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The Making of a Musician

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The Making of a Musician

Kathleen Noel Luster

Chancellor's Honors Program Senior Project

Under the direction of Dr. Wesley Baldwin

May 7, 2007

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I. INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of true musicianship often requires the dedication of a lifetime. The making of a musician involves exposure to music, instruction in performance, practice of technique, critique of performance, and study of historical and theoretical material to name a few of the necessary components. This is an age when one can go through a drive through and instantly obtain an exquisite cup of coffee; learn any piece of information desirable with a few clicks of the computer mouse; listen to music from the past or present from thousands of miles away or from right next door. The painful irony for musicians rests in the unavoidable reality that the pursuit of true artistry still requires much time, practice, and experience. Advancing technology allows access to much more information than could have been fathomed in previous generations; however for the musician, technology has yet to offer a substitute for the many years of dedicated learning required to create beautiful, meaningful music. To justly live up to its title then, *The Making of a Musician*, this semester-long project would have to encompass decades of diligent work.

This senior project revolves around three significant compositions for the cello spanning the periods of baroque, classical, and romantic music. The objective of the project was twofold. The first was the performance of each of these works which occurred in a senior cello recital on March 4, 2007. Much time, energy, and effort went into practicing, learning, memorizing, and performing the music. Yet excellent performance practice and genuine musical sense require an understanding of the context and style of the music. Thus, the second aspect of the project rests in the following pages

as a historical investigation and synthesis of the music performed. The first section of the paper addresses Johann Sebastian Bach's *Third Suite for Unaccompanied Cello*; the second looks into Beethoven and his creation of *Twelve Variations on a theme from Handel's "Judas Maccabeus"*; the third explores Tchaikovsky's composition for cello and orchestra, *Variations on a Rococo Theme*. Each work lives as a unique contributor to the rich body of cello literature.

II. JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH: THIRD SUITE FOR UNACCOMPANIED CELLO (BWV 1009)

Cello Works Prior to Bach

The cello enjoys esteem as a soloist instrument and occupies an integral role in ensemble playing in the twenty-first century. It can prove difficult to grasp the role of the cello in its nascent stages. In the seventeenth century, as the cello began to come into its own, its function existed in the noble but limited use of bass accompaniment in orchestra settings.¹ This involved performing the basso continuo in religious vocal and instrumental works. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, composers wrote some cello solos, notably Corelli's 1683 composition of Twelve Trios for Two Violins and Cello.²

Before Johann Sebastian Bach's creation of the *Six Suites for Unaccompanied Cello*, only a small body of cello solo works existed. Some of the oldest known unaccompanied solo cello works include: *Ricercate* Op.1 by Giovanni Battista Degli Antoni (Bologna, 1687) which offers twelve unaccompanied pedagogical works; Domenico Gabrielli's *Ricercari per violoncello solo* for a four stringed cello tuned C-G-d-g (1689); *Trattenimento musicale sopra il violoncello a' solo* by Domenico Galli for a cello tuned Bflat-F-c-g (Modena, 1691).³ As seen from the variety of tunings, the cello lacked standardized string pitches and number of strings; some compositions during this time were for cellos with as many as five to six strings. Yet, as Elizabeth Cowling notes,

¹ Wilhelm Joseph von Wasielewski, *The Violoncello and its History*, trans. Isobella S. E. Stigand (New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), 45.

² Carlos Prieto, *The Adventures of a Cello*, trans. Elena C. Murray (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 221-222.

³ Robin Stowell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Cello* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 137-138.

it is unlikely that these works in anyway served as a prototype for Bach. The works prior to Bach's suites differed stylistically so much, that "they could not have offered a model for Bach."⁴

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the works for cello continued to grow with composers such as Alessandro and Domenico Scarlatti, Benedetto Marcello, and Antonio Vivaldi, who composed sonatas and concertos for the cello. Improvements in the cello model enhanced the growing perception of the cello as solo instrument. As the cello became easier to play and more standardized, performers could play higher notes with more ease and virtuosity.⁵

The very limited nature of cello repertoire to this point highlights the magnitude of Bach's creation in his Six Suites. The technical difficulty increases with each suite, prompting some to conclude that Bach wrote them with didactic purposes in mind. Cellist and author Carlos Prieto further remarks that the increasing technical challenge shows to Bach's desire to explore the parameters and potential of the cello.⁶ Even with didactic or pedagogic objectives, the suites possess some of the richest musical depth ever written for cello.

Historical Setting for Bach

The life of Johann Sebastian Bach began in Eisenach in March, 1685, and ended in Leipzig, July 1750. During 1717-1723, Bach worked for the auspicious Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, Germany. It appears that Bach left his previous position in Weimar with the Duke on less than desirable terms. November 6 of 1717, the district judge of Weimar imprisoned Bach for his obstinacy and demands to be released from the

⁴ Elizabeth Cowling, *The Cello*, (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1983), 96.

⁵ Prieto, *Adventures*, 222.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 223

Duke's employment. On December 2, the Duke released Bach from prison, sending him away in a disgraceful dismissal. Bach gladly accepted Prince Leopold's position of Kapellmeister in Cöthen, and seems to have hastily prepared music for Leopold's twenty-third birthday celebration on December 10.⁷

Leopold, an avid lover and connoisseur of music, offered a much different working environment for Bach than his position in Weimar. Cöthen's population at the time numbered a mere 10,000 people. In addition to the small city size, the religious dynamics also greatly differed. Leopold and the Cöthen court held to a Reformed Calvinist position rather than a strict orthodox Lutheran tradition of the Weimar court. As such, the position of Kapellmeister required no church cantatas and no organ music of Bach.⁸ Directing sixteen musicians in chamber music and weekly performances for Leopold fell under Bach's duties, but a large portion of his job consisted in the creation of secular cantatas and instrumental compositions for court celebrations.⁹

During his six years with Prince Leopold, Bach composed a majority of his instrumental works, including almost all of his chamber music, orchestral suites, and Brandenburg Concertos.¹⁰ In 1720, the same year that found Antonio Stradivari busily at work on the "Piatti" cello in Cremona, Italy,¹¹ Bach began work on his six unaccompanied violin partitas and sonatas, and six unaccompanied cello suites. In both sets, the term unaccompanied is slightly misleading. 'Without basso continuo' perhaps

⁷ Peter Williams, *The Life of Bach*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 76.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁰ Prieto, *Adventures*, 222.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xiii.

better describes the works, because Bach elegantly weaves the multiple voices within the suites to allow the instruments to accompany themselves in the suites.¹²

Structure of the Suite

Although living and working in Germany, Bach experienced a great influence of French culture. The suite, originating in France, combined a succession of movements based on various dance forms. The traditional Baroque suite consisted of an Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, and Gigue. Bach expanded the structure in the cello suites by composing a prelude to establish the key and musical character and adding a pair of *galant* dances between the Sarabande and Gigue. The first and second suites contain two Menuets for the dance movements, the third and fourth suites each offer a pair of Bourées, and suites five and six contain sets of Gavottes. Suites one-four incorporate the standard C-G-D-A tuning; the fifth suite Bach wrote *scordatura* with the A string tuned down to a G. The sixth suite Bach conceived for a five stringed cello rather than four.¹³

In the third suite, each movement models the initial key of C Major presented in the prelude of the suite with the exception of the second Bourée which uses the parallel minor key. Bach offers an improvisatory style for the Prelude and begins with a descending C major scale to the open C string. The movement provides a sense of cascading beauty in the descending scales and brilliance.

After the Prelude, each additional movement follows a binary structure. The Allemande follows the Prelude and originated as an instrumental dance in the mid-sixteenth century. Based on one of the most popular baroque dances, it usually consisted of duple meter executed in a moderate tempo. As time progressed, the allemande became

¹² Williams, *Life of Bach*, 87.

¹³ Stowell, *Cambridge Companion*, 138.

one of the more highly stylized baroque dances.¹⁴ The C major Allemande opens with a descending C major tonic, elaborated with neighbor note figures.

The eighteenth century Italian *corrente* originated as a virtuoso piece for violin or keyboard soloist based off of the courante Baroque dance. Michael Praetorius in *Syntagma Musicum* stated of the original dance steps of the courante, that it was “as if running while dancing.”¹⁵ The dance itself was quick, containing multiple hops and skips. Characteristics of the music include continuous 8ths or 16ths, fast triple meter, a simple texture, and a slow harmonic rhythm. Courantes employ the 3/4 time signature with phrases incorporating upbeats. All of the courantes that Bach composed were for keyboard or string solo with the exception of BWV 1013 for solo flute. In the C Major Courante, Bach provides relentless running eighth notes with virtually no internal cadences, with the exception of measures 56-57. The slow harmonic rhythm is elaborated through arpeggios, sequences, and figures in Alberti bass style.¹⁶

Of all of the French Baroque dances, the bourée contains the least complex rhythmic structure. Considered light-hearted and joyful, *joie de vivre* reflects the essence of this dance. Although French composers used the bourée structure for ballets and theaters, it was the German composers who favored the style for solo and chamber works.¹⁷ Tempos usually were faster than other French dances with the general rhythmic and harmonic phrases grouped into four measure or eight beat phrases. The “upbeat quality” of the bourée comes from the common rhythmic figure of two upbeat eighth

¹⁴ Meredith Little and Suzanne G. Cusick, “Allemande” (*Grove Music Online*) L. Macy ed. (Accessed [23 April 2007]). <http://www.grovemusic.com>

¹⁵ Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J.S. Bach*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1991.

¹⁶ Little and Jenne, *Dance*, 131-132, 139.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

notes going to a down beat quarter note. The Bourée I of the C Major suite reflects many of these general characteristics. The anapestic rhythms create a forward, propelling sense of motion and add a lilting quality. Incorporating *notas inégales* in performance may add a sense of grace to the first Bourée.¹⁸ In the second Bourée, Bach replaces the C Major hopefulness with the more somber feel of c minor. Although it still uses the two eighth note upbeat, the key and slurs create a very different mood.

The Sarabande, the fifth movement of Bach's suite, originated as a sung dance in Spain and Latin America. Connected to folk arts, the dance was originally accompanied by singing, guitars, and castanets. Its suggestive, sensual nature incurred its ban in Spain in 1583.¹⁹ As the dance spread to Italy in the early 1600's, it still possessed tempestuous and exotic qualities. The French court tamed the sarabande creating an ordered, balanced, and sustained dance.²⁰ Known for its intensity of expression and passion, Bach's Sarabande in the third suite also possesses these moving qualities. Many measures incorporate chordal agrément (beginning with dissonance) especially within beat two. As in the French sarabande style, Bach uses dissonance and suspensions on the second beat to create the stress and high point of the measure on beat two. The release of the tension created on beat two often occurs on beat four.²¹

In contrast to the slow, passionate nature of the Sarabande, Bach closes the suite with a lively, energetic Gigue. Instrumental giges of the Baroque era were far removed from the dances of their origination. Following gigue rhythmic characteristics, the Gigue of the third suite has tripleness on the pulse level, and sixteenth notes below that. Once it

¹⁸ Little and Jenne, *Dance*, 41, 45.

¹⁹ Richard Hudson, "Sarabande: Early Development to c1640" *Grove Music Online* L. Macy ed. (Accessed [23 April 2007]). <http://www.grovemusic.com>

²⁰ Little and Jenne, *Dance*, 92, 94.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

begins, the Gigue has few internal cadences. A lack of strong cadential motion creates longer phrases, in which the C Major Gigue showcases Bach's masterful use of imitation. Also unique to this Gigue is the performers need to negotiate wide leaps on the instrument. As in the French style, Bach incorporates two passages with a pedal point as well as sequences, repetitions, and echo patterns (see measures 21-26, 33-44, 81-88). Bach brings this suite to a close with lively cheerfulness and jigging rhythms.²²

Manuscript Problems

Although written in Cöthen around 1720, the first edition of the suites was not published until 1825. Unfortunately, the holograph manuscripts are lost. This creates numerous problems for historians and performers alike. However, copies of Bach's original manuscripts do exist. Bach's second wife Anna Magdalena copied the Suites around 1730 when the Bach family lived in Leipzig. Other copies include: one by Johann Peter Kellner thought to have been made in Frankenhayn, July 1726; a later eighteenth-century copy belonging to Johann Jacob Heinrich Westphal (1756-1825), a correspondent of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach; an anonymous copy of the second half of the eighteenth-century; and an original manuscript c. 1730, by Bach himself, of a version of Suite V for the Lute. Of the more than eighty printed editions of the Bach suites, most draw upon the Anna Magdalena copy, which creates numerous problems with inconsistencies related to bowings and articulations.²³

²² Little and Jenne, *Dance*, 169.

²³ Dimitry Markevitch, *The Solo Cello: A Bibliography of the Unaccompanied Violoncello Literature*, (Berkeley: Fallen Leaf Press, 1989), 7-10.

Performance History of the Suites

No record remains of the first performances of the Bach Suites. Most likely performed very little in his lifetime, the suites quickly fell into oblivion after Bach's death. During his life, Bach was did not receive the popularity and acclaim that Mozart did, and was not particularly appreciated. Soon after his death, his heavily polyphonic music was seen as old-fashioned and pedantic. Composer Felix Mendelssohn helped to transform the public perception of Johann Sebastian Bach when he conducted Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion* in 1829. This performance opened the door for a revived interest in Bach and his music. Although the renewed interest in Bach began earlier as intellectuals began to explore Bach in a movement of historical exploration, the interest existed only in these academic circles. Mendelssohn offered Bach to the world, and for the first time, he gained the public interest and recognition his compositional genius warranted.²⁴

Although Mendelssohn's performance of Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion* began to revive public interest in Bach's works, generally only his cantatas and other religious works were considered concert music. The Suites were still considered etudes until cellist Pablo Casals (1876-1973) discovered them and brought them into the mainstream cello literature. Casals writes of his discovery of the Bach Suites in Barcelona at the age of thirteen:

[My father and I] stopped at an old music shop near the harbor. I began browsing through a bundle of musical scores. Suddenly I cam upon a sheaf of pages, crumbled and discolored with age. They were unaccompanied suites by Johann Sebastian Bach – for the cello only! I

²⁴ Nicholas Temperley and Peter Wollny, "Bach Revival," *Grove Music Online* L. Macy ed. (Accessed [2 May April 2007]). <http://www.grovemusic.com>

looked at them with wonder: Six Suites for Violoncello Solo. What magic and mystery, I thought, were hidden in those words? I had never heard of the existence of the suites; nobody – not even my teachers – had ever mentioned them to me...twelve years would elapse and I would be twenty-five before I had the courage to play one of the suites in public at a concert.”²⁵

Not only did Pablo Casals happen upon the suites, he began to perform them as legitimate, beautiful compositions for the cello. Prior to Casals, Bach’s compositions for solo violin and cello existed as exercises, academic, and to be performed with little to no musical inflection, and never as a complete suite. Yet Casals found in the Bach cello suites musical value of unspeakable depth. By 1899, he began incorporating a full suite in many of his programs. To Casals, the suite existed architecturally as a complete unit and should include all the repeats of the dance movements. At first, managers and the public complained due to a prevalent misconception of Bach’s stifling, mechanical nature. Casals’ much more liberal musical interpretation aroused the fury of academics, especially in Germany, who found his execution of the suites sacrilegious.²⁶ Casals became one of the first truly dynamic and charismatic personalities associated with the cello. As such, his life and work did much to advance the cello as a solo instrument. Casals brought the suites to public attention, brought new musical life from them, and championed the cello suites as central components of the cello repertoire.

²⁵ Albert E. Kahn, *Joys and Sorrows: Reflections by Pablo Casals*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 46-47.

²⁶ H.L. Kirk, *Pablo Casals*, (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1974), 216-217.

III. LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN: 12 VARIATIONS ON A THEME FROM HANDEL'S "JUDAS MACCABEUS"

Contribution to Cello Literature

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brandished brilliant and dynamic performers on the violin and piano. Paganini astonished all of Europe with his masterful skill, virtuosic performances, and his exploitation of the violin's potential. The piano had the young and masterful Mozart and then Beethoven and in later years Chopin and Liszt, all worthy missionaries of the piano's soloist abilities. The lack of a truly riveting, charismatic personality for the cello prior to Casals may offer one reason why composers wrote more concertos and sonatas for violin and piano than for the cello. Whereas both the violin and piano possess extensive repertoire, the literature composed for cello after Bach and before Beethoven offers only a few significant works. Ludwig van Beethoven composed the first classical sonatas for cello and piano and significantly affected the growth of the literature for cello.²⁷

Part of Beethoven's contribution to cello literature came with his three sets of variations for cello and piano. The French term *air varié* simply implies a theme with variations, or literally, an embellished or ornamented air. As the eighteenth century ended, it became common to compose a set of variations on a well-known opera aria or a folk tune. Composers began to use the vehicle of theme and variations to display the virtuosity of the performer. Although later on the genre would reach its zenith with Mendelssohn's *Variations Concertantes* Op. 17, 1829, and Weber's *Variations* of 1810,

²⁷ Prieto, *Adventures of a Cello*, 231-232.

Beethoven significantly contributed to this growing genre while still in its nascent stages with his sets variations for cello and piano.²⁸

Beethoven in Vienna

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in Bonn, Germany, in 1770. Three generations of the Beethoven family found musical employment with the court of the Electorate of Cologne, in Bonn, Germany. As a boy, Beethoven received instruction on piano and violin from his father, and in 1792, at the age of twenty-two, Beethoven embarked for Vienna, the city where he would reside until his death in 1827. The purpose of Beethoven's venture to Vienna was to study with Haydn, which failed to be as useful as Beethoven anticipated. Despite his less than productive relationship with Haydn, Beethoven began to establish himself as a piano performer and composer.²⁹

During his first few years in Vienna, the influence of friend and colleague Baron Gottfried van Swieten exposed him to many of Handel's works. Swieten arranged numerous concerts that allowed Beethoven's acquaintance with Handel to grow, and Swieten's extensive library including many of Handel's scores provided Beethoven the opportunity for further study. Johann Reinhold Schultz, author of "A Day with Beethoven" published London in 1824,³⁰ reported overhearing Beethoven exclaim at a dinner party that Handel was, "the greatest composer that ever lived."³¹ Beethoven profoundly loved, respected, and admired Handel. Perhaps this exposure and love for

²⁸ Stowell, *Cambridge Companion*, 156.

²⁹ Joseph Kerman, Alan Tyson, and Scott Burnham, "Ludwig Van Beethoven" *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy, (Accessed [30 April 2007]), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

³⁰ Peter Clive, *Beethoven and His World: A Biographical Dictionary*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 327.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 148.

Handel prompted Beethoven's choice to incorporate one of Handel's themes as the basis of his first set of variations for cello and piano composition.

Handel's Oratorio "Judas Maccabeus"

The summer months of July and August of 1746 found sixty-one year George Frideric Handel setting to music a libretto by clergyman Dr. Thomas Morell (1703-1784). Created later in his life, the oratorio reflects the fruition of Handel's English style. Many of Handel's oratorios derived from Biblical stories or themes. *Judas Maccabeus*, based on the First Book of the Maccabees, tells the story of the courageous Israelite leader (175 B.C.) who fearlessly fought off the militant advances of Antiochus, the King of Syria. The Jewish holiday of Channukah celebrates the victory of the Maccabees celebrated in the "Feast of Lights" mentioned in Act III.³²

For Handel, the libretto offered relevance to political events of the day. During 1745-1746, Prince Charles Edward Stuart, grandson of the exiled King James II, led an unsuccessful rebellion in an attempt to seize the throne of England. The English Hanoverian forces defeated the rebellion at the Battle of Culloden, Scotland, on the 16 April 1746; *Judas Maccabeus* was dutifully dedicated to the triumphant leader of the Hanoverian forces, William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland.³³ Handel chose this libretto for its rousing heroic storyline as a means of celebrating the victory of the English nobility over Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobites.³⁴

³² Katherine H. Allen, "Notes on the Program," *Judas Maccabeus* by George F. Handel, Vanguard Classics.

³³ Encyclopædia Britannica Online ed., "Prince Charles Edward Stuart" www.britannica.com.

³⁴ Stanley Sadie, ed, *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, vol. 2, (London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1992), 624.

Friedrich Wilhelm II

February of 1796, fifty years after Handel's creation of *Judas Maccabeus*, found Ludwig van Beethoven traveling with patron and pianist Prince Karl Lichnowsky on a concert tour through Prague, Dresden, Leipzig, and Berlin. Berlin boasted the talents of the fine and dazzling French cellist Jean-Pierre Duport (1741-1818). Duport was known throughout Europe and could not escape the notice of Beethoven. For his concerts in Berlin, Beethoven composed three works for cello and piano with Duport in mind.

Born in Paris and a respected member of the Parisian musical establishment, Duport performed often at the Concert Spirituel, the heart of Paris' non-operatic musical life, found employment with the Prince of Conti (until 1769), went to England for two years, and then traveled to Spain. In 1773, Duport accepted the invitation of Frederick the Great of Prussia to become first cellist of the Königlische Kapelle in Berlin. Duport's responsibilities included cello instruction Prince Friedrich Wilhelm II, and organizing court concerts between 1787 and 1806. Friedrich Wilhelm II's avid patronage coupled with Duport's exquisite French virtuosity, attracted many new compositions for cello.³⁵

Beethoven was no exception. Upon reaching Berlin, Beethoven performed many times before the King of Prussia, now Friedrich Wilhelm II. Beethoven composed and dedicated his first two Cello Sonatas 'for harpsichord or pianoforte and violoncello' Op. 5 to Wilhelm. Beethoven performed these with court cellist Jean-Pierre Duport or possibly Jean-Pierre's brother Jean-Louis Duport, also a cellist, for the Prussian court. Beethoven also composed another *pièce d'occasion*, his first of three sets of variations for violoncello and piano and used Handel's chorus melody from *Judas Maccabeus*.

³⁵ Valerie Walden, 'Jean-Pierre Duport', Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed [30 April 2007]), <http://www.grovemusic.com>

The questions can be posed, why did Beethoven compose these three works for cello and piano and why did he choose a chorus tune from Handel's *Judas Maccabeus*? The reasons for the piano and cello combination were two-fold. Friedrich himself was an amateur cellist and greatly enjoyed the instrument. Friedrich also employed two virtuosic cellists which made the combination of cello and piano a logical choice for Beethoven. Beethoven may have been even more courteous towards the king in his compositional efforts with this set of twelve variations based on a theme from *Judas Maccabeus*. Beethoven selected the riveting chorus melody "See the Conquering Hero Comes" from *Judas Maccabeus* most likely as a means of paying homage to Wilhelm and offering his dynamic expressions of respect to the throne.³⁶ The chorus youths in "See the Conquering Hero Comes" exclaim:

"See the conquering hero comes! Sound the trumpets, beat the drums.
Sports prepare, the laurel bring, Songs of triumph to him sing,"³⁷

To which a chorus of virgins reply:

"See the god-like youth advance! Breathe the flutes, and lead the dance.
Myrtle wreaths, and roses twine, to deck the hero's brow divine."³⁸

Handel chose the story of courageous Judas of the Maccabees as a means of honoring William August, Duke of Cumberland; Beethoven paid homage to Handel by borrowing one of his oratorio themes and to the King by selecting this charismatic, noble theme as the basis of a composition specifically for the King's audience. If this text

³⁶ Kerman, "Ludwig van Beethoven"

³⁷ George Frideric Händel's "See the Conquering Hero Comes," *Judas Maccabeus in Full Score* (Toronto: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997), 186.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

were well-known to the educated Prussian court, then this set of variations very easily could have been Beethoven's nod to the King and throne.

Publication

The year 1797 marked the first publication of the set of variations. Viennese publishing company Artaria & Co. produced the first score for Beethoven. Artaria & Co. specialized in music publishing since its inception in 1778. Beethoven's relationship with Carlo and Francesco Artaria began soon after his arrival to Vienna and published the first editions of a number of Beethoven's initial works.³⁹ Although written for the audience of Friedrich Wilhelm, it seems that in 1797 when Beethoven published the variations, unlike his first two cello Sonatas, he dedicated the work to Princess Maria Christiane Lichnowsky (1756-1841). Maria, daughter of pianist Prince Karl Lichnowsky with whom Beethoven toured, was a highly educated, cultivated, young woman with exceptional skill as a pianist. Maria possessed great concern for Beethoven and even sought to compensate for some of Beethoven's lack of formal education. Beethoven dedicated the 12 Variations in 1797 and the piano arrangement of the ballet music *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus* (Op. 43) to Maria.⁴⁰

Lasting Impact

Beethoven's creation of five sonatas and three sets of variations for cello and piano strongly established the "combination of cello and piano as a true duo" notes musicologist Nigel Fortune.⁴¹ Beethoven moved the piano from an accompaniment position to that of a partner. This is clearly seen in the variations on a theme from *Judas*

³⁹ Clive, *Beethoven and His World*, 9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 205-206.

⁴¹ Denis Arnold and Nigel Fortune, eds. *The Beethoven Reader*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971), 212.

Maccabeus in that the very first variation Beethoven writes for solo piano. A hallmark of this set of variations rests in the integral dialogue between piano and cello keeping one instrument from overpowering or stealing the spotlight from the other. Such an equal partnership paved the way for later works such as the sonatas for cello and piano by César Franck and Claude Debussy.

IV. PYOTR IL'YICH TCHAIKOVSKY: VARIATIONS ON A ROCOCO THEME, OP. 33

Historical Backdrop

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky was born in the Vyatka province of Russia in 1840 and became the first composer of a new style of Russian music. Until his death in Saint Petersburg, in 1893, Tchaikovsky worked to intricately weave the traditions of Western European symphonic ideals with a Russian national style. He synthesized the genius of Beethoven, Schumann, Glinka, Liszt, and Berlioz creating works of brilliance and magnitude that reflected personal depth.⁴²

A mere few months before composing his Fourth Symphony and well-loved *Eugene Onegin*, Tchaikovsky began work on a composition of theme and variations for cello and orchestra. Robin Stowell notes that Tchaikovsky's set of theme and variations "is arguably the most popular set for cello and orchestra."⁴³ Although Beethoven experimented with the theme and variations genre, eighty years later Tchaikovsky expanded the genre to a broader concept, that for solo instrument and orchestra. Tchaikovsky offers the work showings his mastery of the variation form.⁴⁴ As a whole, the theme and seven variations offer passages of extreme virtuosity that challenge the performer with technical demands contrasted with elegant, beautiful lyricism.

Tchaikovsky began composing his Rococo variations in December of 1876 and completed the work in January 1877. Earlier in 1876, Tchaikovsky completed his work on *Swan Lake*, composed *Symphonic fantasia Francesca d Rimini*, premiered his

⁴² Roland John Wiley, "Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Il'yich" *Grove Music Online*

⁴³ Stowell, *Cambridge Companion*, 157.

⁴⁴ Lawrence and Elisabeth Hanson, *Tchaikovsky: The Man Behind the Music*, (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1965), 170.

Slavonic March, heard Bizet's *Carmen* in Paris, and attended the premiere of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* in Bayreuth where he also met Franz Listz. Yet at this stage in his career, Tchaikovsky received only limited success and public acclamation.

Tchaikovsky first mentions his work on set of variations for cello and orchestra in a letter to his brother Anatolii dated 15 December 1876. It appears that Tchaikovsky made the first score for cello and piano. The manuscript transitioned hands to Wilhelm Fitzenhagen (1848-1890), a friend of Tchaikovsky's who performed as a solo cellist and worked as a professor at the Moscow Conservatory. Fitzenhagen took great liberty in making suggestions and then sent the score back to Tchaikovsky. Continuing in the composing process, Tchaikovsky orchestrated the score. The original orchestration includes: Cello solo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets (in A), 2 bassoons, 2 horns (in F), 2 timpani, and strings.⁴⁵

Changes to the Original Version

Wilhelm Fitzenhagen did not consider his initial suggestions and contribution to the Variations enough and his additional changes to the manuscript delayed publication. It seems somewhat unclear whether Tchaikovsky requested Fitzenhagen's additional changes or merely tolerated them. Fitzenhagen completely altered the original sequence of the Variations and completely omitted Tchaikovsky's eighth variation. This then left an introduction, theme and seven variations. Where Tchaikovsky originally placed the D-minor Andante variation as third, Fitzenhagen decided its place as sixth, along with the cadenza that preceded it. The C-Major variation, which Tchaikovsky wrote in the seventh place, Fitzenhagen decided that it should preside as the third variation.

⁴⁵ Alexander Poznansky, and Brett Langston, eds. *The Tchaikovsky Handbook: A Guide to the Man and His Music. Vol. 1, Thematic Catalogue of Works, Catalogue of Photographs, Autobiography*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 202-204.

Fitzenhagen moved the brilliant Allegro Vivo from being the fourth variation to create the dazzling conclusion to the work. Additionally, Fitzenhagen determined that cuts should be made, tempo changes added, and some passages inserted.⁴⁶

Current Edition

More so than other compositions, the *Variations on a Rococo Theme* highlight Tchaikovsky's sense of humor, wit, understanding of French style, and may represent his most Mozartian work.⁴⁷ The variations flow out of a simple sixteen bar theme in the Rococo style. The theme's binary structure and simplicity of form provides an easily recognizable melody when disguised in elaborations.⁴⁸ Cellist and author Carlos Prieto suggests that this delicate theme reflects a true eighteenth century style and Tchaikovsky's "great admiration for Mozart."⁴⁹

The first variation Tchaikovsky writes continuous triplets for the cello part for a playful and light-hearted variation. The accompaniment for the orchestra is sparse allowing the triplets to bubble and create a delightful sense of forward motion. Although the theme is of the rococo style, light, airy, beautiful and simple, Tchaikovsky still incorporates his longing romanticism. This expresses itself initially in the opening material of the orchestra and in the transitions between variations, as seen in the transition material between the theme and first variation and between variations one and two.

The second variation offers quick sixteenth note phrases that dialogue in quick propulsion between the cello and orchestra. Virtuoso ascending scales add to the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 203-204.

⁴⁷ Hanson, *Tchaikovsky: The Man*, 169.

⁴⁸ Prieto, *Adventures*, 237.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

excitement. In contrast, Tchaikovsky offers a dramatically different feel in the third variation. Marked *Andante Sostenuto* indicating a much more reserved tempo, Tchaikovsky gives the audience a taste of ballet music, one of his most exquisite genres. Tchaikovsky writes this variation in C major, a distant key from the A Major of the rest of the work. The lyricism creates a beautiful, longing line. The third variation ends as the cello ascends with E Major arpeggios and quietly resigns itself.

Variation IV is marked *Andante grazioso* and is unique in that it places the two sixteenth note upbeats on the new downbeats of each measure. This creates a rhythmic change through moving the bar line. Once again, the frivolous and flirtatious feel expresses itself in mordents and delightful elaboration. The incorporation of ascending virtuosic scalar passages of solo cello create two very dramatic moments during this variation.

In variation V, the orchestra has the melody for the first time. The cello solo line opens with continuous trills accompanying the flute with the theme. Tchaikovsky begins to include cadenza-like material within this variation, teasing the listener with what is to come, only to return to the trills in the cello line and the theme in the flute. The cadenza arrives in full force as the cello takes over with a series of broken diminished chords that seem very different from the initial flirtatious theme. Dramatic, loud, and forceful, the cadenza loses some of its fire and recedes into a somewhat saddened, defeated end.

Variation VI again marked *Andante* presents the first minor variation. It opens with subtle pizzicato in all the strings, setting the stage for the slow, sad d minor version of the theme. The final variation brings the theme back in doubled thirty-second notes. Incredibly fast and difficult to perform, the firing notes do not end and the virtuosity of

the performer is fully seen in scales, fast sequential patterns, descending octaves and arpeggios.

First Performances

Wilhelm Fitzenhagen débuted Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo Theme* on December 18, 1877, in Moscow, in the third Russian Musical Society symphony concert conducted by Nikolai Rubinshtein. The first performance in the United States occurred a little less than a year later, on November 28, 1888, in New York's Chickering Hall, featuring cellist Victor Herbert conducted by Frank Van der Stucken.⁵⁰

Publication

Publishing company P. Iurgenson published the first edition score in Moscow in November 1889. The version published included all of Fitzenhagen's changes.⁵¹ It was not until 1956 that Tchaikovsky's original score was published as part of the Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii [musical scores] in 63 volumes.⁵² Recordings of both versions abound and Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo Theme* maintains a present membership of respected works for cello and orchestra.

⁵⁰ Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky*, 204.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁵² *Ibid.*, xi.

V. CONCLUSION

The purposes for historical investigation into music abound. Musicologists determine to expend their energies preserving, understanding, and analyzing music and its contexts. For performing musicians, sometimes this work of investigation seems too academic and far-removed from the concert hall. Yet simply learning the notes of a composition fails to draw upon the information necessary to understand and faithfully communicate music. The pursuit of understanding the historical context, the lives and thoughts of composers, and practices of the past encourages performers to grapple with why the music stands as an important work and should influence greater musical depth.

The composers Bach, Beethoven, and Tchaikovsky, stand as three well-known, well-loved composers, offering different yet significant contributions to the cello repertoire. Bach's Suites still stand as cardinal works in the cello literature, demanding technical and musical difficulty that has only been fully appreciated in the past hundred years. The very nature of the French suite should encourage performances with energy and tempos suitable to baroque dances. The noble context of Beethoven's rendition of "See the Conquering Hero Comes," should inform the manner of performance, warranting a sense of dignity and grace. For Tchaikovsky, some cellists choose to perform Tchaikovsky's original composition without Fitzenhagen's changes. These, and a hundred other decisions, require an informed understanding of the music and its context.

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