of thematic treatment occurs at mm. 9-

13 of the Pastiche, where the ending of the main theme is replaced by the melodic outline of the Chorus "Prends garde à toi!" (see Example 3-26).

(c) Extension of Themes

In certain instances, Sorabji has extended Bizet's original thematic material in a manner not unlike the melodic amplification found in Liszt's "Moja

Example 3-25: Sorabji, mm. 39-42.

Example 3-26: Sorabji, mm. 9-13.

"Pieszczołka" transcription. A case in point is the one-measure extension of "Prends garde à toi," which occurs at m. 38 of the pastiche (see Example 3-27).

Example 3-27: Sorabji, mm. 35-42.

(b) RECOMPOSITIONS

Sorabji's pastiche represents such a complete transformation of Bizet's original that the entire piece may be regarded as an exercise in recomposition. Nevertheless, several instances are especially illustrative in this regard. Aside from the opening and closing cadenzas (comprised almost entirely of newly composed material of improvisatory character), other prime specimens of recomposition include the free treatment of the main theme (mm. 5-21) and Carmen's "Si tu ne m'aimes pas" (mm. 49-56) (see Example 3-28).⁷⁵

Even in instances where complete statements of Bizet's themes are readily apparent, they are inevitably engulfed by a wave of "Sorabjian" figuration which obscures their original identity, creating passages which bear a closer resemblance to original material than transcriptions. The effect of this type of figuration, when combined with Sorabji's thematic alterations and harmonic innovations, is to transform the character of the original work to an even greater extent than the mystical atmosphere created in Busoni's fantasy. Donald Garvelmann has described the peculiar ambience emanating from Sorabji's pastiche as follows:

We might suspect, hearing Sorabji's whimsical romp with Bizet, that Carmen's tobacco factory has moved to the marijuana field, for the Spanish tart's famous aria is treated

⁷⁵Roberge, *Introduction*, p. iii.

to an astonishing assortment of contrapuntal imitation, distorted melody line, and coruscating embellishment.⁷⁶

Sorabji's pastiche thus reflects a desire to exploit new possibilities for Bizet's original material and reflects upon Bizet's work in the following ways:

- 1) it anticipates new thematic possibilities for the original work;
- 2) invites comparison with the static quality of Bizet's themes and
- 3) reflects upon Bizet's unambiguous harmonic plan, with its overwhelming proliferation of tonic chords.

While most of these criticisms closely coincide with the aspects of commentary contained in Busoni's fantasy, Sorabji's thoughts are, in many respects, revealed in a highly divergent manner from Busoni's commentary. While Busoni clothes the original themes in finely tailored suits, endowing them with a magnificence never possessed by the originals, Sorabji's thematic treatment is one of musical camouflage, whereby each thematic statement is elaborately disguised and, in some instances, thoroughly hidden amidst dense figuration. As Garvelmann has noted, with respect to Sorabji's pastiche, "Some listeners find the piece hilarious, while others feel it contains an insistent attempt to annihilate the theme."⁷⁷ The relationship between the Habanera transcriptions of Busoni and Sorabji is closely analogous to a comparison between two music reviewers, both of

⁷⁶Donald Garvelmann, *Liner Notes to Musical Heritage Society MHS 4271* (1980), cols. 2-3.

⁷⁷Garvelmann, cols. 2-3.

whom may ultimately expose similar strengths and weaknesses in a given work or performance, but inevitably express these ideas through the individualistic writing styles of each.

The image displays a musical score for Sorabji, spanning measures 47 to 56. The score is written for piano and consists of three systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The first system (measures 47-50) features complex rhythmic patterns with triplets and a large slur over the right-hand part. The second system (measures 51-53) includes a fortissimo (f) dynamic marking and continues with intricate textures. The third system (measures 54-56) begins with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic and includes a decrescendo (dim.) marking. The score is characterized by dense harmonic textures and complex rhythmic structures.

Example 3-28: Sorabji, mm. 47-56.

The following chart will serve as a summary of the primary means of commentary employed in the "Habanera" transcriptions of Busoni and Sorabji, and will also provide a synopsis of the aspects of Bizet's original work revealed by each.

Table 2: Busoni's "Carmen" versus Sorabji's "Carmen."

	BUSONI	SORABJI
HARMONIC/TONAL STRUCTURE	Introduces greater tonal variety by modulating from D flat major to D minor.	Transforms many of Bizet's original harmonies into dissonant chords and ends the piece on an unresolved chord.
RHYTHMIC ALTERATIONS	Varies rhythmic pattern considerably in thematic repetitions.	Relatively minor rhythmic changes.
THEMATIC ALTERATIONS	Exploits the polyphonic potential of Bizet's themes using devices such as: 1) mirroring of thematic statements 2) vertical juxtaposition of themes.	Manipulates Bizet's themes by: 1) fragmentation 2) extension, and 3) horizontal juxtaposition of themes.
EXPRESSIVE MARKINGS	Introduces greater quantity and variety of expressive markings which serve the function of transforming the character of the original.	Similar treatment as Busoni, although the resulting atmosphere is highly divergent.
RECOMPOSITION	Omits substantial passages from Bizet's original containing numerous unaltered repetitions, embellishes original thematic material with elaborate figuration.	Surrounds original thematic material with elaborate figuration (unlike Busoni, Sorabji's figuration creates the effect of disguising rather than highlighting Bizet's original themes).
OVERALL COMMENTARY ON BIZET'S ORIGINAL WORK	Comments on: 1) Tonal scheme 2) Unvaried repetition 3) Thematic repetitions.	Comments on: 1) Unambiguous harmonic plan 2) Unvaried repetition 3) Thematic repetitions.

As the preceding examinations have sought to illustrate, the aspect of critical commentary inherent in the process of transcription remains as insightful in twentieth-century piano transcriptions as it is in the transcriptions of J. S. Bach. By shedding new light on the original works in new and multifarious ways, the piano transcription as a genre has stated a convincing case for its own existence as a vital artistic medium. The enduring value of the transcription's critical potential is perhaps best summarized in the words of Stephen Davies:

How is it then that transcription saves itself from the charge of plagiarism or sycophantism, despite its creative aspect? That is, why do we regard sometimes as praiseworthy the transcriber's presentation of the composer's ideas when that presentation is perhaps gratuitous? The answer...is this: transcription is valued not merely as a report of, but also as a commentary on, the composer's original work and, as such, it continues to be of interest even where the original is accessible.⁷⁸

⁷⁸Davies, p. 226.

CONCLUSIONS

The art of piano transcription, a genre which had its genesis in the keyboard intabulations of the fourteenth century, represents a historical trend spanning over 700 years of diverse musical styles and rapidly evolving musical developments. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, for example, a rising interest in different types of instrumental music resulted in the practice of transcribing music from one instrumental medium to another, while the rapid rise of the piano as the instrument of choice in both the home and concert hall of the nineteenth century exerted a direct influence upon the volume of transcriptions written for that instrument. Consequently, the apex of the transcription's prominence was reached during that time period. Even in our own epoch, the art of piano transcription continues to thrive, despite its apparent disregard for the quest for originality held in such high esteem by many twentieth-century artists.

For much of its history, the transcription has served many important practical purposes in the development of music. J. S. Bach, following in the tradition of earlier intabulation practices, utilized transcription both as a means of attaining new music for his own study purposes as well as a valuable learning tool in the art of composition. The transcriptions of Liszt, Thalberg, and others served the musical world as nineteenth-century equivalents of recordings, making the vocal, orchestral and operatic repertoire accessible to a

much larger audience than would otherwise be possible, and also resulted in revolutionary advances in piano technique as well as substantial additions to the pianist's repertoire.

The transcription's value, however, extends far beyond purely practical considerations and, as Busoni noted, the genre represents "an independent art"⁷⁹ which must be judged on its intrinsic musical qualities rather than pre-conceived biases.⁸⁰ When evaluated objectively, transcriptions often reveal a high degree of creativity and, in many instances, are aurally indistinguishable from original piano works. Furthermore, many transcriptions sound as convincingly original as the orchestral, vocal or operatic models from which they were born. The creativity inherent in the art of transcription is perhaps best exemplified in the works of twentieth-century transcribers, who not only lack the utilitarian stimuli of previous generations of transcribers, but have also displayed an unprecedented degree of creative autonomy in their transcriptions.⁸¹

The most convincing evidence for the transcription's artistic merit, however, ultimately lies in its role as a vehicle for critical commentary in which

⁷⁹Busoni, *Letters*, p. 229.

⁸⁰Certain biases have coloured our twentieth-century conception of the genre, including the trend toward strict adherence to the "Urtext" score.

⁸¹As evidenced by Sorabji's *Pastiche on the Habanera from "Carmen"* by Bizet and Cage's *Cheap Imitation*.

one artist's ideas are reflected through the creativity of another, thus stimulating reconsideration of the original work. Like the art of transcription itself, the critical role of the transcriber may be envisaged as a lengthy period of activity extending from Bach's contrapuntal amplification of Vivaldi to Sorabji's twentieth-century transformation of Bizet. In some cases, such as Sorabji's *Pastiche on the Habanera from "Carmen" by Bizet*, the aspects of commentary contained in the transcription serve as a musical affirmation of the transcriber's stated views on the original composer or work. In other instances, such as Liszt's transcription of the song "Moja Pieszczotka" by Chopin, the critical nature of the transcription is expressed with no evident correlation to the transcriber's stated views on the original composer, but rather as a natural outgrowth of the transcriber's creativity.

By altering and recomposing the original models, transcribers offer insightful commentary on many aspects of composition, including the melodic content, tonal plan, thematic development, length, rhythmic figuration and emotional intensity of the original work. The uniquely creative means of expressing these comments represents a radical departure from all other modes of music criticism. Thus the transcription has the potential to reveal new and provocative insights into the original works which may otherwise have remained latent and unexplored. It is for this reason, perhaps more than any

other, that the transcription has outlived its practical applications and found a permanent place in the musical repertoire as an independent art form.

Appendix A: J. S. BACH'S CLAVIER TRANSCRIPTIONS OF INSTRUMENTAL WORKS (EXCLUDING SELF-TRANSCRIPTIONS)⁸²

Original Work	Transcription
Concerto for Four Violins and Cello Continuo, Op. 3, No. 9, by Antonio Vivaldi.	Clavier Concerto No. 1 in D, BWV 972 (1708-11).
Concerto for Solo Violin with Two Violins, Cello & Harpsichord (Op. 7, Pt. 2, No. 2, by Vivaldi.	Clavier Concerto No. 2 in G, BWV 973 (1708-11).
Concerto for Oboe, by Benedetto Marcello.	Clavier Concerto No. 3 in D minor, BWV 974 (1708-11).
Concerto Grosso for Three Violins, Viola, Cello & Organ, Op. 4, No. 6, by Vivaldi.	Clavier Concerto No. 4 in G minor, BWV 975 (1708-11).
Concerto for Solo Violin, Op. 3, No. 12, by Vivaldi.	Clavier Concerto No. 5 in C, BWV 976 (1708-11).
Concerto for unknown instrument, possibly by Marcello.	Clavier Concerto No. 6 in C, BWV 977 (1708-11).
Concerto in G for Violin, Op. 3, No. 3, by Vivaldi.	Clavier Concerto No. 7 in F, BWV 978 (1708-11).
Work by unknown composer.	Clavier Concerto No. 8 in B minor, BWV 979.
Concerto in B flat for Three Violins, Viola, Cello & Organ, Op. 4, No. 1, by Vivaldi.	Clavier Concerto No. 9 in G, BWV 980.
Work by unknown composer.	Clavier Concerto No. 10 in C minor, BWV 981.
Concerto by Prince Johann-Ernst.	Clavier Concerto No. 11 in B flat, BWV 982.
Work by unknown composer.	Clavier Concerto No. 12 in G minor, BWV 983.

⁸²Carrell, pp. 244-7.

Original Work	Transcription
Concerto by Prince Johann-Ernst.	Clavier Concerto No. 13 in C, BWV 984.
Work by Telemann.	Clavier Concerto No. 14 in G minor, BWV 985.
Work by unknown composer.	Clavier Concerto No. 15 in G major, BWV 986.
Concerto by Prince Johann-Ernst.	Clavier Concerto No. 16 in D minor, BWV 987.

**Appendix B: FRANZ LISZT'S TRANSCRIPTIONS OF SONGS
(EXCLUDING SELF-TRANSCRIPTIONS)⁸³**

Original Composer	Transcription
Donizetti	<p><i>Nuits d'Eté à Pausilippe</i> (1838):</p> <p>1) Barcarola, 2) Notturmo, 3) Canzone Napoetana.</p>
Mercadante	<p><i>Les Soirées Italienne</i> (1838):</p> <p>1) La Primavera, 2) Il Galop, 3) Il Pastore Svizzero, 4) La Serenata del Marianaro, 5) Il Brindisi, 6) La Zingarella.</p>
Rossini	<p><i>Soirées Musicales</i> (1838):</p> <p>1) La Promessa, 2) La Regatta Veneziana, 3) L'Invito, 4) La Gita in Gondola, 5) Il Rimprovero, 6) La Pastorella delle Alpi, 7) La Partenza, 8) La Pesca, 9) La Danza, 10) La Serenata, 11) L'Orgia, 12) Li Marinari.</p>

⁸³Sitwell, pp. 346-9.

Original Composer	Transcription
Schubert	<p>Songs (1838-56):</p> <p>Abschied; Am Meer; Der Atlas; Auf dem Wasser zu singen; Aufenhalt; Ave Maria; Die böse Farbe; Der Doppelgänger; Erbkönig; Erstarrung; Das Fischermädchen; Die Forelle; Frühlingsglaube; Frühlings-Sehnsucht; Die Gestirne; Gretchen am Spinnrade; Gute Nacht; 'Hark, Hark! the lark!; Himmelsfunken; Hymne; Ihr Bild; Im Dorfe; In der Ferne; Der Jäger; Die junge Nonne; Kriegers Ahnung; Der Leiermann; Liebesbotschaft; Lindenbaum; Litanei; Lob der Thränen; Mädchensklage; Meeresstille; Der Müller am Bach; Muth; Die Nebensonnen; Die Post; Rastlose Liebe; Die Rose; Sei mir gegrüsst; Die Stadt; Ständchen; Sterbeglöcklein; Der Stürmische Morgen; Die Taubenpost; Täuschung; Trockne Blume; Ungeduld; Der Wanderer; Das Wandern; Wasserfluth; Wohin?</p>
Dessauer	Three Songs (1847).
Weber	A song from <i>Preciosa</i> (1847); Leier und Schwert (1848); Lützows wilde Jagd (1848); Schlummerlied (1849).
Schumann	<p>Widmung (1849).</p> <p>An den Sonnenschein (1860).</p> <p>Provinzialkisches Minnelied (1881).</p>
Beethoven	<i>An die ferne Geliebte</i> , song cycle (six songs) (1850).
Hans von Bülow	Tanto gentile (Canzonetta) (1860).

Original Composer	Transcription
Chopin	Six Chants polonais (1860).
Mozart	Ave Verum (1860).
Arcadelt	Allelujah; Ave Maria (1861).
Meyerbeer	Le Moine (1870).
Schumann	Frühlingsnacht (1872).
Robert Franz	Twelve songs (1875).
Schumann (Robert and Clara)	Thirteen songs (1875).
Spohr	A song (1876).
A. Goldschmidt	Two songs (1880).
A. Rubinstein	Two songs (1881): 1) O wenn es doch immer, 2) Der Asra.
Count Wielhorsky	Autrefois (Romance) (1885).

Appendix C: FERRUCCIO BUSONI'S OPERATIC FANTASIES⁸⁴

Original Composer	Fantasy
Peter Cornelius	Fantasia über Motive aus <i>Der Barbier von Bagdad</i> (1886).
Mozart-Liszt	Fantasia über zwei Motive aus W.A. Mozarts <i>Die Hochzeit des Figaro</i> (1912). Réminiscences de <i>Don Juan</i> . Concert Fantasia über Motive aus Mozarts <i>Don Giovanni</i> (1918). ⁸⁵
Bizet	Kammer-Fantasia über <i>Carmen</i> (1922).
Mozart	Ouvertüre zur Oper <i>Die Zauberflöte</i> (1923).
Wagner	Marcia Funebre in Morte di Siegfried nel Drama musicale <i>Il Crepuscolo degli Dei</i> (1926).

⁸⁴Sitsky, pp. 356-7.

⁸⁵Both of these fantasies are based on Liszt's earlier versions of Mozart's original works.

**Appendix D:
KAIKHOSRU SHAPURJI SORABJI'S OPERATIC FANTASIES⁸⁶**

Original Composer	Fantasy
Bizet	Pastiche on Bizet's "Habanera" from <i>Carmen</i> (1922).
Rimsky-Korsakov	Pastiche on Rimsky-Korsakov's "Hindu Merchant's Song" from <i>Sadko</i> (1922).
Richard Strauss	Concert Paraphrase of the Closing Scene from R. Strauss's <i>Salome</i> (1947).

⁸⁶Rapoport, pp. 186-7.

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