

Ferruccio Busoni – The Six Sonatinas:

An Artist's Journey 1909-1920 – his language and his world

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Part I of an in-depth appreciation of these greatly significant piano works

The Six Sonatinas, written between 1910 and 1921, are Busoni's finest and most compelling collection of compositions. Although they are not programmatic in any aspect, the set tells a cohesive story of an artist's journey. These are deeply personal, quasi-autobiographical compositions: each Sonatina serves as chronicle, and marks a gathering and culmination of Busoni's spiritual searchings and growth. Fluid and timeless, the Sonatinas also encompass Busoni's temporal world. Beginnings and departures are marked. They are a diary of contentment, of aggressive experimentation, of the war and chaos, and peace and reconciliation. The Sonatinas are contemplative works, and although all end softly, they are unreservedly expressive, with abundant contrasts and highly developed instrumental writing. The Sonatinas are also premonitory; they foretell Busoni's orchestral and operatic language as it expands, evolves, and crystalizes.

Busoni writes to his wife, Gerda, from Color-

ado Springs: "No year in my life has been so full up as this one which is just over: the richest in work, experiences and achievements – and I feel that I am still going upwards. Everything good, my Gerda, is with us." The date is 1 April, 1910, and the composer marks his 44th birthday surveying a year of fertile and extravagant artistic discovery.

In December 1908, Busoni composes the sparkling miniature for piano, *Nuit de Noël*, as a musical offering to the New Year. He often acknowledges Christmases, New Years, and other important dates with musical works. *Nuit de Noël* is a masterpiece of colour and style, an auspicious beginning for the New Year. After completing his concert tours in 1909, Busoni begins one of his most prolific and intense periods of artistic achievement.

From June until October 1909, his efforts appear impossible:

Berceuse, for piano. June 1909

Fantasia nach Johann Sebastian Bach, for piano. June 1909

Preludietto, Fughetta ed Esercizio Book 1 An die Jugend, for piano. June 1909

Preludio, Fuga e Fuga figurata Book 2 An die Jugend, for piano. July 1909

Giga, Bolero e Variazione Book 3 An die Jugend, for piano. July 1909

Concertante transcription of Schoenberg's Klavierstück, op. 11 no. 2. July 1909

Introduzione e Capriccio (Paganinesco) & Epilogo Book 4 An die Jugend, for piano. August 1909

Berceuse élégiaque, for orchestra. October 1909

The summer's accomplishments also include several transcriptions of Bach's *Chorale Preludes* and a musical comedy libretto titled *Frau Potiphar*. In addition, Busoni writes his explorative treatise, *Attempt at an Organic Notation for the Pianoforte*, and prepares new material for an anticipated second edition of his *Outline of a New Aesthetic of Music*. He begins orchestration on his important opera, *Die Brautwahl* and in July, completes Act 1 part 1.

The *Berceuse élégiaque* is inscribed in memory of Anna Busoni, and *Fantasia nach Johann Sebastian Bach* is composed for Ferdinando Busoni. Both parents died a few months apart in 1909, and these pieces are personal eulogies, musical gestures of bereavement and mourning. The remaining compositions are dedicated to the young generation of composers.

Sonatina, 1910, is born from *An die Jungen*. The composer, Bernard van Dieren, offers to clarify the misleading title, *An die Jugend*. He writes, "Busoni intended them as visionary sketches of aspects which, in his belief, music was to assume and dedicated them to Youth which would see the full growth. On Youth all his hopes centered." Van Dieren adroitly concludes:



“He did not resist the temptation to leave possibilities of confusion. It points to a didactic strain in his mind which avoided the danger of pedantry by an impish sense of humour, and by a romantic delight in erudite, poetic complexities.” Busoni explains the title to Schoenberg in 1909, *An die Jugend* is intended to signify that the publications are conceived for the new generation,” and as with his Elegies, Busoni dedicates the pieces to promising young musicians: Josef Turczinski, Louis Theodor Gruenberg, Leo Sirota, Louis Closson, and Emile R. Blanchet. Busoni writes, in his forward to *An die Jugend*: “My love belongs to the young and shall always belong to them. Their impossible plans, their open-minded questions, disarming criticisms, defiant contradictions and fast-beating hearts ... Very fine, but unfortunately optimistic. Youth is mostly conservative and its promise is often deceptive ... the ‘best’ stand alone in every generation.” Busoni speaks as both the eternal optimist and the worldly cynic. The opposing forces of Faust, the seeker of knowledge, and Mephistophiles, the incessant doubter, become more pronounced as the composer matures. This duality forged opportunistic energy and balance, giving shape to his operas and mature works.

Busoni writes, “Composing only deserves the name when it busies itself ever with new problems.” He hopes a new generation will further explore and develop the musical aspects he foresees as significant in the development of 20th century music. Busoni is forever Janus-faced, and the gift for future generations is also homage and memorial to generations past. Early on, Ferdinando Busoni introduces his wonder child to Bach, and during adolescence, Busoni completes a 15-month course of study with his only formal composition teacher, Wilhelm Mayer-Rémy. This teacher fortifies an already marvellous gift of counterpoint, and instills the 14-year-old with a lifelong dedication to Mozart. As Busoni grows, he initiates himself into the world of Liszt, gaining complete mastery over his technique. Ultimately, this discovery of Liszt serves as a primary model for his piano writing. Although the title *An die*

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Jugend has lighthearted connotations, the mature composer is on consecrated ground, with Bach, Mozart, and Liszt standing guard.

The four books are a devotional collage of the composer’s love of form, and polyphonic explorations, or ‘free polyphony’.

The volumes contain his original music, as well as transcribed material. Musical puzzle-games of dazzling complexity are interspersed with creative gestures, acknowledging the great masters. References to various compositions suggest musical and philosophical subtexts. ‘Free polyphony’ reigns as unrelated and related themes combine contrapuntally with breathtaking facility. Uncanny harmonies are an important side effect of these explorations.

The pieces in *An die Jugend* have a complex and cohesive relationship. For instance, Book 2 is an exercise based on the D major Prelude and Fugue from Bach’s *Well-Tempered Klavier*, Book 1. Busoni writes, in his edition of the 48 Preludes and Fugues: “The thematic relations between the Prelude and Fugue are closer than may generally be assumed; their common harmonic basis would render it possible to superimpose the one piece on the other.” The *Fuga figurata*, a contrapuntal combination of both the Prelude and Fugue, is proof of his concept. Although slight modifications occur, the work is not a technical prank, it is Busoni’s concrete demonstration in the underlying unity of Bach’s music. Another example is in Book 3, the ‘Mozart’ volume of *An die Jugend*. Busoni freely transcribes Mozart’s *Kleine Gigue*, K574. The historian Alfred Einstein relates that Mozart was in Leipzig in 1789 and inscribed this brilliant 3-voice gigue in the Court Organist Engel’s notebook as a creative homage to Bach. In the same volume, Busoni follows *Gigue* with *Bolero*, drawn from Act III of Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro*. Busoni transposes, transcribes, and re-visions Mozart’s fandango as a piano composition. The *Variatione* pushes

Mozart’s peculiar rhythms and harmonies further afield in a celebration of ‘free tonality’.

In his essay, *Value of the Transcription*, 1910, Busoni discusses the borrowing, quoting and passing on of musical themes. He asks, “But where does the transcription begin?” Busoni examines two of Liszt’s compositions, *Spanish Rhapsody*, and *Great Fantasy on Spanish Airs*. They share the same themes, and Busoni poses the question, “Which of them is the transcription? The one which was written later? But is not the first one already an arrangement of a Spanish folk-song? That Spanish Fantasy commences with a theme which tallies with the dance motive in Mozart’s *Figaro* and Mozart took this from someone else too. It is not his, it is transcribed. Moreover the same theme appears again in Gluck’s ballet *Don Juan*.” After more investigations, he reveals, “We have been able to bring the motive material of both Spanish Fantasies by Liszt in conjunction with the names of Mozart, Gluck, Corelli, Glinka, Mahler. My humble name too, is now added.” *An die Jugend* is the realisation of Busoni’s ‘Eternal Calendar of Music’, and by extending the musical language of Bach and Mozart, he furthers ‘free polyphony’ and ‘free tonality’.

Antony Beaumont notes an entry in Busoni’s diary, 5 October, 1909, “*An die Jugend!* The source of the palimpsest.” Busoni often references Thomas De Quincey’s *Suspira de Profundis*. An essay from this collection, *The Palimpsest of the Human Brain*, is a meditation on consciousness and memory. De Quincey explains the term Palimpsest: “Hence it arose in the middle ages, as a considerable object for chemistry, to discharge the writing from the roll, and thus to make it available for a new succession of thoughts. The Greek tragedy, the monkish

legend, the knightly romance, each has ruled its own period.” Readings of obscured texts were made possible by chemists in the early 1800s. De Quincey comments, “They are not dead, but sleeping ... the Grecian tragedy had seemed to be displaced, but was not displaced, by the monkish legend; and the monkish legend had

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seemed to be displaced, but was not displaced, by the knightly romance." He examines the phenomenon whereby unrelated texts intermingle, invade and compete. He poses the paradox: "What would you think, fair reader, of a problem such as this — to write a book which should be sense for your own generation, nonsense for the next, should revive into sense for the next after that, but again become nonsense for the fourth; and so on by alternate successions, sinking into night or blazing into day...But really it is a problem not harder apparently than to bid a generation kill, but so that a subsequent generation may call back into life; bury, but so that posterity may command to rise again."

De Quincey links the palimpsest to human memory and consciousness: "What else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain ...Everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings, have fallen upon your brain softly as light. Each succession has seemed to bury all that went before. And yet, in reality, not one has been extinguished." These texts align with Busoni's aesthetics, and in 1916, Carl Jung will define his theory of the 'Collective Unconscious', evoking De Quincey's writings, as well as Busoni's 'Eternal Calendar of Music'. Musical references in the *An die Jugend* volumes existed throughout the ages, simultaneously credited or linked to composers from many different generations. Busoni is the time traveller, unearthing past treasures, revealing hidden mysteries, and teaching their value. By extending the language, he becomes a beginner, adding another dimension to the parchment, and passing the torch forward.

In 1910, at the time Busoni posts the letter to Gerda, he is touring America. Seeds for the *Indian Fantasy* and *Red Indian Diary* are planted, the *Grosse Fuga* is complete and the *Fantasia Contrapuntistica* will be finished within a few months. He lists tours of England, Switzerland and Austria along with his American tour, where he performs 35 times. In August of that year, he reworks sections of *An die Jugend* to form his first *Sonatina*.

The Six Sonatinas are Busoni's greatest series of compositions and contain his very personnel and uniquely identifiable voice. This title, however, creates confusion and a predilection for misunderstanding.



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ing. The general assumption connotes works of diminutive form; 'Sonatina' usually describes 'studies' for young musicians, or small scale Sonatas. With these youthful implications, it is easy to comprehend the humorous, yet meaningful segue, from *An die Jugend* to *Sonatina*.

Busoni does not intend to confuse or alienate amateurs and students with a misleading title; selling music is already challenging. Allegorically, a beginner

would be a journeyman, an explorer and artist. In his unrelenting push for growth and discovery, he questions as a way of life. Busoni has a personal horror of looking back and thrills to imagine himself a novice. A critic, writing for *Musical America* in 1910, understands Busoni's meaning: "Certainly this description has not been selected without real justification, but probably also not without a slightly ironical undercurrent of thought. A 'Sonatina' means a piece for beginners, and in ►

this *Sonatina*, the composer may have regarded himself as the beginner or founder of a new system of harmonies."

Busoni writes, "The *Sonatina* is merely a re-working of the *Preludietto*, *Fughetta*, *Esercizio* and *Epilogo* from *An die Jugend*, organically condensed. Perhaps the maturest of my piano pieces." Throughout the composer's life, he is compelled to revisit and search particular material until finally, its creative potential is depleted. *Sonatina* is from Books 1 and 4 of *An die Jugend* and is all thematically related. Although Busoni never programmes all four Books, he performs *Sonatina*. His refined chiselling of the larger work produces a sensational concert piece. Busoni gives the first performance at the Musikhochschule, Basle, on 30 September, 1910. Dedicated to Rudolf Ganz, *Sonatina* has striking economy of form and succinct use of thematic material. Every note is vital. As with many Busoni compositions, a listener experiences a journey; questions and solutions are worked out from the end backward. With the final move in mind, the grand master solves a chess game. Busoni masterfully secretes his methods of thematic transformation. Gestures lead in deceptively effortless fashion towards a transfiguration. A stunning improvisatory language rises out of a carefully articulated journey. Busoni never subjugates form and lyrical beauty; yet, he is not pouring 'old wine into new bottles'. The *Sonatina* integrates a complex harmonic language, derived from Busoni's 'free polyphony'. This is his style being spun. It is not abstract expressionism, impressionism, serialism, futurism or post-Wagnerianism.

Sonatina is in one-movement form, with five sections. The opening is marked *Semplice, commovente*. A fughetta follows, *Più tranquillo*, and the third section is *Allegretto elegante*. The fourth section, marked *Teneramente, come da principio*, has a brief return and disintegration of the opening theme. This leads to a mystical and unearthly section, the complete *Epilogo* from *An die Jugend*.

Although the initial melodic material is marked *semplice*, the punctilious phrase markings and ensuing harmonic improvisations are not easy. The theme, in the

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treble, evokes a pulse: two repeating tones follow in *diminuendo*, while the left hand keeps a gentle, flowing pace with a two-note slur – the pulse of an artist walking serenely through his world, quietly observing, commenting and taking stock. A harmonic

journey is undertaken. Many of Busoni's interesting scale patterns are planted beneath the theme and shimmer below the surface. The simple melodic material and supple accompaniment are perfect foils for a calm but deliberate stroll off the well-worn path. Secure ground begins to shift. There is a restlessness beneath the heartbeat. After a climax incorporates and pre-states the fughetta subject, the pulse sounds alone with pedal, suspending and extending the contemplative atmosphere.

In the fughetta *Più tranquillo*, the subject is plainly stated, intimate and un-sentimental. As Busoni explores familiar territory, traditional harmony recedes when small chromatic scales in 4-note groupings enter. Patterns of shifting whole-tone and half-tone combinations, extending to broken major and minor thirds, crawl under and above the subject. The music leaves sure-footed earth bound harmony with dizzying embroidery and certain flight. The fughetta theme remains a *cantus firmus*, the voice of reason. Foundation combines with flight, and the two elements of earth and air are magically blended. The section ends with a sumptuous small cadenza recalling the improvisatory finale of an ornamental Baroque cadenza, passages Busoni cherished. In an autobiographical moment, the fughetta subject returns chorale-like, sonorously chiming an unambiguous, traditional cadence.

This transitional cadence into the third section is Busoni's prayerful acknowledgment following intense explorations. He respectfully nods to past Masters, tips his hat, and salutes the key of C major. The beginners' key accentuates how far he has traveled and serves to remind younger generations that much discovery remains. His first *Elegy*, *Nach der Wendung*, symbolically begins in C and spins a mystical and spiritual harmonic journey outward. Similarly, the *Sonatina* returns to C major, his mantra for other explorers:

build upon your ancestral foundations.

The *Allegretto elegante* rises from the final, resonating C major chord of the cadence. The right hand is in 4, the left hand is *quasi-Valse* 3 metre. The right hand explores the whole-tone scale, the left hand stays rooted to defined key centres, all the while transforming the colour and direction of the right hand. The fughetta subject remains in the middle voice, rhythmically and harmonically freed from the outer voices. The Lisztian figurations are marvellously designed. The *Allegretto elegante* is marked *leggiero* throughout, even when *forte*, and presents an exhilarating invention of the waltz. This style of *scherzo-waltz* is one of Busoni's trademarks. The printed music appears sparse, yet these spectral waltzes are never straightforward. Some examples of his fantastical original waltzes are the fleeting *Die Nächtlichen* (the ghost waltz from the *Elegies*) and the early op.20, op.30a and op.33a. Other undiscovered miniature jewels can be found among the short pieces of Busoni's *Klavierübung*. The *Allegretto elegante* is homage to Chopin, but the debt to Liszt is unquestionable. Busoni's waltzes are the children of Liszt's *Forgotten Waltzes* as well as *Mephisto*. They are certainly the predecessors of Ravel's *La Valse*.

In the final section, the theme returns briefly, followed by the *Epilogo* from *An die Jugend*. Here the composer speaks entirely in his own language. The fughetta subject is present, lyrical and intact, even as Busoni opens the gate to his secret subterranean world. Colours, pedalling effects, and harmonies entice the listener into a realm of magic. The alchemist spins the whole-tone scale, spilling a trace of liquid silver, trills float disembodied, and glistening modulations stretch and pull. With each statement of the theme, he shows a different path – wonders await. Throughout, bell-tones echo C major. Born within this framework, Busoni defines his creativity and imagination. In the closing moments of *Sonatina*, the noble simplicity of a cadence acts as reminder that past and future are one.

Busoni posts a letter to his wife from Dayton, Ohio, on 3 March, 1910. He encloses his essay, *The Realm of Music*, intended as an epilogue to *Outline of a New Aesthetic of Music*. The essay is undoubtedly a companion piece for *Sonatina*. "Come, follow me into the realm of

music. Here is the iron fence which separates the earthly from the eternal... Here there is no end to the astonishment, and yet from the beginning we feel it is homelike ... Unthought-of scales extend like bands from one world to another... Now you realise how planets and hearts are one, that nowhere can there be an end or an obstacle; that infinity lives completely and indivisibly in the spirit of all beings."

Busoni writes to Gerda, March 1911, "I think *with serious joy* of the journey home and I have the feeling that my most important period is beginning and that it is, I suppose, the *definitive* one. The joy is not less because it is serious; on the contrary, it is deeper. It is deep and beautiful, but it has lost all its youthfulness, like Rembrandt's later self-portraits."

Sonatina seconda, dedicated to the pianist Mark Hambourg, is composed in the summer of 1912, and heralds a period of energetic experimentation. For the 46-year-old composer, this signals the end of a nearly two year compositional silence. A period of rigorous concert tours allows him time to complete his opera *Die Brautwahl*. He debates a form for the Indian melodies, reads voraciously, and anticipates his future path after the dynamic explorations of 1909 and 1910.

The first *Sonatina* is lyrical and transparent, sensual in its flowing lines. By comparison, *Sonatina seconda* is a powerful, kinetic work. The contrast of light to dark is also useful here. *Sonatina seconda* is a tour de force, decidedly experimental for its time. This composition contains much of what is new and rarely tried, in a compelling form. Generations remain captivated by its spell, and the piece is a treasured masterwork for instrumentalists and composers. Known commonly as 'the occult', the word appears for the first time in a Busoni score, the composer later admits the piano piece is a *Dr Faust* study. *Sonatina seconda* enters the senses as tableau in contemplation of worlds beyond our own.

The printed page forcefully announces daring changes within the composer. There is no key signature or time signature. A postscript at the bottom of the first page instructs the interpreter that accidentals apply only once, natural signs (cancellations of sharps and flats) never occur. Bar lines are used rarely and serve to mark the ends of phrases or sections.

The music is written in a virtuosic style: demanding, volatile and liquid rich. The visual score is splendid, the aural is revelatory, and the markings, *Lento occulto*, *flebile* and *lamentoso*, beckon from another dimension.

The first performance has Busoni as soloist at the Verdi Conservatoire in Milan, on 12 May, 1913. His programme notes describe the piece as 'senza tonalità'. The opening is a single line stretching two octaves, a free-tone row. Schoenberg, the Futurist movement, and Busoni's personal conjuring of his ultimate autobiographical hero, are varying influences. Busoni's relationship with Schoenberg, who returns to Berlin in the autumn of 1911, is recorded in hundreds of letters. For a time, they share rule of the Berlin avant-garde and cautiously admire each other. Their letters tell a captivating story of two artistic giants. While attempting to understand each other, the relationship is riddled with apprehension, mutual respect and a general philosophical agreement notwithstanding. The futurist movement is also reaching a broad audience at this time. Busoni shows mild interest, but remains wary of any movement proselytising an absolute manifesto. He writes, "Unfortunately I can see that these people are already becoming old-fashioned."

Sonatina seconda is published at a time when séances are in fashion and occultism is a popular topic. Busoni is an extremely charismatic, larger-than-life virtuoso, surrounded by an aura of mystery. As with Paganini and Liszt, he attracts fantastical tales. He is, in most ways, a practical man, although his artistic and spiritual temperament leaves him sensitive to nightmares and emotionally suggestive. The walking dead and gypsy-robed conjurers are not the characters Busoni gravitates towards. His letters, diaries and essays are a truer measure of the man than the myths built around him. A list of his favorite authors will include, Edgar Allen Poe, H. G. Wells, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Cervantes, and De Quincey. He believes, under special circumstances, telepathy and clairvoyance might occur, and

has already begun to write about his metaphysical concept of the 'omnipresence of Time'. In *Sonatina seconda*, Busoni's supernatural obsessions find their truest expressions as an extension of his artistic quest for perfection and fulfillment. The forces of good and evil, Mozart's *Magic Flute* and the 'Trial by Fire and Water', better exemplify his marking *occulto*. He is searching for the ideal mythical-mystical protagonist that will be his voice. This quest begins many years before *Sonatina seconda*.

Busoni endlessly deliberates the choice of his protagonist before settling on *Dr. Faust*. He is fascinated with puppet plays and loves the ambiguity of beings that possess both human and superhuman characteristics. Early on, Aladdin is explored, and he also considers the mythical magician Merlin as subject for a musical work. When Busoni is a young man, Carl Goldmark's opera *Merlin* is premiered. Busoni writes a piano fantasy on themes from the opera and is hired to produce the vocal score. Busoni often incorporates a variant on melodic material from Goldmark's opera as a motif. This motto becomes a personal musical signature in many of his compositions. The Magicians-Alchemists Leonhard and Manasse duel as opposing forces of good and evil in Busoni's musical comedy opera, *Die Brautwahl*. Leonardo and Dante are debated in a search for a truly Italian opera. Mephistopheles, the Wandering Jew, Don Juan, and Don Giovanni appear, as he tries to grasp the essence of these beings. His library holds beautiful rare books and prints depicting the superhuman mythological beings. Who best embodies the opposing forces of good and evil, and is consumed with the struggle for their soul? Who personifies the crusade for truth,

creativity, and wisdom, while in danger of dissolution, falsification and failure? These are the supernatural forces that enter the arena with *Sonatina seconda*. Ten years after publication, Busoni acknowledges that this is his first published study for *Dr. Faust*. In 1912, with years of searching behind him, *Sonatina seconda* is conjuring the soul of his hero, and serves as an incantation for the process to begin. ▶

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Busoni's music is not programmatic, however, his writing is atmospherically suggestive and produces unforgettable feeling states. *Sonatina seconda* must be considered separate from *Dr Faust*. Only hindsight reveals that musical material for the opera is developed here. That being said, the autobiographical references, attached to certain musical passages that make their way into the opera, are haunting. It is a vision of both past and future. Some material explored in the *Sonatina seconda* is later used in the opera as the 'Students' Theme'. In the opera, the students from Krakow enter Faust's study, accompanied by the 'Students' Theme'. Faust speaks, "Ah Krakow, memories of my youth!" Edward J. Dent, Busoni's biographer (published 1933), relates an incident in 1912 that mirrors these words. Busoni is at Hamburg for rehearsals of his opera *Die Brautwahl*. According to Dent, Busoni and some friends are dining in a restaurant following a rehearsal. Busoni is sitting with his head in his hands, lost in meditation. One guest begins speaking about Klagenfurt and Busoni looks up as if stricken. Trance-like, he shocks his companions, exclaiming, "Klagenfurt! Klagenfurt! Who spoke of Klagenfurt?" Everyone falls silent and later they report that Busoni painfully enunciated the word several times and said — "The ford of wailing." When asked if he ever played there, he replies, "Did I ever play there?"

Klagenfurt! It brings back all my childhood!" Busoni explains, "I was there with my parents; I was twelve years old; I was a wonder-child, and everything turned on me. We were in a hotel there and had to stay for three months, because we had no money and could not pay the bill."

Busoni is haunted by memories of an unhappy childhood. The sensitive and gifted prodigy long understood his fiduciary responsibility to his parents. Busoni's father is an abusive pedant with a furious temper and cruel demands. The child is exploited as a Tom Thumb of the piano, and exhaustive concert tours negated any serious course of education. Ferdinando Busoni incurs egregious debt and makes enemies wherever he goes, precipitating many disappointments in the young artist's life.

As a child, he longs for a future, free of his parents. From his first professional concerts, at the age of seven-and-a-half, until the death of both parents 35 years later, he is their sole means of support. His mother, Anna Wiess, is an exceptional pianist, and his father, Ferdinando, is a traveling clarinet virtuoso of natural, but unrefined gifts. Anna Busoni is in charge of her son's education until Ferdinando Busoni, after lengthy absences, gives up work when he sees that the boy has enough talent to support them all. He knows little about the piano, and Busoni describes him as being erratic in rhythm.

His father sits beside him and scrutinises every finger and note for hours; the only break is an explosive temper, which Busoni describes as, "violent in the extreme. A box on the ears would be followed by copious tears, accompanied by reproaches, threats and terrifying prophesies." Anton Rubenstein's testimonial for Ferruccio is a blunt letter of advice to Ferdinando, written in 1878 while the family was in Vienna: "The young Ferruccio Busoni has a very remarkable talent both for performance and for composition. In my opinion he ought to work seriously at music and not be forced to play in public to earn a living." Busoni's unfinished autobiography of 1909 relates how debt follows them everywhere: "The state of the exchequer was then, and always was, the weak point of my father's administration... All through my childhood and all through my youth I had to suffer... and as far as my father was concerned it never ended." As to Ferdinando's insistence that the boy study Bach in great detail, Busoni recalls that at the time of his youth in Italy, Bach is rated little higher than Carl Czerny: "How did such a man in his ambition for his son's career come to hit on the very thing that was right?"

In Vorspiel I of *Dr Faust*, the students from Krakow enter Faust's study, welcomed with warmth and generosity. This is a common posture for the recognisable figure of Busoni. Ernst Krenek recalls, "Musicians were in a minority and painters, writers, poets, architects, scientists, and a large number of miscellaneous intellectuals were all attracted by the fireworks of his fascinating soliloquy which would go on for an hour or more, before he retired ceremoniously... to attend to his creative work proper." From his book, *Music History and Ideas*, 1932, Hugo Leichtentritt writes, "In Berlin, Ferruccio Busoni was for twenty years the advocate of all ideas that aimed seriously at creating something vitally new. As an incomparable master of the piano, as a composer, conductor, teacher, essayist, and philosopher of art, Busoni was an outstanding personality of the highest artistic and intellectual type... Almost every night there was a gathering of young artists from many countries at his hospitable residence... there were heated controversies on the artistic problems of the day in which everyone spoke freely and which were given great distinction by Busoni's own *esprit* and wit,

superior understanding, mature judgement, and illuminating criticism."

By 1912, this powerful artist dominates the Berlin avant-garde and his circle of students surrounds him. He is a towering virtuoso, welcomed onto stages as a living legend. Guests and students fill his home. In this *Dr. Faust* scene, Busoni is both *grand seigneur* and young student. He is the present and the past, the disillusioned and optimistic youth, the dissolute and fulfilled adult.

Sonatina seconda's popularity rests on free-fantasy bravura, overtly emotional writing, and Busoni's intoxicating lyricism. There are confounding harmonic explorations, contrapuntal writing, and economy of material. Small cells are hidden within Busoni's long Italianate cantilena style. The canons are complex, in reverence to Bach, and the sparse perfect form confides a devotion to Mozart, all characteristics of Busoni's mature style. From Lisztian bravado, to the disquieting beginnings of *Dr Faust*, the dreamscape stream-of-conscious style of the *Elegies* implodes in full concentrated perfection. No other Busoni piano work will sound so adventurous.

Robert Freund, the composer and pianist, writes to Busoni: "The *Sonatina* took me captive at once. The very unusual harmony just suits the fantastic, mystic character of the piece, and gives the impression of a natural, spontaneous intuitiveness. I ask myself why it is I cannot get in touch with Schoenberg whilst even the most daring things you do seem quite natural to me."

The incantation begins: *Il tutto vivace, fantastico, con energia, capriccio e sentimento. Sostenuto, a mezza voce parlando.* Under this sign post and low in the bass, glowing coals and a smoldering of elements rise in a single melodic strand, leaving a trail of molten gold across two octaves: The alchemist speaks. The pianist's hands weave underneath and on top of each other, crossing from treble and bass on three staves, mixing ethers, tossing and blending elements of fire, air and water. A two-note motif is drawn from the opening incantation. The mysterious undulating broken-chord accompaniment is now more pronounced, and serves as a primary source for melodic material. Nervously, the flames begin to erupt. A fragment of the 'Students' Theme' appears in a scornful unison octave passage.

The texture becomes ruthless. Falling sevenths recall a motif from Goldmark's opera *Merlin*, announcing the arrival of the magician. A fire spout funnels upward to a full statement of the 'Students' Theme'.

The spell is cast. Marked *Opaco*, thick ominous chords enter as severe contrast to texture and color. The Merlin motif echoes in the falling sevenths of the 'Students' Theme'. The theme repeats, marked *triste*, accompanied by lamenting murmurs. The two-note 'incantation' motif is always present. Conjuring a ghost from another past, a Neapolitan-like song enters, marked *pallido*, a chilling, subconscious quote from Busoni's *Elegy, 'All' Italia!' In modo napolitano.* The harmonic underpinning is slightly broken and stuttering, assisting the vocal line. This undulating harmony, drawn from the opening of the piece, is an uneasy terra firma. The texture transforms as aural *deja vu*, a faded background of a half-remembered song, from a world long past.

A cadenza pours into the *Con fuoco, energicissimo*, where the 'Students' Theme' and the Merlin fragment entwine in Mephistophelean fury. The texture recalls Liszt's *Dante Sonata*, with metric opposition of duple and triple rhythms. The music is driven with frenzied, erratic pacing, to a crashing silence. *Lento occulto* heads a chord passage cloaked in low bass tones, derived from the opening two-note motif of the 'incantation' tone row. These chords pivot to and from E flat major. Busoni's sketches for this passage are marked '3-mal. Akkord'. This is the description Mozart uses for his Masonic music in *Die Zauberflöte*, and Mozart's opera begins and ends in the key of E flat major, the Masonic key. There follows a three-voice canon of remarkable harmonic effect, formed from the top three notes of the undulating broken-chord accompaniment. Mirror image inversions twist through strettos and severely stress the contrast between lyricism and dissonance. The music is calm, yet the overall effect is unnerving. A canon follows with a regular dotted-rhythm pattern, and this quasi-ostinato is momentarily grounding, even though the complex inclusion of theme, mirror image, and melodic extensions are never harmonically at rest. The outer voices cross through the middle dotted-rhythm voice with exquisite serpentine style.

In striking contrast, the next section

enters the water world of a long descending chromatic line. Marked *flebile*, this haunted wail is texturally and rhythmically reminiscent of a Neapolitan song. It is actually an extension of the original melodic material. The canonic texture liquefies, returning seamlessly into a recapitulation of the opening harmony. Here, the *parlando* theme is marked *Sostenuto quasi Violoncello* and *calando*. The accompaniment figure bleeds into waves of A flat minor and F major. These keys recall the composer's *Berceuse*. The A flat minor and F major chords are repeated again and again, an insistent echo, until the material begins to break off. Long lines shift to short fragments. The spell weakens.

The contrasting *Calmissimo* follows, and has the Mozart Masonic chords laced bell-like in canon, in Mozart's original E flat key center. The theme is in the middle; chords float throughout the 3-stave passage. The atmosphere is transcendental. Dent relates that *Die Zauberflöte* was one of Busoni's most treasured scores. Writing about the Overture of the opera, the historian Alfred Einstein states: "[Mozart] compressed the struggle and victory of mankind, using the symbolic means of polyphony: working out, laborious working out in the development section; struggle and triumph." Busoni's inclusions of the Masonic elements symbolise his appeal to the higher ideals of humanity, and subtly foretell the eventual triumph of Faust over the devil.

The canon returns truncated and inverted, falling into the descending chromatic line. Reverberations of the lowest strings prompt the descent. The treble climbs slightly upward, exhausted, to a full solemn restatement of the 'Students' Theme', *un poco marziale*. As the tableau disintegrates, the theme marches into shadow, fading behind the curtain. The revenants return to their world. The Past or the Future. The last instruction of the piano piece is *estinto*, extinguished. The falling sevenths, reminiscent of the Merlin fragment, are now a personal motif for Busoni, a musical *nom de plume*. The sevenths fall to C and the C repeats twice, hushed and extinguished. The candlewick sizzles, and all is black. Busoni ends on C, a muffled heartbeat, a profound pulse. ■

Concluded in the next issue

Ferruccio Busoni – The Six Sonatinas:

An Artist's Journey 1909-1920 – his language and his world

Jeni Slotchiver

This is the concluding second Part of the author's in-depth appreciation of these greatly significant piano works. Part I was published in our issue No 1504 July-September 2015.

At summer's end, 1914, Busoni asks for a year's leave of absence from his position as director of the Liceo Musicale in Bologna. He signs a contract for his American tour and remains in Berlin over Christmas, playing a Bach concert to benefit charities. This is the first all-Bach piano recital for the Berlin public, and Dent writes that it is received with "discourteous ingratitude." Busoni outlines his plan for *Dr. Faust*, recording in his diary, "Everything came together like a vision." By Christmastime, the text is complete. With the outbreak of war in 1914 and an uncertain future, Busoni sails to New York with his family on 5 January, 1915. He writes to Egon Petri: "When shall we ever meet again? This state of uncertainty (*Planlosigkeit*), after ten years of deliberate constructive work, at the climax of my vital strength, is the hardest of all blows to bear!" He is battling disillusionment, yet hopes to proceed with his opera *Arlecchino*. Modelled on 16th century puppet plays, the composition is an organic link to *Dr. Faust*. Busoni takes the two librettos with him. His letters describe a growing isolation: "When one is no longer *master of one's own freedom of movement*, life has no further value." He abhors the provincial limitations of American audiences, and expresses fear that the war in Europe will cause cultural destruction. He is consumed by a paralysing anxiety about the future, and this precipitates a desperate emotional state. Busoni writes, "I shall never overcome this criminal amputation on my life." At a time when the composer's attention is tightly focused on the realisation of a masterwork, Busoni is obliged to proceed with the scheduled tour, and in so doing; he nervously anticipates a creative drought. Compounding these difficulties, New York is deluged with celebrated

artists in exile from Europe. Audiences are in thin supply. He writes to Edith Andrae, June 1915, "I didn't dare set to work on the opera... for fear that a false start would destroy my last moral foothold."

Busoni begins an orchestral composition as a warm-up for *Arlecchino*, the *Rondò Arlecchinesco*. He sets down ideas, hoping they might be a useful study, if all else fails, and writes, "If the humour in the *Rondò* manifests itself at all, it will have a heartrending effect." With bold harmonic language, Busoni clearly defines this composition as his last experimental work. The years give way to passionate reflection. The war will change him.

In America, Busoni completes *Sonatina ad usum infantis Madeline M.* Americanae, pro Clavicimbalo composita*, *Red Indian Diary*, the *Rondò Arlecchinesco*, his editions of Bach's *Well-Tempered Klavier* Book 2, and *Goldberg Variations*.

Each Sonatina has a Latin title and bears a dedication. With *Sonatina ad usum infantis Madeline M.* Americanae, pro Clavicimbalo composita*, Busoni obscures the dedicatee, omitting her full name. A photograph of Madeline Manheim, dated 1918, was found among his papers in Berlin. She was a friend of Busoni's eldest son, Benvenuto. He had American citizenship, born during one of his father's extended teaching and concert tours. Busoni composes *Sonatina ad usum infantis* in America and perhaps meets her then. The portrait of Madeline Manheim shows a beautiful young woman with a thoughtful expression. The title hints at the Sonatina's encapsulated innocence, and offers an insider's view of the composer's ability to regenerate his youthful enthusiasm. Now, he sees the world as a wide-eyed child, without the Mephistophelean cynic looking over his



shoulder. Mature Busoni compositions mirror the composer's ontological state, as well as his temporal environment. There are no dated sketches or surviving manuscripts. The piece is published in 1916 and performed by Busoni on 6 November, 1917, at Tonhalle in Zurich. *Sonatina ad usum infantis* is probably completed shortly before the composer's *Red Indian Diary*, dated 20 June, 1915.

Busoni references *Sonatina ad usum infantis* as, "A sonatina for a child which itself has the air of a child." Considering the catastrophic times, it is a rite of purification, a cleansing of self-doubt and uncertainty. He introduces a composition with clear and simple melodies, gentle harmony and transparent beauty. This Sonatina is not for a child, but graciously warm, and disarmingly uninhibited. Busoni writes to Edith Andrae in 1916: "My heart... is in a state of adolescence again; shy and full of longing and lacking practical impact."

The subtitle is *pro Clavicimbalo composita* (harpsichord). Busoni plays the piece on piano and the long silky legatos, with sustained pedal harmonies, contradict a harpsichord touch. The writing style points towards the rich warm tone of ▶

the piano, yet the elegant ornamentation is reminiscent of a remote past. By using the term 'harpsichord' the composer designates a youthful piano, constructing a symbolic recapitulation to an earlier period of time, recalling Gregorian chant, and the pure lines of Palestrina. This is Busoni's Gothic harmony, and the language of *Arlecchino* as well as *Sonatina in diem nativitatis Christi* MCMXVII.

The third *Sonatina's* visionary aspects are significant. After 1900, Busoni begins to use a pure form of polyphony ('free polyphony'). He often combines this technique with the development of melodic and constructive materials, forming motifs of usually two or three notes. In his definitive study of Busoni's piano music, the composer-scholar Larry Sitsky traces all musical material used in *Sonatina ad usum infantis* to the opening few bars of the composition. An exceptionally integrated work, motifs are treated to rhythmic variation, augmentation, inversion and other techniques used by great masters. Busoni is cognisant and hopeful for the path of new music, when he writes his treatise on 'Absolute Melody', 1913. Prophetically, this very style becomes widely popular after the Second World War. Busoni describes 'Absolute Melody': "A row of repeated ascending and descending intervals, which are organised and move rhythmically. It contains in itself a latent harmony, reflects a mood of feeling." He further explains that expression does not depend on a text or accompanying voices and declares, "It must be maintained here that melody has expanded continuously, that it has grown in line and capacity for expression and that in the end it must succeed in becoming the most powerful thing in composition." Busoni's discourse on 'Young Classicism', contained in a letter to Paul Bekker, 1920, gives further insights into his crusade for the future of music. Busoni calls for "The definite departure from what is thematic and the return to melody again as the ruler of all voices and all emotions ... and as the bearer of the idea and the begetter of harmony, in short, the most highly developed (not the most complicated) polyphony."

There are five numbered and connected movements: 1. *Molto tranquillo* 2. *Andantino melancolico* 3. *Vivace (alla Marcia)* 4. *Molto tranquillo* 5. *Polonaise*

(*un poco cerimonioso*).

The *Molto tranquillo* and the *Andantino melancolico* pair as prelude and fughetta. The *Vivace (alla Marcia)* has two variations with a brief coda. The fourth movement restates the *Molto tranquillo* theme, ascending towards the luminescent transfiguration of a chorale motif, drawn from the first movement. This brief passage serves as unifying bridge to the elegant and enchanting *Polonaise*.

The third *Sonatina* is born at a time when Busoni attempts to toss off his brooding spirits and re-enter his creative journey with *Dr Faust*. Despite his opera's quasi-autobiographical elements, the composer believes personal hardships could poison an objective perspective. After nine torturous months in America, Busoni returns to Europe and settles in Zurich, where he completes *Arlecchino*, classifying the composition as a "Marionetten Tragödie." Dent writes that the composer feels it is his "most individual and personal work," and describes it as a satire on war and human failings. Reality and illusion fuse. Grim humour combines with fantasy and philosophical paradox, resulting in a labyrinth of meanings and finely interwoven themes.

This is the era of Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, and the toy boxes of Debussy and Fauré. 'Commedia dell' Arte' returns to the stage in the 20th century. Despite the popular tide, Busoni has a long attraction to 16th century puppet plays; he is enthralled with the marionettes' contra-human characteristics.

Contrasting the outward gentle beauty of *Sonatina ad usum infantis*, the fourth *Sonatina* retreats inward. Busoni dedicates *Sonatina in diem nativitatis Christi MCMXVII* (1917) to his son Benvenuto. The composer gives the premier in Zurich on 24 January, 1920. A critical review reads: "Ringings of bells and Christmas atmosphere seen with the eyes and felt with the heart of an artist shaken by the griefs of the world." Busoni is isolated, broken hearted from his exile and wearied by the mounting ravages of war. He is also concerned for Benvenuto, who is called to military service in America. The fourth *Sonatina*, titled and dated 'Christmas 1917', is not a Holiday tribute, it is the composer's plea for peace. Busoni turns away from the world and embarks on an intense period of creativity. This is the first

of four compositions written in Zurich, with *Dr Faust* material.

The *Sonatina in diem nativitatis Christi MCMXVII* is a profound work. The manuscript, a modest eight pages, has enormously condensed emotional material. The entire composition maintains a serene beauty. Fortes are rare, emerging from Busoni's characteristic long lyrical lines, blended arpeggiated strands, and sonorous chorale reverberations. The melody is marked *dolce*. In a gently rocking three meter, the bass is slightly off centre, entering with the melody on the third beat of each measure. Although lyrically *dolce*, the music is not reassuring. An oscillating broken-chord strand rises from the quasi-berceuse accompaniment and begins to sound quietly subversive, implying an underlying menace. A structurally inverted motif from the *Pezzo serioso* of the *Piano Concerto* smoothly punctuates the end of this oscillating figure. First impressions of calm stability give way. Characteristic of a medieval folk song, a contrasting theme enters in intervals of fourths, articulated above *un poco vivace* triplets. This melody reaches a crescendo with four chiming F major chords, adamant and painful. This stagnant chord passage, mirroring Busoni's death motif, fades to a restatement of the opening thematic material. The next passage remembers the veiled world of the *Elegies*. The right hand weaves a Lisztian figured accompaniment, falling and rising above lyrical, *sotto voce* bass octaves. These low melodic lines are prayerful and questioning, while shifting harmonies glaze the transparent atmosphere. The music seems to be moving towards a resolution. The singing octaves crescendo to the opening theme, augmented and passionately restrained. The theme eventually subsides, dissolving into the opening lullaby.

A single line rises out of the lowest tones of the broken-chord accompaniment, floating plaintively, a memorial to the *Sonatina seconda*. This melodic strand is transformed, as if Busoni views it from a great distance, while always carrying it with him. The apparition imparts a feeling of rest and security. A chorale unfolds as an ancient investigation, still and meditative. Low bells toll, accompany the chorale, and contain a latent rhythm, while sounding timeless. A rustic medieval

dance, harmonically monotonous, enters. The dance dissipates into rhythmically augmented basses, marked *ritenendo* and suspended by continuous pedals. The chorale returns in a questioning dialogue with muffled bell tones. The closing section combines the theme in 4-part fugue, and disintegrates within a triplet accompaniment. In the final section, marked *quasi transfigurato*, the theme is resplendent, augmented and stated three times in rapturous bell-like clarity. Treble – tenor – treble, ending on A with ancient open fifths. Bleakness and apprehension give way to hope and firm foundation.

The *Sonatina in diem nativitatis Christi*, reminiscent of late Liszt, illustrates Busoni's ability to convey vastly profound feeling states, with very few gestures. The composer is at his peak, with a magnificently refined technique and crystallised thought process. He creates music of weightlessness, and communicates emotions of unfathomable density.

Sonatina brevis in Signo Joannis Sebastiani Magni (in freier Nachdichtung von Bach's Kleiner Fantasie und Fuge d-moll) is found at the end of the seven-volume Bach-Busoni edition, a testament to the singular importance the composition holds for the composer. The Bach editions occupy all of Busoni's adult life and range from visionary recastings of the great original works, to the immeasurable wisdom recorded in his edition of the *Well-Tempered Klavier* Book 2. There are two separate collections of Busoni's Bach editions. In 25 Volumes, the *Klavierwerke* (1894-1923) presents Bach's complete keyboard works. The other collection is a six-volume publication from 1916, and holds Busoni's transcriptions and arrangements. A seventh volume is added to the six-volume set and these are published in 1920. A posthumous eighth (1925) is the second edition of Busoni's *Klavierübung*.

The 1916 and 1920 editions differ only in the addition of the seventh volume, which has all new material. The compositions in Volume 1 and 2, *Bearbeitungen*, are arrangements. Volume 1, *Lehrstücke*, are study pieces, and Volume 2, *Meisterstücke*, contains compositions for concert use. Volume 1 opens with a dedication, *Widmung*. This miniature combines the tones B.A.C.H. with the C major Fugue from Book I of the *Well-*



The *Sonatina in diem nativitatis Christi*, reminiscent of late Liszt, illustrates Busoni's ability to convey vastly profound feeling states, with very few gestures

Tempered Klavier. There are, *eighteen short Preludes* and a *Fughetta* BWV 924-42, a revised version of the *Two-part and Three-part Inventions* from the 1892 publication, *Four Duets* BWV 802-5, and *Prelude, Fugue and Allegro in E flat major* BWV 998. Volume 2 has, the *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue, Concerto for piano and strings in D minor*, and the *Goldberg Variations*. Volume 3 holds the virtuoso transcriptions of organ works. These are, the *Prelude and Fugue in D major* BWV 532, the 'St. Anne' *Prelude and Triple*

Fugue in E flat major BWV 552, the *Toccatas and Fugues in D minor* BWV 565, and *C major* BWV 564, and ten *Choral Preludes*. The *Chaconne for solo violin* is also found in this edition. The transcriptions in Volume 3 date from the 1880s through 1909.

The works in Volume 4 are *Nachdichtungen*, original compositions based on motifs or themes from Bach. These are, *Fantasia nach Johann Sebastian Bach (Alla Memoria di mio Padre Ferdinando Busoni † il 12 Maggio 1909 †)*, and ▶



Preludio, Fuga e Fuga figurata, from *An die Jugend*. A realization of the *Capriccio on the Departure of a beloved Brother* BWV 992 bears a dedication to Arthur Schnabel. *Fantasia, Adagio and Fuga in C minor*, and *Fantasia Contrapuntistica (Versio minore and Versio definitivo)* round off this heroic collection. Volume 5, originally published in 1894, is the *Well-Tempered Klavier* Book 1, while Volume 6 is devoted to the *Well-Tempered Klavier* Book 2. Busoni notes: "Bach's 'well-tempered', Part 1 for pianists, Part 2 for

composers: my testament."

Volume 7 is compiled in 1920 and has, three *Toccatas* BWV 914-916, and a critical edition of the *Fantasia and Fugue in A minor* BWV 904, dedicated to Hugo Leichtentritt in appreciation for his 1916 Busoni biography. Here is Busoni's creative grouping of three separate Bach pieces; *Fantasia and Fugue* BWV 905, *Andante* BWV 969, and *Scherzo* BWV 844. There follows, a transcription for cello and piano of the *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue* (1917), *Improvisation for two*

Pianos on 'Wie wohl ist mir', and new versions of the puzzle canons from *Musical Offering*. The final work is *Sonatina in Signo Joannis Sebastiani Magni*, a *Nachdichtung* of the little *Fantasy and Fugue* BWV 905, found earlier in this same volume in its original form. Just as *Widmung* dedicates the seven volumes, the fifth *Sonatina* is Busoni's signature on his completed effort.

Throughout his life, Busoni returns to Bach's works for inspiration and re-discovery, believing the music is both essential and potential. As a child, Bach is his favourite composer, and this is where he learns the art of structure and counterpoint. From earliest youth, Busoni was a natural, intuitive contrapuntist; he would joyfully combine unrelated themes to a victorious solution. By age ten, he had already developed prodigious skill improvising polyphonically.

The prophetic original compositions based on Bach themes and fragments, known as *Nachdichtungen*, stand as monument to a lifetime of study. *Nachdichtungen* expose the thinking process and colossal imagination behind many of Busoni's compositions, and confirm his creative perspective as intuitive, rather than intellectual. These structural masterpieces embody a free, visionary aesthetic, grounded in the composer's artistic ideals and his philosophical concept of the 'omnipresence of Time'. For Busoni, the past and future are one, and in the *Nachdichtungen*, they are inseparable. Busoni looks back for structure and counterpoint. He looks to the future, and frees polyphony from strict control, elevating it, both melodically and constructively, above harmony. The freed polyphony and the constructive adventures produce a new, fluid harmony.

The *Fantasia, Fugue, Andante* and *Scherzo*, in Busoni's seventh volume of the 1920 Bach editions, constitutes a synthetic grouping of Bach's compositions. Busoni feels they are related by thematic material and key structures, and encourages their unity as an effective concert piece. In this presentation, Busoni comments on the *Fugue*: "The counter-subject appears as a fragment of an obvious canonical leading which has not been developed." He suggests an appropriate realization, and in the *Sonatina brevis*, the *Fantasia and Fugue* are eloquently combined with unrestricted

use of his proposed solution.

Sonatina brevis in Signo Joannis Sebastiani Magni, composed in August 1918, is dedicated to Philipp Jarnach. A series of musical signatures are combined in a short, 'brevis', composition. The score consists of five printed pages. The music is rich in material, colour, texture and design, and there is a transparency in the natural improvisatory character of the piece. One thought flows, and binds into another, a continuous organic improvisation. The *Sonatina brevis* is a meditation on the future of 20th century polyphony.

Marked *Andante, espressivo e Sostenuto*, a canonic chain of sustained falling sevenths opens the *Sonatina brevis*. A common Bach figure (melody extracted from a series of diminished seventh chords), these sevenths are also one of Busoni's signatures, his Merlin motif. The sevenths serve as structural material for the 'Students' Theme', and announce the arrival of Megaeros, the fifth spirit of hell, in *Dr. Faust*. In *Sonatina brevis*, the sevenths are wrapped around a three-note motif. This three-note motif is found in many Busoni compositions, and it is one of Bach's signatures as well. These notes are a transposition of the first three notes of the second *Kyrie* from Bach's *B Minor Mass*, a work recognised for its dualistic nature. Another provocative characteristic of the *Mass*, as it relates to *Sonatina brevis*, is the transcription-transformation aspect. Albert Schweitzer lists six sections of the *B minor Mass* as 'rearrangements', and describes them as, "Not mere transfers...it is more correct to speak of their being suggested by the original than borrowed from it." Schweitzer's observation applies to Busoni's *Nachdichtungen* as well. The sevenths and the three-note motif serve as structurally unifying elements in various sections of *Sonatina brevis*. They symbolically join the musical souls of Bach and Busoni.

The Fugue subject enters in the second section of the composition, *Poco più mosso, ma tranquillo*. Natural extensions of the subject's melodic material produce adventurous harmony, the result of the vertical realisation of polyphonic development. The falling sevenths return and bridge the third section, *Tema dell' Andante*. Highly developed counterpoint blends all elements: the *Fugue* subject, the three-note motif of the *Andante*, the

falling sevenths. The Fugue subject becomes a *cantus firmus*, disguised among 16th-note accompanying figures.

In the closing section, the falling seventh motif inverts, rising purposefully. In this form, the motto releases its darkness, and speculates the reversal of fortune. As with *Sonatina in diem Nativitatis*, a coda announces a benevolent transfiguration. These final bars are closely tied to *Vorspiel II, Dr. Faust* (Adagio Theme). Expectations of a tranquil ending fail, when a cadence breaks off without resolution. The sevenths fall, and *Sonatina brevis* ends ambiguously, in an unstable A major.

The final conclusions of peace are made in the spring of 1919, and Busoni is able to travel once more. The Zurich years allow the composer an intense period of productivity, and although comfortably settled, he cannot plan for the future. Dent speaks of Busoni's growing isolation and oppressive loneliness. He is cut off from his great cosmopolitan world. He misses his friends and students, he is lost without his beloved library, and he longs for provocative artistic stimulation. Concerned that the majority of life is already behind him, Busoni experiences a mounting anxiety, his depression deepens. He writes to Isidor Phillip, "For four years I have lived in a state of inward hostility towards this remote world, from which I have shut myself off. While judging it to have become uncivilised, I have perhaps become uncivilised myself. On the other hand I think that my art has become more subtle, and that it expresses all that remains 'good' within me." He begins to think of his future, "Zurich is exhausted, and now that peace is concluded...I see that it is time for me to make an end of its limitations." He gives a series of five concerts in Zurich and makes plans for appearances in Paris and London.

Busoni writes to Phillip Jarnach from Paris, 10 March, 1920, "After the sanatorium existence of Zurich, Paris has a liberating effect. It is like a homecoming for me to find life on the grand scale again." He is renewed in this vibrant city, where he has always enjoyed a certain

freedom. He observes that Parisians do not judge a person according to their dress, personal wealth, or private companionship. Nine solo and orchestral concerts are sold out: "I shall never forget it. Not as a virtuoso but as a human being, I sensed this tremendous devotion from a public that scarcely knew me, in a spoilt and hardened capital city, as something quite phenomenal...the applause continued all evening." On 25 March, He describes the audience for his compositions' concert as, "very concentrated then increasingly enthusiastic...with the finest understanding and greatest warmth...one of the most wonderful evenings of my life...the end of the concert was indescribable, people stood up and shouted...the orchestra performed miracles."

While in Paris, Busoni finds many ways to occupy himself, including composition. He writes to Phillip Jarnach, 10 March, "As a gesture of thanks to my host I am trying to construct a brief *Carmen* fantasy, an interesting pastime." The overwhelming response of the Parisians leaves him "very inspired and full of ideas." With the city at his feet, Busoni completes his sixth *Sonatina* on 22 March, 1920. He writes, "The little *Carmen* fantasy is finished – It is 12 pages long, with five themes and four short sections."

The dedication to *Kammer-Fantasie über Bizet's Carmen (Sonatina super Carmen)* reads *En souvenir d'estime et de reconnaissance, à Monsieur Tauber, Paris, Mars 1920*. Busoni met Leonhard Tauber in Klagenfurt. Tauber was owner of an inn and frequently heard the young Busoni play. He becomes a successful hotelier, has many musician friends, and owns the luxurious Hotel Foyôt in Paris where the Busonis often stay. Their letters are evidence of their close friendship, and on the composer's final visit to Paris, in

1923, he dedicates his 'study for the Steinway piano with the third pedal' to Tauber.

Sonatina super Carmen is written while Busoni is staying at Tauber's home, during his series of orchestral and solo recitals. Busoni gives the first performance at Wigmore Hall in London, on 22 June, 1920.

Busoni plans *Carmen* as early as 1917. He ▶

...On the other hand I think that my art has become more subtle, and that it expresses all that remains 'good'

loves Bizet's French opera more than any contemporaneous Italian opera. In his essay titled, 'Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Liszt's *Don Juan Fantasy*', he proposes: "If it were a question of the paraphrase of *Carmen*, the transcriber, following Liszt's example, would begin with the suggestive scene in the marketplace in Act IV, and in the introduction as contrast to this, would join the pathetic *Carmen* theme built on the gypsy scale. The middle section would be composed of the Habañera (followed by variations), the finale, the bull-ring music." The final version is larger than the one imagined in his essay. Busoni understands that the Opera Paraphrase in Liszt's hands is more than a presentation of selected melodies for virtuoso display. The visionary aspects of Liszt's skills transform the Opera Paraphrase. Liszt's paraphrases are dramas in condensed settings, they project the emotions of the actual staged event, and bring a story to life.

Busoni often composes lighter 'antidotes' to serious works in an effort to achieve a creative equilibrium. In 1920, he wrote the orchestral *Tanzwalzer* (inspired by Johann Strauss) 'for fun', as an antidote to the powerful *Toccata* for piano. Music from both the *Toccata* and the *Tanzwalzer* contain potent *Dr Faust* material and appear in the opera. Although inspired by other composers' ideas, *Carmen* and *Tanzwalzer* are completely original in Busoni's formats: These 'light' compositions are shadowed, sometimes obliquely, other times intrinsically. The music's sinister whispers escape the casual listener.

Kammer-Fantasie über Bizet's Carmen (*Sonatina super Carmen*) opens in A major, inextricably linking itself to *Sonatina brevis*. For Busoni, the keys of A and C are



significant. The final sustained tones of *Sonatina brevis* melt into silence, easily embracing the opening pizzicato thirds of *Sonatina super Carmen*. Fate motifs play a major role in both compositions, and the two *Sonatinas* also pair for their interchangeable duality, both internal to themselves, and in relation to each other. The *Sonatina brevis* is Bach, encapsulating many of Busoni's strong Germanic traits, yet it is lyrically flowing, light, and flexible. The *Sonatina super Carmen*, with Liszt as creative source, celebrates Busoni's Mediterranean lyricism. At the same time, the sixth *Sonatina* is dark, with clearly ordered sections. Busoni said, "Truly Bach is the Alpha of pianoforte composition and Liszt the Omega."

Busoni did not intend *Carmen* for virtuoso exhibitionism, although the writing is extravagantly demanding. Edward J. Dent emphasises that, Busoni would never draw attention to difficult, extraneous passages in order to display his colossal technique. He was a master of melody, subjugating surrounding voices to an endless spectrum of imaginative colors.

The bright opening material, *Allegro deciso*, comes from the chorus of Act IV. Staccato octaves and double-thirds flutter in canonic variations. The second section, *Andantino con amore*, is a free arrangement of José's *Flower Song* from Act II scene 2. The melody is in the tenor voice, while the right and left hands spin darkly glittering ornamental arpeggios. The *Carmen* theme enters at the end of this section with a subtle, gloomy presence, a fateful premonition. This leads to the third section, where the Habanera from Act I is treated to a series of variations. Any expectation of a light operatic fantasy ends here. The variations, one marked *fantastico*, flicker with malice, and what appears in the opera as a lusty celebration of life, here, has the essence of a gleeful dance of death. The material of the fourth section is taken from the Prelude to Act 1. The familiar tune becomes mocking and increasingly malignant. The fifth section is marked *Andante visionario*. The fate theme, from the end of the second section, now levitates above the descending chromatic scale of the Habanera,

My heart is bursting,
I leave my sons
behind, I am going
– at 54 – into the
unknown.

while somber deep bells toll the spectral fragments of a dissipated dance rhythm.

Carmen and Busoni exemplify Jung's 'shadow' to the object of society. Both are liberated outsiders. *Carmen's* uninhibited nature and unrestrained sensuality have portentous implications, making the character a symbolic companion to artists and philosophers in their pursuit of an anti-pragmatic ideal.

In 1947 Kaikhosru Sorabji comments on Busoni's *Sonatina super Carmen*: "I feel the metapsychic element to be present to a degree and intensity unparalleled in music... The gay and occasionally rather trivial Bizet tunes become indescribably 'charged' and even sinister, undergoing a sort of dissolution and transformation that is... 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 the ineluctable and immense power behind the whole business – this is a psychical invasion in musical terms."

With *Sonatina super Carmen*, Busoni demonstrates his characteristic ability to rejuvenate his spirits. He shakes off the horror of war years and the desolation of exile, he momentarily releases himself from the intense journey with his master work, *Dr. Faust*, and he sets aside his most pressing concern: For over a year, Busoni is unable to decide where the next chapter of life will take him. He ends his letter to Phillip Jarnach, " 'Home'? - the word invokes all the problems awaiting me; and this time I shall ignore them." Busoni is inundated with offers, and there are many cities he loves. His torturous indecision ends when he accepts an appointment from the Prussian Ministry of Education. He will return to Berlin and direct a class for advanced composition at the State Academy of Arts and Sciences. He writes to Isidor Phillip from Zurich, 7 September, 1920, "My heart is bursting, I leave my sons behind, I am going - at 54 – into the unknown." ■

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