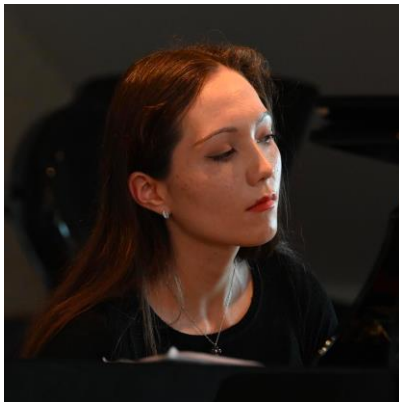


Franz Liszt's Variations on "Weinen Klagen" - Grief, Virtuosity and Historicity

The Variations on "Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen", containing a multiplicity of personal and musical references, present interpreters and researchers with unavoidable questions which are vital to any serious engagement with the work. Bach, as the originator of the thematic material and in a direct citation with the Chorale at the conclusion of the work, is a monumental influence - also in the late-romantic inflected counterpoint which dominates the variation form. The expansion of the original prelude for solo piano (1859) after the death of his eldest daughter, Blandine, provides indications of a potential biographical connection - and the dedication to the renowned pianist, conductor and teacher Anton Rubinstein, with whom he was personally acquainted, an apparently contradictory impulse towards a "public" and explicitly virtuosic context for the work.

These circumstances present the necessity for evaluation and interpretation which is shared not only by academics and pianists, but also by audiences: a methodological examination of the modes by which an individual experience or perspective upon the work is generated and influenced. What decisions regarding expressivity and contextualisation does the performative interpretation of this work demand? In what sense can a historicised approach through the deliberate research in the analytical and extra-musical approach to narrative and form in the work inform and interact with not only the performative engagement with this music, but also the experiential level upon which an audience may approach it? In particular focus is the transition to the "coda", in which a non-formalistic gesture of reconciliation is required by the reference to the final movement of the cantata "Was Gott tut, das ist wohl getan", which places questions of "conviction", "belief" and "authenticity" at the heart of the interpretative conundrum. Essentially, the set of variations demands a specificity of contextualisation and an embodiment of extra-musical "knowing" which is not only highly unusual, but presents the possibility of a closer, more personal relation to the work than is often possible in an academic or performative environment. In this paper, the juxtaposition of performative and analytical-historical approaches to the work in synthesis provide a new understanding of its form and musical content.



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