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Calogero Di Liberto's

Fantasy on Cavalleria Rusticana in the Context
of the Romantic Opera Fantasy for Piano

by

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ABSTRACT

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This study interprets the author’s *Fantasy* for piano based on the opera *Cavalleria Rusticana* in the context of the operatic fantasy for piano that was a major genre in the Romantic period. The first two chapters provide an overview of the history of opera and concert life in the nineteenth century, and a history of the genre itself from its birth (mid-eighteenth century) to its decline, at the end of the nineteenth century. Special attention is paid to the world of Franz Liszt, the main exponent of the genre. Chapter three analyzes the style and structure of the author’s Fantasy and shows its relationship to Mascagni’s opera and Liszt’s works. The final chapter suggests that despite modernism’s disdain for the piano fantasy based on opera, the genre has a great deal to offer audiences.
Acknowledgments

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Thanks also to my wife, Francesca Deflorian, and to John T. Manning, Jr., for his help with English.

This work is dedicated to my wife.
Table of Contents

PREFACE

CHAPTER ONE: Opera, Piano Music, and Virtuosity in the Nineteenth Century

Opera in the Nineteenth Century 1
Concert Life and the Virtuoso in the first Half of the Nineteenth Century 12

CHAPTER TWO: A Brief History of the Piano Fantasy on Opera Themes 26

CHAPTER THREE: Di Liberto Fantasy on Cavalleria Rusticana by Pietro Mascagni

Genesis of the Piece 50
Cavalleria Rusticana 52
Analysis of the Fantasy 54
Final Remarks 72

CHAPTER FOUR: Conclusion 74

BIBLIOGRAPHY 79
Preface

The idea of writing my doctoral document on operatic fantasies for the piano has been in the back of my mind ever since I started my studies at Rice University, in the fall of 2002. When the moment came to discuss this idea with Dr. Marcia Citron, we realized that, given the number of existing documents and articles available on the subject, one more dissertation would have been merely a duplicate of little or no interest. So we resolved that writing on my own Fantasy on Cavalleria Rusticana could be more interesting than collecting information on someone else’s pieces. It would be the occasion to present, for once, a piano fantasy on operatic themes from the point of view of the composer.

It seemed to me that writing on my own piece would be a great pleasure and a fairly easy task. But soon I had to change my mind. Analyzing my piece was a pleasure, but at the same time it was not easy at all. Putting into words the reasons that brought me to make the choices I made, and explaining the emotions I was trying to convey in my music, became indeed a major challenge. I realized that the proportion between rational thinking and the instinct involved in the process of composition was approximately equal. Most of the rational thinking regarded the choice of themes and the planning of the outer structure of the work. The treatment of the themes came more instinctively to me. Not only was I a pianist writing for my instrument and for myself, but I was also somehow trying to follow the model set in the genre by Franz Liszt. I tried to feel in my hands all I was writing on the page as natural and never merely attempted to copy from the master. The result is not for me to judge, and surely I will never presume to compare my piece to
those of Liszt, Thalberg, or Busoni. However, I am firmly convinced that there is no better way to understand something than attempting it oneself. This experience surely made me more aware of what a fantasy on opera can be and signify, and led me to a deeper appreciation of the genre.

The document is organized in three chapters. The first, “Opera, Piano Music, and Virtuosity in the Nineteenth Century,” is further subdivided into two parts. The first part presents a brief survey of opera history in the nineteenth century, limited to France, Italy, and the German-speaking world, and to the genres and authors that will appear in the repertory of opera-based fantasies for piano. The aim of the second part is to offer a view of how the piano and its performers gradually became the center of musical life in the nineteenth century. The development of the instrument, the birth of the virtuoso, concert life, and venues are briefly discussed.

The second chapter is “A Brief History of the Piano Fantasy on Opera Themes.” This overview will consider the development of the genre from its beginnings as an improvised practice, in the works of Mozart, Clementi, Beethoven, Hummel, and Moscheles, to its decline after the masterpieces of Liszt. Selected works are briefly presented and discussed.

The third chapter features an analysis of my Fantasy on Cavalleria Rusticana. The first section will explain the genesis of the piece, how the idea came into my mind, and how this idea was gradually realized. The second part offers a detailed analysis of the piece, with numerous musical examples.

The Fantasy on Cavalleria Rusticana is dedicated to my daughter Clara.
Chapter One: Opera, Piano Music, and Virtuosity in the Nineteenth Century

Opera in the Nineteenth Century

In the first half of the nineteenth century Paris was the European capital of opera. Here, in the late 1820’s and early 1830’s, a group of newly composed operas introduced a new type of musical drama, *grand opéra*. Those works most typifying the new genre were Auber’s *La Muette de Portici* (1828), Rossini’s *Guillaume Tell* (1829), Meyerbeer’s *Robert le diable* (1831) and *Les Huguenots* (1836), and Halévy’s *La Juive* (1835). The term *grand opéra* was originally used to distinguish this form from *opéra comique*. The main difference between the two forms is that the musical numbers were connected by recitatives in the former, and by spoken dialogue in the latter. The word “grand” implied a heroic subject, grandiose proportions, and the use of extreme resources in singing, staging, and orchestral music. The new works did not correspond to a clear break with tradition. Instead, they represented a more romantic interpretation and employment of features already in use. They were very successful at the time and extremely influential on subsequent generations of opera composers.

The composer who best represents *grand opéra* is Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864). He was a master of dramatic writing and effects who fully realized all scenic and emotional possibilities of his librettis. His music is generally tuneful, rhythmically energetic, and harmonically original. His orchestration is remarkable, his choral writing massive, and his treatment of the solo voices brilliant. His harmonic language and especially his use of orchestra influenced many later composers, and his ideal of grand opera is clearly visible in Verdi’s *Vêpres Siciliennes*, *Don Carlos*, and *Aida*, and in
Wagner's *Rienzi*. Meyerbeer's most important works in the genre are *Robert le diable*, *Les Huguenots*, *Le Prophète* (1849), and *L'Africaine* (1865).

French opera of the early nineteenth century contained a mixture of classical and romantic traits. The romantic qualities are not only typified by the grand and spectacular scale of the shows, but also by the increasing length of descriptive instrumental numbers, and the more frequent use of chromaticism and unexpected modulations for expressive purposes. During this period *grand opéra* and *opéra comique* grew closer to each other. Comic scenes and characters, typical of comic opera, entered *grand opéra*, and *opéra comique* occasionally approached the subject matter of a libretto in a more serious way. The musical style of comic opera became in general more complex.

In the 1830's and 1840's a more lighthearted type of *opéra comique* led to the flourishing of *operetta* during the Second Empire (1852-70). Its main traits were the use of spoken dialogue, enjoyable subjects, comic elements and characters, and an unpretentious musical style. The master of this genre was undoubtedly the German-born Jacques Offenbach (1819-80).

Between the genres of grand opera and *operetta* there developed the *opéra lyrique*. This genre was less heavy and pompous, smaller in its dimensions, and more unified than grand opera. More solemn and sober than comic opera, it was generally distinguished by sophisticated lyricism. The most important composer in the genre was Charles Gounod (1818-93).

The state of opera in Italy at the turn of the century was not as dynamic as in France. From 1790 to 1810 the production of *opera seria* was still largely governed by a strong obedience to the old Metastasian principles that permitted only three types of solo
song: *recitativo secco, recitativo accompagnato* and *aria*, and to the convention of the exit aria. After 1800, however, the works of the German-born Simon Mayr (1763-1845) successfully initiated some changes. His literary sources were often French, which forced him to introduce numerous choruses and ensembles, and eventually resulted in a greater flexibility in the treatment of form. He most importantly influenced Felice Romani (1788-1865), the librettist of his later works who subsequently also worked with Bellini and Donizetti, to develop the practice of introducing larger and more numerous choruses and ensembles in his libretti. As a result, the first decades of the nineteenth century increasingly saw a relaxation in the old conventions and the appearance of new types of solo song, such as the *cavatina-cabaletta*. Choruses, ensembles, and instrumental passages of larger proportions were gradually introduced and organized in a broader musico-dramatic plan. These formal developments were fully developed by Mayr’s successors: Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi.

Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868) largely dominated the operatic world in Italy in the first part of the nineteenth century. By 1815, he had established himself as a great composer of both *opera seria* and *opera buffa*. His most famous works are *Tancredi* (*melodramma eroico*, 1813), *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (*opera buffa*, 1816), *Otello* (*melodramma tragico*, 1816), *La Cenerentola* (*melodramma giocoso*, 1817), *Mosè in Egitto* (*melodramma sacro*, 1818), *Semiramide* (*melodramma tragico*, 1823), and *Guillaume Tell* (*melodramma tragico*, 1829). His vocal style is best known for its unmatched rhythmic energy and dynamic tunefulness, light textures in the accompaniment, and elegant coloratura passages. His arias are for the most part in two sections, slow and fast (*cavatina* and *cabaletta*, respectively). His numerous ensembles
are energetic, realistic, and full of contrasts, often employed to build excitement through the famous device of the Rossinian crescendo, whereby a passage is repeated several times, each time on a higher pitch and with heavier orchestration. His recitatives are accompanied by the orchestra. The treatment of the orchestra is extremely skillful and always transparent, economical, and genial in the choice of colors.

The history of Italian opera between Rossini and Verdi was for the most part defined by Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) and Vincenzo Bellini (1801-35). Donizetti, the more prolific of the two, wrote over seventy operas, the most famous being Anna Bolena (romantic tragedy, 1830), L’elisir d’amore (romantic comedy, 1832), Lucrezia Borgia (romantic tragedy, 1833), Lucia di Lammermoor (romantic tragedy, 1835), La fille du régiment (opéra comique, 1840), La Favorite (grand opéra, 1840), and Don Pasquale (opera buffa, 1843). In Anna Bolena, the work that established him as the leading Italian opera composer, Donizetti started showing signs of a mature, personal musical style, gradually moving away from Rossinian conventions. “His music at its best has a primitive dramatic power…and his tunes have a robust swing, with catchy rhythms reinforced by frequent sforzandos on the off beats.”¹

While Donizetti’s works represent the outgoing spirit of Romanticism, Bellini’s are often introverted and lyrical in nature. Bellini’s entire output consists of only ten operas, of which the most important are Il Pirata (1827), I Capuleti e I Montecchi (1830), La sonnambula (1831), Norma (1831) and I Puritani (1835). The reason for the slow pace at which he produced his works lies in his obsession for an ideal union of words and music. His sensitivity to the text results in more musical recitatives and a fusion between

¹ Donald J. Grout and Hermine Weigel Williams, A Short History of Opera (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 391.
text and music that at climactic moments reaches an astonishing intensity of expression. The prime element of Bellini’s dramas is melody. His long, elegant, stunningly beautiful tunes are characterized by little internal repetition and some irregularity of phrase. In their melancholic and nostalgic mood, they have often been compared to those of Chopin. Bellini’s harmonic style is nonetheless significantly more varied than that of Donizetti, and his treatment of the orchestra is remarkable.

The changes that took place in Italian opera from 1800 to 1840 did not overturn its basics. Italian composers always held firmly to two principles: the melody (voice) as essential vehicle of musical expression, and the division of the opera into distinct numbers (recitatives and arias). Starting with Mayr and Rossini, the role of the orchestra gradually became more important, but the supremacy of melody was never questioned. In much the same way, a greater flexibility in the treatment of forms never really threatened the convention of separate numbers. Nevertheless, in the first half of the nineteenth century, Italian opera started a process of evolution that was to be brought to maturity by Verdi.

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) dominated the Italian opera scene in the second half of the nineteenth century, embodying in his works the transformation from the older Italian opera to the more complex and refined style characteristic of his mature works. Verdi’s first important operas were Nabucodonosor (dramma lirico, 1842), I Lombardi alla prima crociata (dramma lirico, 1843), and Ernani (dramma lirico, 1844). These works show a certain degree of influence from Meyerbeer, as well as the signs of an indisputable dramatic and melodic gift combined with an intense power of expression. Verdi’s music quickly became extremely popular. In fact, the composer succeeded in
providing just the touch of originality to the established forms of opera that was needed. Further, his works came to play a significant role in Italian contemporary politics (the nationalist movement of the Risorgimento, c. 1815-70). Although his operas did not relate in any direct way to the contemporary revolutionary movements, their plots were filled with conspiracies, political assassinations, and appeals for liberty from tyranny, which made them extremely suitable to the widespread feelings and moods of the time. The plots of his operas (except for Il giorno di regno and Falstaff) are serious, dark, highly passionate, and violent, providing plenty of dramatic contrasts.

*Rigoletto* (1851), *Il trovatore* (1853), and *La traviata* (1853) represent the peak of Verdi’s production in the purely Italian style. In these works his musical style is direct, vigorous, and natural. While the melodies sometimes appear insignificant, they are almost always appropriate to the situation. Dramatic effects are achieved exclusively by means of the voices, while the orchestration shows the development of original and skillful techniques. The role of instrumental music grows more important than in the past, but it never rises to the central position found in Wagner. Verdi’s use of recurring themes in several of his operas also has little in common with Wagner’s use of leitmotifs. It simply consists of introducing a musical phrase associated with a specific event in a later situation to emphasize the similarity between the two events. A master at combining vocal colors, Verdi created ensembles that are remarkable for their beautiful sonorities as well as an exceptional sense of climax and dramatic timing.

Like many of his contemporaries, Verdi was attracted by the style of French grand opera, and he was very successful in the genre. With *Aida*, written for Cairo and first performed there in 1871, the composer achieved a perfect balance between Italian
melodic liveliness and rich colors and the majestic style of French grand opera. The work’s most important accomplishment is its great formal continuity, obtained through the skillful use of recurring themes and an all-encompassing exotic quality of the music (due to Verdi’s sensibility for orchestral and vocal colors).

After Aida Verdi took a long leave from the stage, returning sixteen years later, at the age of seventy-four, with Otello (1887), the greatest Italian tragic opera of the nineteenth century. The subjects for Otello and Falstaff (1893), his last two operas, were derived from Shakespeare. The libretti were prepared by Arrigo Boito, and much of the success of these two works is due to him. Boito’s extensive use of long verses provided the poetry with a great mobility of accents that closely resembled prose. This versification was perfectly suited to Verdi’s late style, focused on free melodic declamation that renounced any kind of repetition and symmetry.\(^2\) Otello’s music represents the culmination of Verdi’s evolution as a composer. In this work, all the forms and styles already familiar to Verdi reach a perfection and connection with the drama never seen before. The opera also introduces several innovations: a remarkable level of unity through the musical continuity in each act, the return of a significant recurring motif, and great continuity of action from one scene to the next. Otello’s melody is extremely varied, flexible, receptive to changes of mood, and supported by the orchestra with distinctive rhythms in each scene, with the harmony providing the organization in long periods.

“As Otello was the climax of tragic opera, so Falstaff (1893) represented the transfiguration of opera buffa.”\(^3\) The process of dismantlement of the closed forms

\(^2\) Liner Notes from DVD Falstaff (Milano: Corriere della Sera, 2004), 6-7.

\(^3\) Grout, A Short History of Opera, 414.
initiated with *Simon Boccanegra* (1857) and *Otello* reached its maturity here. In *Falstaff*, the only interruptions are created by the division of the opera into six scenes. The principal means employed by the composer to achieve total adherence of the music to the dramatic events is a continuous and extremely versatile melodic flow of the vocal line, a melody that encompasses all the nuances between simple declamation, and the most expressive cantabile. The orchestral writing is similarly versatile and complex, always complementing the melodic line. But *Falstaff*'s real originality is the extensive use of an archaic musical language, both in the vocal and in the orchestral writing (the use of fugue and sonata form). This is a device employed by Verdi not only to portray the spirit of the old *commedia musicale* in a more modern dimension, but also to signify his emotional distance from the agitated world of his characters, the distance from the events of life of the old, wise composer.⁴

The German operatic world of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries was dominated by Italian and French opera, with the native *Singspiel* confined for the most part to relatively isolated localities. The genre was nevertheless able to preserve its traditional features, among which were the choice of either a serious or comic subject matter and the use of spoken dialogue.

Romanticism resulted in new vigor and enthusiasm for music in general and for opera in particular. By the 1820s, German romantic opera started its path towards the climax embodied by Wagner in the second part of the century. The romantic ideals that pervaded all arts around 1800 originated in literature and quickly spread to all other art forms. Some of the general traits of German Romanticism entailed a close relationship between man and nature on one side, with the representation of "folk" scenes and humble

⁴ *Falstaff*, 10.
people, and of nature with the supernatural on the other, with subject matter often drawn from national legends and myths. Various artistic fields had greater interaction with each other. Inevitably, music was seen as the ideal art form because of its immediacy and unmediated effect on one's feelings. Opera was advanced as the only possible art form able to unite all arts. The romantic philosophy of coalescence of the single elements of a whole had a great impact on operatic music style, providing the foundation for great developments in musical language and style. The union of text and music became increasingly more essential, culminating in Wagner's ideal of the composer/librettist. Separate numbers disappeared and dissolved into a continuous flow of music, with the orchestra now providing most of the action. Similarly, the distinction between aria and recitative also loosened towards a declamatory vocal style best represented by Wagner's works. Other general developments in German music of the romantic period include an increase in the variety of colors offered by the orchestra and a harmonic language gradually moving away from the limitations of tonality, with dissonance gaining status as an important means of expression.

With his most important opera, Der Freischütz (1820), Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826) was the founder of German Romantic opera. The libretto is a perfect model of early German Romanticism: the emphasis on nature and the life of a simple and happy village, a pure heroine and a virtuous but naïve hero, a villain caught in his own trap, and a kind and just prince. While the elements were old, their mixture here was innovative, with every detail presented by Weber as a vital element of a whole. The music of Freischütz is the work of a very skillful and experienced opera composer. The arias
display diverse forms and styles, and popular forms are skillfully intermingled with more learned ones. A feeling of unity is achieved by recurring motives.

The composer who brought German Romantic opera to its highest level is Richard Wagner (1813-83). While carrying the work of his predecessors to maturity in his early operas, he developed in the later ones a new philosophy of musical drama and brought about what can be considered a revolution in the genre.

_Tannhäuser_ (1845) represents Wagner's first mature work, embodying a synthesis between his early grand-opera style and the idea of redemption from love first presented in _Der fliegende Holländer_ (1841). The earlier work is still organized in separate numbers, but Wagner's mastery in combining them, while at the same time providing them with a serious dramatic purpose, brings a balance between form and content that was seldom achieved in opera. In _Tannhäuser_ the composer also introduces innovations that are further developed in his later works. The recitatives gain an unprecedented declamatory quality, achieved by means of melodies strictly shaped around the text. The orchestra not only provides important harmonic structure, but additionally carries musical motifs that function as commentary to the text and support the delivery of its meaning.

The next Wagner work is _Lohengrin_ (1846-48). The subject matter derives from Germanic folklore and legend. The musical setting is remarkable for its unity of mood and a greater continuity between numbers. In this work, the recurring reminiscence motifs begin to symbolize situations or abstract ideas. The distinction between recitative and aria becomes more and more subtle, and this new declamatory style is now the norm.

Around the year 1850 Wagner produced a series of essays on music (_Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft, Oper und Drama_) that systematically explain the philosophy and
technical features of all his subsequent works. His idea of Gesamtkunstwerk (a form of art that unites all of the arts, and of which music is only one of its parts) and its governing principles are best represented in Der Ring des Nibelungen, which consists of four operas: Das Rheingold (one act), Die Walküre, Siegfried, and Götterdämmerung (1848-74). The libretto, written by Wagner himself and taken from a composite collection of Germanic mythological sources, embodies the interaction of the eternal forces governing human and natural life. The Ring aims to represent by means of symbols all the issues entailed in the interrelationships between human, natural, and superhuman lives.⁵

Wagner viewed music as the direct expression of feelings, representing the inner action of drama, but thought it incapable of designating the object of the affection described, the outer action. Moreover, since "the inner action is considered to be always on the plane of feelings where music is appropriate and necessary, there is no simple dialogue or simple recitative,"⁶ and because inner action is continuous, the music must also be uninterrupted. The most efficient way of analyzing the form of his works from the Ring onward seems to be that of following the recurrence of the leitmotifs. Each leitmotiv is the representation of a specific dramatic idea, and the evidence of its meaning is to be found at the first appearance of each theme. The motifs are usually short and of distinct individual character, and they aim for the essence of the idea for which their visible symbols stand. The recurrence of such themes forms a "symphonic web that corresponds ... to the dramatic web of the action."⁷ Given that the meaning of the drama is in the music (the leitmotifs), it follows that the principal vehicle for delivery is the orchestra, while the voice usually makes a free counterpoint to the instrumental

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⁵ Grout, A Short History of Opera, 451.
⁶ Ibid., 454.
⁷ Ibid., 457.
presentation of the leitmotifs. The voice parts are largely declamatory and manage to reproduce correctly the accents, tempi, and inflections appropriate to each character. The sound of Wagner's orchestra is full and rich, and all the resources of the symphonic style are skillfully employed to their best.

After the Ring Wagner wrote three more operas: Tristan und Isolde (1859), Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (1867), and Parsifal (1882). Parsifal is the most philosophical of his operas. Here Wagner reached an unprecedented expressive intensity, a richness of orchestral colors, and a degree of dissonance that occasionally hints at atonality.

Concert Life and the Virtuoso in the first Half of the Nineteenth Century

During the course of the nineteenth century, European musical life experienced a significant growth. Opera gained a primary position in the musical world; chamber-music and solo concerts gradually moved from a primarily private environment to especially-built concert halls; the solo recital was inaugurated by Liszt at the end of the 1830s; home music-making no longer involved members of the aristocracy only but progressively spread to the bourgeoisie; and, thanks to the improvements achieved in piano making in the first decades of the century, the piano and its virtuosi gained an extremely prominent role in musical life.

At the beginning of the century, the country that showed the most established concert life was undoubtedly England. "Our debt to the musical life of the United Kingdom is great...London manifested a restless, flourishing public concert life by the
late seventeenth century." By then, publicly advertised concerts in taverns were common and well attended, so much so that both the child Mozart and Johann Christian Bach performed in such venues in the 1760s. Public concerts were offered in the city at the numerous "pleasure gardens." They were based on a standard of twelve to twenty items distributed between two acts. A vast array of more private musical events, often including amateur performances of mainly chamber music, led to the institution of numerous musical societies. Large rooms specifically intended for musical performance started to be built in England as early as the 1730s. Mr. Johnston's Great Room was inaugurated in Dublin in 1731, the Rotunda at the Public Pleasure Gardens of Lord Ranelagh in today's Chelsea opened in 1742, and the Hanover Square Rooms, holding six hundred people, was built in London in 1775. The Royal Albert Hall, built in London about a century later, in 1871, with a capacity of over six thousand, set a new standard in concert-hall size. By 1800 regular seasons based on subscription were well established in London. Soon, two major musical institutions - the Philharmonic Society, devoted to symphonic and chamber music, and the Sacred Harmonic Society, promoting choral singing - were founded, in 1813 and 1832 respectively. Three major theaters were also active in London at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The King's Theatre (later Her Majesty's Theatre, with Queen's Victoria accession in 1837) imported foreign operas, mainly Italian. The Covent Garden and Drury Lane theaters offered newly commissioned English operas, and English adaptations of foreign works. After 1800 about a dozen of

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new, smaller theaters were built and came gradually into competition with Covent Garden and Drury Lane. The operas by Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti, together with English operas, dominated the stages of the city. Performances of German and French operas in original language were sporadically offered by foreign touring companies. ¹¹

Vienna of the eighteenth century was without doubt the musical capital of Europe. But during the nineteenth century the city lost its musical supremacy to Paris. In the Austrian capital public concert life evolved in a much slower fashion than, for instance, in London, and public concert opportunities for pianists such as Czerny, Thalberg, and Moscheles were certainly not plentiful. Longer than anywhere else in Europe, domestic music-making remained the predominant way of enjoying chamber and solo music. The spaces available until the two halls of the Musikverein were opened in 1870 were, for one reason or another, not readily available. As Leppert and Zank observe, "the complexities of procuring rooms for any kind of public musical performance at the time were formidable." ¹² Piano manufacturers like Stein, Graf, Bösendorfer, and Streicher partially made up for this lack in performing spaces by making their showrooms available to lesser known artists at no charge, but these venues did not meet great fortune for a lack of publicity.

Opera was a crucial component of Vienna's musical life. Performances were held mainly at the Kärntnertortheater, the Burgtheater, the Theater an der Wien, and at smaller suburban houses. The Kärntnertortheater and Burgtheater produced mainly Italian, French, and German operas, while the Theater an der Wien and the smaller venues featured lighter German comic theater.

As the other European countries, Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed the spread of musical culture among the middle classes. Domestic music-making became more pervasive, as a larger portion of the population could afford instruments and music lessons, and most of the chamber and solo performances still took place in more or less private settings. Public concerts were largely dominated in Germany by the symphony, which was also virtually the only genre cultivated by German composers that exercised a significant and lasting influence abroad. Until the rise of German opera with Wagner, most opera productions were imported from Italy and France. This repertoire was performed in municipal theaters usually patronized by the civic authorities.\(^\text{13}\)

During the years of the Revolution, concert life in Paris underwent significant changes. But although the Revolution brought some chaos to the concert life of the city, and a number of the most eminent concert series succumbed, musical activity somehow survived and gradually became the focal point of social life. By the beginning of the nineteenth century Paris became not only the European capital of opera production, but the center of artistic life in general, holding the position for a good part of the century.

Through 1810, public concerts were mostly held in theaters. By the first years of the nineteenth century several rooms devoted to public music making were constructed in the French capital, the most important of which was the hall of the Paris Conservatory, opened in 1811 with a capacity of over a thousand people. The hall was used by students of the Conservatoire and by great virtuosi as well. In 1805 the *concerts spirituels* resumed and the fervent musical activity of the city led to the inauguration of several

concert series in the late 1820s and early 1830s. Some promoted the music of the Viennese Classics and of the German romantic masters (Mendelssohn and Schumann). Starting in the late 1830s, promenade concerts, which offered evenings of mixed entertainment (light classical concerts and dances), were also extremely popular. Public performances of chamber works were promoted by small groups of enthusiasts and connoisseurs.\textsuperscript{14} In Paris a great range of facilities became available to pianists much earlier than, for instance, in Vienna. Most significant for the development of piano-centered concerts was the opening of rooms for public performances by several piano manufacturers. Pleyel inaugurated a hall in 1830 and a second hall only nine years later, reaching two hundred concerts a season within a few years. Following the Revolution, three major theaters were active in Paris, and Parisians were offered a great variety of events. The Opéra produced grand operas in French, ballets, and other types of dramatic spectacles. Comic operas were offered at the Opéra-Comique, and by 1801, with the reopening of the Théâtre Italien, Italian \textit{opere buffe} and \textit{serie} returned to Paris with productions employing both Italian and French artists.\textsuperscript{15}

Italian musical life of the first half of the nineteenth century was largely, if not almost exclusively, dominated by opera. The beginning of an era practically devoid of instrumental music was marked by Rossini’s establishment as the rising star of opera in the early 1810s. He opened the way to Bellini and Donizetti, and the three rapidly conquered not only the Italian stages, but the opera houses of all Europe. In the nineteenth century, the number of important theaters in Italy was smaller than in the previous century, but their prestige was much greater. The most important were La

\textsuperscript{15} Grout, \textit{A Short History of Opera}, 336.
Fenice at Venice, La Scala at Milan, the Pergola in Florence, the Apollo and Argentina in Rome, and the San Carlo in Naples. The first conservatory was founded in Milan in 1807. In mid-century, towns like Florence, Turin, Rome, Palermo, Venice, and Bologna followed the example of Milan, confirming the fact that musical education in Italy was becoming a national responsibility. The opening of these music schools also contributed to the renewal of interest in instrumental music, which occurred in Italy during the 1860s. Milan remained through the century the most important Italian center of instrumental music, partly because of the presence in town of prominent musicians teaching at the Conservatory, and partly because of the presence of the occupying Austrian nobility, directly connected with the musical activity of Vienna. Several circles for amateur performances were established in the city in the first half of the century, and chamber-music concerts were held in numerous houses of the aristocracy. Shortly after the unification of Italy (1861) the Società del Quartetto was founded in 1864, and from 1872 the orchestra of La Scala gave concerts for the society.\(^\text{16}\)

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the only instrumental musician of international reputation based in Italy was also the foremost virtuoso of the romantic age: the violinist Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840). His performances, and the extent of his European career, elicited the marvel and enthusiasm of several prominent musicians, notably Liszt, Schumann, Chopin, the cellist Franchomme, and more than a generation of violinists. Paganini showed a rather eccentric and unorthodox approach to music (and to life in general) at a very early age. He rose immediately to the attention of critics and the public (often of opposite opinions about his playing) partly for playing jokes and

imitating animal sounds with his violin, but especially for the high level of unfaithfulness to the text when playing music by other composers. His extensive touring (in Italy and most of the other European countries) was unprecedented, and his playing was considered inimitable. His stunning technical skills elicited the same marvel as the novel sound effects introduced in his pieces.

Not only a performer, Paganini was in fact a skilled and prolific composer as well, and produced a considerable body of works for his instrument. Like Chopin and Liszt, Paganini’s music was dependent on his own playing style, and was meant for his own performances. Among his pieces for violin and orchestra or piano, we can count several sets of variations on operatic tunes. These include *Le streghe*, on a theme from Viganò’s ballet *Il noce di Benevento*; three sets of variations on Rossini’s arias from *Tancredi*, *Mosè in Egitto*, and *La Cenerentola*; one set on an aria from Paisiello’s *La molinara*; and others. It was not only Paganini’s playing that aroused the audience’s fervor, but also his appearance and stage presence. The nineteenth century was the age of the visual (we only need to think of how spectacular opera productions of this period were) and now, more than ever before, musical meaning was conveyed not only by the sound, but by sight, gestures, and facial expressions of the performer.

Most of the other virtuosi and composers of the nineteenth century were centered in Paris, feeling that they had not arrived until they achieved a Paris success. Rossini moved to the city in the mid-1820s. Meyerbeer, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Wagner also resided and worked there at one point or another in their lives. Nearly all major musical talents of Europe found their way to Paris, and by 1839 Franz Liszt (1811-86), Fryderyk Chopin (1810-49), Sigismond Thalberg (1812-71), Henri Herz (1803-88),
Johann Peter Pixis (1788-1874), Theodor Döhler (1814-56), Jacob Rosenhain (1813-94), Pierre-Joseph-Guillaume Zimmermann (1785-1853), Henri Bertini (1798-1876), Valentin Alkan (1813-88), and other pianists were either permanent or occasional residents of Paris. Of them, Liszt certainly became the master in following the example set by Paganini and in exploiting the violinist's expressive means.

Liszt heard Paganini in concert in Paris in 1832. The performance was a "blinding flash of revelation" for him and he clearly saw his future in following Paganini's footsteps.\(^\text{17}\) Liszt wrote on May 2, 1832:

> For a whole fortnight my mind and my fingers have been working like two lost souls. Homer, the Bible, Plato, Locke, Byron, Hugo, Lamartine, Châteaubriand, Beethoven, Bach, Hummel, Mozart, Weber are all around me. I study them, meditate on them, devour them with fury; besides this, I practice four to five hours of exercises (thirds, sixths, octaves, tremolos, repetition of notes, cadenzas, etc.) Ah! Provided I don't go mad you will find in me an artist! Yes, an artist ... such as is required today.\(^\text{18}\)

The ideal of Paganini was always before him, and it is a myth that Liszt never practiced. After this first encounter with the famous violinist, he devoted himself immediately to the production of a repertoire in which he could transfer to the piano some of Paganini's most spectacular effects (tremolos, leaps, glissandos, spiccato effects, and bell-like harmonics). His own career as a traveling virtuoso was much shorter than Paganini's, lasting only from about 1835 to 1847, but it was equally extensive and influenced generations of performers after him. Liszt's technical facility was legendary and his artistic sensibility left no soul untouched. His performances always provoked a very strong reaction, either pro or against, in both audiences and critics.

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As mentioned above, Liszt was not the only piano virtuoso living in Paris or touring Europe in this era. Chopin, Thalberg, Kalkbrenner, Herz, Pixis, and Clara Schumann, among others, were the contenders for the spotlight. Legendary is the quarrel between Liszt and Thalberg, which culminated in a musical duel held at the Paris residence of Princess Christina Belgioioso on 31 March 1839. Newspapers had partly instigated and emphatically supported the rivalry between the two greatest virtuosos resident in Paris at the time, until Princess Belgioioso persuaded both to perform at a charity concert at her house, setting up this musical duel to establish the greatest pianist in Europe. “Thalberg’s playing was characterized by an intense cultivation of the *legato cantabile* style, and his unostentatious manner contrasted vividly with Liszt’s rhapsodic virtuosity.”¹⁹ Comparison between their two vastly different styles was hardly possible, but Thalberg’s great success with his *Fantasy on Rossini’s Moses*, a showcase for his so-called “three-handed” technique,²⁰ provoked a lively debate in the musical world about the respective merits of the two artists. Liszt performed his *Fantasy on a Cavatina from Pacini’s Niobe*. The contest ended with an even score: “newspaper reviews counseled that Thalberg could benefit from a little of Liszt’s spirit and energy, while Liszt would be improved by the addition of a little of Thalberg’s repose, which might have prevented him from banging the pedal so loudly with his foot during the more vigorous passages of the *Niobe* Fantasy.”²¹ A few years later, Liszt included Thalberg’s three-handed

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²⁰ The main melody is played alternately by each hand in the middle register of the keyboard while arpeggios or other virtuosic figurations are running above and below it. This technique gives the listener the impression that more than two hands are playing at the same time.

²¹ Hamilton, “The Virtuoso Tradition,” 60.
technique in his Fantasy on Bellini’s *Norma*, effectively surpassing the model represented by the *Moses* Fantasy.

The era of the piano virtuosos was made possible by a number of reasons, not least the improvements achieved in piano building at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Up to the end of the eighteenth century, the business of piano making had been primarily concentrated in Vienna and London. Viennese pianos were generally more elegant, provided with a better action and lighter in sound, while English pianos were known for their greater sonority and sturdiness. The major piano builders in Vienna at the turn of the century were the manufacturers Nannette and Matthäus Stein, Anton Walter, Conrad Graf, Streicher, and Brodmann. In London, where the grand piano was introduced around 1770 by Backers, the firms of Joseph Merlin, Robert Stodart, and especially John Broadwood were the major producers of pianos. By the end of the eighteenth century, Paris entered the competition, quickly becoming a third important center of piano-making.  

"Such major French manufacturers as Erard and Pleyel had learned a great deal from the British trade during their extended ‘sabbaticals’ in London during the Revolution...both eventually turned out pianos that virtuosos preferred to any English and Viennese instruments." As reported by Hamilton in *The Cambridge Companion to the Piano*, Fétis claimed that, by 1830, over three hundred piano makers worked in Paris. The introduction of iron bracing, double escapement action, heavier hammers, and thicker strings were all accomplishments of this period, which allowed the instrument a much greater sonority and the pianist a better control of the instrument. The piano became louder and more agile, opening the way to the era of its virtuosos. The success of

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23 Leppert and Zank, “The Concert and the Virtuoso,” 244.
Chopin, Liszt, Thalberg and many others would have been impossible without the improvements in piano design achieved in the first decades of the nineteenth century. The growth of the European middle classes, nowhere more obvious than in Paris, also distinctly contributed to the fortune and improvements of the instrument. The piano quickly became the favored instrument of the musically active bourgeoisie.

The improvements in piano building also greatly influenced concert life. For a long time, the feeble harpsichords and the first, just as delicate, pianos were instruments chiefly employed in the home, during private or semi-public musical gatherings. The music performed during these reunions of family and friends included chamber and solo works. However, in public venues, the piano was almost exclusively involved in chamber music and solo concertos. Up until the 1830s, solo piano music was generally not considered suitable to public performances. For more than a century the solo instrument par excellence had been the violin. The construction of string instruments had been mastered by the end of the seventeenth century and violin technique had developed a great deal, producing a virtuosic literature for the instrument and contributing to the establishment of the figure of the violin virtuoso. In all this, the piano was mostly relegated to the role of accompaniment, in public concert life. With the development of the piano in the first half of the nineteenth century, the violin found a worthy rival, and in a few decades the piano became the virtuoso instrument par excellence. The violinist Pierre Baillot observes in 1796 how the piano was gaining ground on the violin in Paris, as it had happened already in London: “the epidemic of musicoragicomania is spreading...Every tiny circle is turning into a concert society, every table into a piano, every woman into a musician...A quarter of an hour is ample time to hear three Gluck
operas, a few Italian finales, a few ponts-neufs, potpourris, romances, and a grand sonata by Steibelt may be thrown in."\textsuperscript{25} The piano was beginning to be heard in public venues in a variety of roles that kept it occupied almost continuously throughout a concert.

The context in which instrumental musicians of the nineteenth century performed was substantially different from the design of the present-day recital. Instrumental public and private performances, from Mozart's time to at least the middle of the nineteenth century, followed mostly the model of the benefit concert, featuring a variety of artists in a mixture of vocal and instrumental genres. The repertoire was largely contemporary. The first, true piano solo recital was presented in Rome in 1839 by Franz Liszt, who at the occasion cavalierly introduced himself to the public with these words: "The concert is - myself."\textsuperscript{26} Taken from Louis XIV's famous "L'état c'est moi - The state is myself," this phrase is representative of the romantic sensibility toward excellence and of the tendency toward recognizing in the great performer and virtuoso a kind of hero, a model to society. But until the last decades of the nineteenth century, solo recitals remained relatively rare (Clara Schumann waited until 1870 before she dared to appear in a solo recital).\textsuperscript{27}

Sometime around the 1850s-1860s, as the figure of the virtuoso-composer declined and the solo recital gradually gained favor, performers increasingly showed more interest in the works of the past. The "classical" composers started to become the measure to judge someone's value as performer and musician. By the end of the century all the formulas of the classical piano recital as we know it today were being explored, "from the single-composer program to the conservatory model (a roughly chronological program proceeding from Bach preludes and fugues to Beethoven sonata through works

\textsuperscript{25} Leppert and Zank, "The Concert and the Virtuoso," 243.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 255.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 247.
of Chopin or Liszt or Schumann to whatever counted as new)." The "historical recitals" of Anton Rubinstein (1829-94) typically traversed hundreds of years of music history in a chronological order, and famous is von Bülow's program of the last five Beethoven's sonatas, which also included an encore – the *Appassionata*!  

From Mozart's time through the second half of the nineteenth century, public and private instrumental performances always required some sort of virtuosic display, usually saved for the end of the concert, when the main performer of the event was asked to improvise on the spot, often on well-known themes. During this period, most performers (especially pianists) were also first-class composers who produced music chiefly for their own use and to satisfy the request for brilliant, pyrotechnic display of technical ability. The paradigmatic forms of virtuoso music in the nineteenth century were the fantasy, the variation, and the rondo. The simplicity of structure of variation (based on a recurring melodic or harmonic pattern) and rondo (with its periodical return of a ritornello) made these two forms especially suitable for improvisation and virtuosic display. Improvised passage work and brilliant figuration demanded a simple and unproblematic formal structure. Two examples of such pieces can be seen in Mendelssohn's *Andante e Rondo Capriccioso* Op. 14 and Chopin's *Souvenir de Paganini*, a collection of variations on Paganini's theme "Il carnevale di Venezia." The fantasy, freer in its form and allowing greater liberty in the treatment and manipulation of the preexisting material, was dominated by expressive rhetorical gestures and gradually became the favorite virtuoso piece of the romantic era, not only for improvisation. The genre was employed by virtually all composers of the time and for the most diverse groups of instruments. Piano

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28 Ibid., 247.
fantasies on popular themes were produced in the first half of the nineteenth century by
the thousands. Not only for the use of piano virtuosi (who often were also prolific
composers for their instrument), they became the favorite musical genre of amateurs and
dilettantes and a favorite vehicle for experimenting and improving the technique of the
instrument (didactical pieces).

Opera was so popular in the first half of the nineteenth century that the most
memorable tunes of the favorite works penetrated every level of society. "Singers sang them at concerts and in the salons. Amateurs and students played them, as did the
virtuosos. Selections from an opera or fantasies on its themes were arranged for almost
every conceivable combination of instruments. Those people who could not sing or play the tunes could dance to them." Even church and devotional music was influenced by
the operatic repertoire. Organists played variations on opera tunes and several operatic melodies were provided with a religious Latin text. And at a time when opera was at the peak of its popularity and unquestionably the musical genre most favored at all levels of society, it was quite natural that the majority of the themes employed in piano fantasies were derived from its most famous tunes. "It is safe to say that, to a considerable extent, the piano music of the years 1825-75 was a dependency of the opera."³¹

Chapter Two: A Brief History of the Piano Fantasy on Opera Themes

The term *fantasia* was first adopted during the Renaissance to indicate an instrumental composition of a form that derived exclusively from the imagination and skill of the composer. The genre tended to preserve this freedom and license, consequently assuming a wide variety of forms, ranging from improvisatory types to strictly contrapuntal, more or less sectional forms. In the course of the eighteenth century, the term *fantasia* gradually came to identify a keyboard composition developing essentially from improvisatory material. It became larger in size and scope, and by the nineteenth century it was a musically substantial, large-scale, multi-sectional work (for example, Schubert’s *Wandererfantasie* and Schumann’s *Phantasiestücke* and *Kreisleriana*). In the course of the nineteenth century, *fantasia* was also applied to virtuoso pieces based on one or more themes of popular source, usually an opera. Most piano virtuosos of the romantic period wrote operatic fantasies for their own use. The form of the fantasy on operatic tunes was often modeled on the theme-and-variations form, with the addition of a freer introduction and an extended finale.1

It is interesting to note how Carl Czerny (1791-1857), a great pianist, teacher, and theorist of the piano of the romantic period, defined and explained the term *fantasia* as related to piano pieces based on popular themes. Czerny’s didactic works were carefully designed to present the student with all the different varieties of piano playing and compositions known at the time. This series of works discusses each aspect of performance and composition in great detail, and is furthermore extremely useful for

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understanding the musical life of the second half of the nineteenth century. Three of
Czerny’s theoretical works discuss fantasies on popular themes: Systematische Anleitung
zum Fantasieren, Op. 200 (1829, translated as the Art of Improvising); the Complete
Theoretical and Practical School of Piano-Forte Playing, Op. 500 (1839); and the School
of Practical Composition, Op. 600 (1848).

Czerny was very sensitive to the changes that were taking place in the style of
piano playing and in the demands of different types of audiences during his lifetime. He
recognized that different musical styles coexisted, and that a young pianist, if he wanted
to be successful, needed to model his playing so as to please different tastes. The piano
piece of his time that was most pleasing to the largest portion of the audience was
undoubtedly the fantasy based on known themes, preferably taken from opera. His
discussion of the genre was therefore extensive and detailed, ranging from the practice of
improvising such pieces on the spot, to the creation of artistic masterpieces.

When discussing improvisation, he recognized the existence of three main types.
The first type was represented by the practice of preluding or playing an introductory
movement before the work the performer is about to execute (to “warm-up” and trying
the instrument). A second type included fermatas, cadenzas, and pedal points. The third
type, which he called improvisation “properly speaking,” he further subdivided into six
subtypes:

a. The development of one theme in all the usual forms of composition.

b. The development and union of several themes so as to form a unity.

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2 Charles Suttoni, “Piano and Opera: a Study of the Piano Fantasies Written on Opera Themes in the
c. The potpourri; that is, the joining of several favorite motives by means of modulations, brilliant passages, or cadences without developing any one theme particularly.

d. Variations in all the usual forms.

e. Improvisation in a sostenuto and fugal style.

f. The caprice with all its liberties and independence.\(^3\)

Of these, subtypes b, c, and f more closely relate to the fantasy on known themes. Czerny's own discussion of the fantasy on known themes is the most comprehensive, containing not only detailed information with regard to its structural principles, but also advice on the proper way to choose the thematic material to include and on its treatment.

...Two or three themes are first selected, which differ from each other in respect to their time, character, and degree of movement. The leading idea for the Introduction may then be taken from one of these themes, and be more or less developed. Original ideas and melodies may also be interwoven in the same.

The entry of each of the themes chosen must be prepared in as striking and interesting manner as possible, and each must be treated in a different way. ...

In the succession of the themes, regard must be had for variety; and, as connecting links, brilliant figures, elegant embellishments, together with melodic, harmonic, and even fugued passages must be introduced. But the chief aim of the composer must be always to remain tasteful and interesting... To these qualifications Thalberg's fantasias are indebted for their generally acknowledged effect.

Grand Fantasias of this class are specially intended to present Virtuosi with the opportunity of displaying their talent in performance, and in the bravura style. Hence they must be brilliant, and consequently difficult. But in order to write effective difficulties, the composer must himself be a good player, otherwise his passages will generally be awkward, unnatural, and scarcely worth studying.

Fantasies of this kind may likewise be composed in an easier and merely pleasing style, and then (if the themes be well chosen) we may calculate upon their meeting with a favorable reception among amateurs.

Extemporaneous performances of this species may also take place. The improvisations of Hummel, so celebrated in their time, were generally in the style here described…

Among the modern compositions of this species, we must particularly mention the Fantasias of Kalkbrenner, Thalberg, Liszt, Moscheles, Döhler & c. …

Although Czerny published this account at the end of the 1840s, his description of the fantasy on known themes is closer to the genre’s makeup in the 1820s and 1830s. He never mentions the opera, or the character that the selected themes have in the opera, or their dramatic meaning. An interest in preserving the dramatic unity of an entire opera or part of it, or for portraying a specific character, will slowly appear at the beginning of the 1840s with the mature works of Franz Liszt.

It is worth emphasizing that Czerny presents the fantasy on known themes as an extremely popular genre at the time, and that he wholly understands the reasons of its fame:

Composition of this kind are now greatly esteemed, and have, for the moment, supplanted many other pianoforte works. This is easily accounted for.

The public generally experiences great delight on finding in a composition some pleasing melody with which it is already familiar, and which it has previously heard with rapture at the Opera: for most melodies acquire their popularity by the fine performance of a human voice and the charm of theatrical effect.

Now, when such melodies are introduced in a spirited and brilliant manner in a Fantasia, and there developed or varied, both the composer and the practiced player can ensure great success. This species is by no means new… But as pianoforte, as well as performers on the same have become so general since then, as very different opera themes are now in favor, and,

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5 Suttoni, “Piano and Opera,” 29.
lastly, as several great and celebrated Virtuosi have particularly distinguished themselves in this class of composition, none need wonder at the success of it.⁶

Many factors contributed, therefore, to the fortune of the opera fantasy in the first half of the nineteenth century. Possibly the most influential were the demand for known material and brilliance in performance, and the need for virtuosi to please their public and, at the same time, explore the limits of the instrument and its technique. The genre proved quickly to be able to satisfy all these requirements and more, and so, to serve several different purposes. The opera-based fantasy provided in the first half of the nineteenth century not only a repertoire for amateurs and a way for virtuosi to demonstrate their talents (with pieces generally more appreciated by the larger portion of the audience than more serious music), but also offered teaching material, and a means of disseminating new music (the operas on which the fantasies were based).

In its early development, the piano fantasy on known themes was primarily an improvised piece presented by the main performer of a concert at the end of the program. Its main role was that of displaying the virtuoso’s technical abilities and to close with music which would especially please the listener’s ears. Exponents of this type were Mozart (1756-1791), Clementi (1752-1832), Johann Baptist Cramer (1771-1858), Beethoven (1770-1827), Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837), and Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870). Contemporary accounts of the extemporaneous improvisations of these great pianists talk of technically brilliant performances and astonished audiences. Quite to the contrary, most of the variations and fantasies based on known themes published by these musicians are fairly limited technically and not too pretentious musically. The

published pieces are therefore certainly not representative of the art of these masters and were obviously destined to the amateur’s market. The themes for improvisation were usually chosen by the performer according to the formality of the occasion and the degree of popularity of the source opera. Sometimes the audience placed specific requests.

Of the pianists mentioned above, Hummel and Moscheles can be considered among the first modern piano virtuosi - predecessors of the generation of virtuosi to follow in the years 1830s-1850s. Their influence on Chopin, Thalberg, and Liszt was extremely significant. Hummel was well known for his skills in improvisation and his ability to please and satisfy two different types of audiences: amateurs and skilled musicians. This became the aim of many virtuoso-composers of the time. Hummel openly sought this type of recognition, and he trained himself over a long period of time to acquire the skills to achieve this kind of success.

Hummel’s works are of two types. For the most part they demonstrate his musically serious side, but he also produced a group of works for the amateur market. We can discern different approaches to the genre in the two fantasies on opera tunes mentioned below. The grand fantasy *Oberons Zauberhorn*, Op. 116, for piano and orchestra (1829) is a virtuoso show piece, “basically an original work which, with its title and use of the finale theme, merely borrows elements of Weber’s opera.”

Here Hummel employs the most popular genre of the time for displaying the technical skills of the performer, while the original work is barely suggested. His *Fantasina on a Theme from Mozart’s Marriage of Figaro*, Op. 124 (1833) is, on the other hand, an example of a second type of opera fantasy, one that is entirely based on a single aria from an opera. This aria, the popular "Non più andrai," consists of a refrain and two contrasting episodes,

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7 Suttoni, “Piano and Opera,” 87.
the second of which is briefly interrupted by a military march. Hummel employed the refrain and the march tune, structuring his fantasy in four sections. An introduction based on fragments of the refrain ("Non piú andrai") is followed by a first presentation of the refrain tune, then by the march theme, and finally by the return of the refrain. This work is technically not challenging, and was certainly intended for the amateur performer.

Moscheles’s life spanned the period from Beethoven through Wagner. As Suttoni observed, he “arranged the vocal score of Fidelio, played four-hand sonatas with Chopin, duets with Liszt, and lived to hear Die Meistersinger.” Together with Hummel and Kalkbrenner, Moscheles developed piano technique and virtuoso style in the 1820s and 1830s to the extent that technique alone became an attraction and a form of art in itself. Like Hummel, Moscheles was an accomplished improviser and wrote music for several segments of the public. His compositions range from the most serious to the most commercial. His Recollections of Ireland, Op. 69 (1826), although not based on opera themes, reflects the form employed by many of the performers of the time in their improvisations on known tunes. The composition starts with an introduction based on fragments of the themes to follow. Each theme is then stated and individually developed. At the end, portions of the various themes are tied together in an energetic finale.

A second group of pianists and composers who cultivated the genre of opera fantasy in the first half of the nineteenth century is represented by Joseph Gelinek (1758-1825), Daniel Steibelt (1765-1822), Friedrich Wilhelm Kalkbrenner (1785-1849), Henri Herz (1803-88), and Czerny. These composers “deliberately sought out the popular market.” Very successful during their respective lifetimes, they wrote music to suit the

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8 Suttoni, “Piano and Opera,” 93.
9 Ibid., 149.
taste of the day and achieved a level of financial success that far outstripped composers of more serious music. In addition, they provided the large crowd of amateurs with brilliant, but not too challenging music, and supplied pianists with a repertory that was sure to please concert goers. This repertory, although widely distributed and valued by a large number of music lovers, often received unsympathetic comments from critics and from audiences devoted to a more “serious” type of music. The works by these composers based on operatic material were often in the form of variations preceded by an introductory fantasy and followed by a lively finale. They were harmonically and melodically simple, and the choice of themes was usually dictated by the necessity for variety within each single work, with a special consideration given to those tunes most favored by the public.

Kalkbrenner was regarded as a sensational performer, but a pedantic and extremely self-centered person. His opera fantasies show both these traits of his personality. For the most part, they were among the most brilliant of his day. Unfortunately, his choice of themes was dictated entirely by convenience. He often interrupted the tunes with virtuosic passages that were not musically or dramatically functional, and only effective as show-off moments. On the other hand, Kalkbrenner’s *Grand Fantasy and Brilliant Variations on a Chorus from “Norma,”* Op. 140 (late 1830s), exemplifies a different approach to operatic material. This work shows more attention to thematic activity. It is perhaps his most convincing composition in the genre. The use of a single theme, “Dell’aura tua profetica,” provides a great degree of unity. At the same time, the formal plan of the work is expanded to include a lengthy development section between the variations and the finale. The introduction is in two parts. The first
builds to a climax that leads to a lyric section presenting the theme. Subsequently, the material is treated in a rather conventional way in a group of variations (Kalkbrenner's skills as a writer of variations were fairly limited, and he therefore tended to rely on figurations). The following development section is quite extended and emphasizes the suspensions contained in the theme. The finale is turned into an occasion for technical bravura.

Herz, a Viennese by birth, was among the most successful touring pianists of the nineteenth century. As a composer he wrote over two-hundred works, some of which were among the most popular compositions of their day. Generally directed to the amateur public, they were harshly criticized by the press for their musical superficiality. Herz’s favorite form was that of the variation, the most suitable to virtuoso display. It is in this form, also featured in many of his fantasies, that he best expressed himself as a composer of brilliant pieces for the piano. Herz’s variations never loose the melodic outline of a theme and don’t have the tendency to degenerate into mere passagework. He also wrote a large number of opera fantasies, which ranged from simple transcriptions to the most virtuosic works and usually included a section in variation form. Suttoni asserts that Herz is perhaps “the most typical representative of the piano and its position in society in the early 1830s,”\(^\text{10}\) and his works based on operatic tunes are an example of the kind of light, brilliant pianism very much in vogue in Paris at the time.

Czerny is the only pianist included in this historical review of the operatic fantasy who never sought a virtuoso career. Therefore he did not produce operatic fantasies for his own use. His principal occupations were teaching and composing. “Czerny, of course,

\(^{10}\) Suttoni, "Piano and Opera," 144.
composed too much." His works reached opus number 798, but except for his
collections of teaching etudes, the rest of his compositions fell into oblivion shortly after
his death. He wrote operatic fantasies in all forms and at all levels of difficulty, as
codified in the theoretical works. None of the fantasies mentioned above reached a high
level of artistry, or succeeded in displaying the themes in interesting ways.

Overall, this early generation of pianist-composers viewed the operatic fantasy as
a means to assure themselves of financial success. It provided access to the amateur
market, and a repertory to exploit in their public performances and private gatherings.
These pianist-composers never considered the opera from which they were drawing
material as anything more than a source of material to be extracted and to be used at will
for the purposes mentioned above.

The 1830s and 1840s represent the final stage of maturity and fortune of the
opera-based fantasy. In this period the genre continued to supply a repertory for amateurs,
as well as brilliant music for virtuoso performers. While the pieces for the amateur
market continued to follow the models set by the previous generation of pianist-
composers, the works composed and performed by some of the most eminent virtuosi
started to exploit the technical and sonorous potential of the piano to its utmost.
Furthermore, the pieces begun to show a significant change of attitude towards the opera
from which the material was drawn. The latest developments in piano building and the
centrality of the instrument in musical life, the interest of composers and performers in
experimenting with the new possibilities of the piano, the demand for brilliant and
pyrotechnical performances, and the increasing popularity of the operas by Bellini and
Donizetti (representative of the Italian bel canto style), certainly rank among the most

11 Ibid., 145.
influential factors which contributed to the culminating phase of the opera-based fantasy. The mature stage of the genre is exemplified by the two most celebrated piano virtuosos of the time: Sigismund Thalberg (1812-1871) and Franz Liszt (1811-1886). With their antithetical but complementary personalities and approaches to the instrument, they together represent the summit of piano playing in the mid-nineteenth century.

Thalberg had an extraordinary influence on piano playing of his time, perhaps even more than Liszt. His style combined a singing tone, technical brilliance, and a powerful sound—traits rarely found in the same performer. He studied voice for five years and consciously attempted to imitate the qualities of vocal performance when playing the piano. Melody always featured prominently in his playing, no matter what the accompaniment. A simple melodic line in one hand, with an accompaniment spun around it assigned to the other hand, is typical of his operatic compositions. This technique was expanded by Thalberg to its limit into what was labeled "three-handed" technique: the melodic line played alternately by the two hands in the middle register while the accompaniment ranges over the keyboard above and below it. This device was most famously employed by the composer in his fantasy on Rossini’s Moses (1837), and was later adopted and perfected by Liszt, notably in his fantasy on Bellini’s Norma (1841), where the technique reaches its highest expression.

Thalberg’s output is dominated by opera fantasies, of which he wrote nearly fifty. This certainly was for him the most congenial vehicle for musical expression. The large predominance of fantasies written on Italian operas and total absence of works based on Wagner’s operas demonstrate his interest in melody and in singing at the piano. Unlike Liszt, he developed early as a composer but then tended to repeat himself over and over.
His opera-based fantasies do not show in fact a marked formal or stylistic development over time. This is not to say that he did not contribute innovations to the genre, but these are mixed with traits representative of the older fantasies. Thalberg retained these older features even after Liszt introduced substantial innovations in the genre, a factor that contributed to the quick decline of Thalberg’s fantasies.

A clear example of Thalberg’s link to the previous generation is represented by his introductions: they tend to be lengthy and sectional. At times the themes presented are transformations of the material to follow. At other times they are original and serve to enhance the mood of the fantasy. The inclusion of original material in the introduction of an operatic fantasy was not an unusual practice at the time, but Thalberg seems to have exploited the device to a greater extent than most of the other composers. The introduction of his fantasy on *Moses*, which amounts to precisely half of the total composition and presents two fragments of themes from the opera and one original theme, is the paradigmatic illustration of this kind of procedure.

A novel feature of Thalberg’s works is the composer’s predilection for contrapuntal techniques: his frequent use of imitative devices was certainly not typical of composers of operatic fantasies of the time. An example of his use of fugato passages can be found in his fantasy on *Norma* (1835) (mm. 194-213, Ex.2-1).
Example 2-1: mm. 192-214.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} Sigismond Thalberg’s score of \textit{Grande Fantaisie et Variations sur des motifs de la Norma de Bellini} courtesy of Centro Studi Internazionale Sigismond Thalberg, Napoli.
One additional significant and innovative quality of Thalberg’s works concerns the sonorities the composer could draw from the instrument. He sought a richness of sound that was not found in the works of his precursors. In Thalberg’s works the piano almost became an orchestra, as can be seen in various sections of his fantasies on Meyerbeer’s _Les Huguenots_ (1836) and Rossini’s _Moses_.

Thalberg’s most influential contributions to the genre are represented by the finales and by the order of appearance of the themes of some of his operatic fantasies. In his fantasy on _Moses_ the lively, brilliant finale (typically unrelated to anything else happening earlier in the piece) is replaced by a single thematic statement. This innovation is not insignificant: it causes a shift in the emotional weight of the composition toward the end. It also shows a new centrality of the original material to the piece: the climax of the fantasy is not necessarily represented by brilliant passage-work alone. The practice of ending the operatic fantasy with a lively finale is not altogether abandoned (Liszt employs it in his the early works), but Thalberg provides a valid alternative which will eventually prevail. In _Norma_, one of Thalberg’s most important operatic fantasies, is shown the composer’s innovative attitude towards the original material and the fantasy itself. _Norma_ is characterized by a seriousness and a type of lyricism lacking in the works of Herz and Kalkbrenner. More importantly, in comparison with the traditional use of a lyric theme followed by a livelier one, here the succession of the two contrasting themes chosen for the fantasy is reversed: the martial “Dell’aura tua profetica” appears first, followed by the lyrical “Padre, tu piangi?” This reflects the order in which the themes appear in the opera. But the fact that Thalberg did not reverse the order to obtain a more
powerful climax toward the end of his composition, constitutes a striking innovation in the genre.

Nevertheless, in spite of his important contributions to the operatic fantasy, Thalberg remained strongly rooted in the older school of musical thought codified by Czerny. The genre was to reach its highest and most mature form in the hands of Franz Liszt. According to Liszt scholar Alan Walker,

Liszt's career unfolded in at least six different directions simultaneously. Pianist, composer, conductor, teacher, writer, and tireless administrator, Franz Liszt transformed everything he touched. ...if Liszt had never existed it would have been necessary to invent him. So much of the nineteenth century would otherwise remain unaccountable. ...His spectacular career as a pianist has drawn the greatest attention, and with reason. He is the model that all pianists follow, whether they know it or not. In the 1830s and 40s, he evolved a new style of piano playing and introduced the solo “recital”-a word he himself coined. ... He was the first to play his recitals by memory; the first to play the whole of the piano repertory (as it then existed) from Bach to Chopin; the first to tour Europe from the Pyrenees to the Urals; and the first consistently to place the piano at right angles to the stage-its open lid reflecting the sound across the auditorium. ... As a composer Liszt was equally original. He invented the Symphonic Poem, his “reply” to the classical symphony, and he brought music into closer affinity with painting, literature and drama.13

Walker's statement that Liszt transformed everything he touched is also true of the fantasy on opera tunes. His interest in one form or another of opera fantasy extends over his entire career, and his production in the genre is highly representative of his musical personality, so much so that Busoni stated that

Here the theatrical and dramatic impulse is added to all Liszt’s earlier pianoforte achievements. The means, to their furthest limits, are used to the best advantage-for example, the compass of the keyboard, big chords, bravura playing, heightening of the contrasts for expression of pathos, greatest freedom and subjectivity in the conception; these are the most remarkable characteristics of this side of his creative power. But besides these “decorative painting” methods, it is the ennoblement, the elevation

13 Alan Walker, preface to Liszt the Progressive, ed. by Hans Kagebeck and Johan Lagerfelt (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), ix-x.
and aggrandizement of the musical content which give the Fantasies a high artistic rank. Anyone who has listened to or played the Finale of *Lucrezia*, the middle section in B Major in *Norma* or the slow movement in *Sonnambula*, without being moved has not yet arrived at Liszt.14

Several reasons can be given for the level achieved by Liszt in this genre. An initial, general statement is that among all the piano virtuosos who contributed to the operatic fantasy in the nineteenth century, Liszt was undoubtedly the best as a composer. A student of Czerny, he was strongly rooted in the pianistic tradition represented by his teacher. If as a pianist he was equaled and surpassed in his own time, as a musician he continued to mature and renew himself. Liszt the composer had a highly individual voice and contributed to the advancement of more than one genre. Given this eclecticism, if we trace the line from Kalkbrenner, Herz, and Thalberg to Liszt, we see that the operatic fantasy was naturally following a path of development which, in Liszt’s hands, could not avoid coming to fulfillment. If we compare Liszt’s opera fantasies with those of Thalberg’s we can observe several differences. Liszt’s some sixty works represent a smaller portion of his total output, but a much greater variety of compositional techniques and approaches to the opera. These range from the simple transcription of a portion of an opera, as exemplified by Wagner’s *Liebestod* (1867); to compositions based on a single scene, like the “Miserere” from Verdi’s *Il trovatore* (1859) or the Polonaise in Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin* (1880); to pieces that take their material from a number of different portions of an opera, like the fantasies on Bellini’s *Norma* and *La sonnambula* (1839), and on Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots* (1836-42). Also, Liszt’s taste for opera was far more comprehensive than Thalberg’s and ranged over a greater variety of works than just the standard Italian and French repertory. Finally, Liszt included Wagner’s operas in

his own late repertory of fantasies, recognizing the role of these works in the operatic scene.

Liszt’s first group of important operatic fantasies, from 1835-36, shows the composer’s pianistic roots in the brilliant generation of pianists embodied by Czerny, Kalkbrenner, and Herz. Although Liszt demonstrates in the works of this period a greater interest in the original opera and its dramatic content than his contemporaries, at times the dramatic purposes become subservient to purely technical display. Works of these years are the fantasies on Halévy’s *La Juive* (1835), Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835-36), Pacini’s *Niobe* (1835-36), Bellini’s *I puritani* (1836), and Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots*. They are generally long, large-scale works, with loud and brilliant introductions and long and equally loud finales. It is especially in the finales that Liszt shows little consideration for the original character of the themes selected from the opera, often transfiguring them for the sake of bravura passages. An example can be seen in the finale of his fantasy on *La Juive*, where the theme of the Bolero is treated with complete disregard of its character in the opera. The fantasy on *I puritani* is an example of a dramatically more integrated work. For Busoni it represented “the perfect model for all the later paraphrases.”15 The three themes selected by Liszt for this fantasy derive from three related scenes in the first act, emphasizing one single aspect of the opera. Liszt’s treatment of the themes, however, remains quite unbound to their original character. The fantasy on *Lucia* displays these same shortcomings, but Liszt’s selection and arrangement of the themes shows the presence of a dramatic plan and the composer’s grandiose view of the opera. What is most unusual in this work is that the first part, based on the sextet “Chi mi frena in tal momento?,” is a rather accurate transcription of the original material.

15 Ibid., 151.
while the second, based on three other themes, is much freer in the treatment of the themes. *Lucia* is also important for Liszt’s unusual use of harmony in the piece: the use of the tritone, diminished fifths, and the amply spaced chords over a dominant pedal all point to the composer’s mature harmonic style. The fantasy on *Les Huguenots* offers yet another approach to the genre. Here the succession of themes reflects that in the opera, preserving the original order of events. The dramatic unity in this work is suggestive of the change that occurred between Liszt’s fantasies of 1835-36 and those of the 1840s.

Liszt’s mature works of the early 1840s represent the most distinguished achievements in the opera fantasy. The most significant works in this period are the fantasies on Bellini’s *La sonnambula* and *Norma*, Mozart’s *Don Juan* (1841), and Meyerbeer’s *Robert le diable* (1841). The three fundamental characteristics of these fantasies are the high degree of dramatic integrity; the effective translation of orchestral, vocal, and dramatic effects on the piano; and the subjugation of virtuosity in favor of the dramatic material.

“A fantasy by Liszt embodies a dramatic point of view, and one can almost tell his reaction to an opera by examining his fantasy on it.”16 This dramatic perspective provides a unity of thought that prevents the work from becoming a simple potpourri, a succession of famous tunes. Furthermore, and quite originally, Liszt does not include original material in his fantasies, but combines together those themes that have an inner relationship with each other. From a dramatic standpoint, the most successful of Liszt’s operatic fantasies is certainly *Norma* (the complete title of the work is *Reminiscences of Norma*). Here the composer succeeds in condensing the dramatic essence of the whole opera into fifteen minutes of piano music. According to Suttoni,

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16 Suttoni, “Piano and Opera,” 244.
Norma is perhaps the most difficult and complex of all bel canto heroines to portray on stage, but the essential drama of the opera is the conflict between her feelings as a woman and her position as High-Priestess, the defender of the Druid tradition against the invading Romans. Her relations with Pollione and Adalgisa ... are incidental to the basic conflict, the one on which Liszt has chosen to erect his fantasy. In the process he deliberately omits some of the more famous arias in the opera, notably “Casta Diva” and “Mira, o Norma”.¹⁷

Liszt chooses seven themes from the opera (among the most he includes in a fantasy), all related to Norma’s inner conflict, but the succession of them in his work does not mirror that of the Bellini’s. Liszt creates a dramatic succession of his own by reordering the themes to depict the characters and tragedy of Norma, but also to create a natural increase of tension from the beginning to the climax of the piece, represented by the chorus “Guerra, guerra!.” The treatment of the chorus’ theme is in itself a clear example of Liszt’s ability to control a gradual increase in tension and create a powerful, glorious climax. The theme is stated three times: first in chords alone in the middle register (Ex. 2-2a, mm. 248-55), then in alternating triplet chords in the low register (Ex. 2-2b, mm. 272-80), and finally in alternating triplet chords and double notes that encompass the whole range of the instrument (Ex. 2-2c, 298-305). This constitutes a fine example of brilliant virtuosity at the service of a dramatic purpose.

¹⁷ Ibid., 298.
Example 2-2a: mm. 248-55.\(^{18}\)

Example 2-2b: mm. 272-283.

Example 2-2c: mm. 298-308.

\(^{18}\) Examples 2-2a, b, and c © 1982 Dover Publications, Inc.
Afterwards the tension is suddenly dropped by the presentation of Norma’s theme “Padre, tu piangi?”

The same sort of approach to virtuosity can be found in the Reminiscences of Don Juan. From a dramatic perspective, this is a challenging work to define. Liszt selected the most important moments of the opera to include in his fantasy, but then he reversed their order of appearance, causing some uncertainty in the understanding of his dramatic intent. Nevertheless, the work remains a brilliantly conceived fantasy and at the same time represents the summit of nineteenth-century pianism. Although Liszt, like most of the virtuosi of his time, was never completely detached from the pyrotechnical qualities of his instrument, this is a pianism almost completely free of virtuosity for its own sake.

One aspect of his works that he shares with Thalberg’s is the successful attempt at recreating orchestral, vocal, and dramatic effects on the piano. The first section of the Don Juan fantasy is an extremely fine example of Liszt’s “orchestral” effects. Here Mozart’s bass lines and accompanying figures are successfully translated into pianistic terms with tremolos in the low register and ascending and descending scales in octaves.

His ability to transpose vocal tessitura and voice placement to the piano was evident in his works as early as his fantasy on Lucia di Lammermoor. In this piece, the first theme presented by Liszt is the sextet “Chi mi frena in tal momento?” Here he respects the vocal registers so as to reproduce the movements of the melody from one voice to another. The theme starts in the tenor and baritone, then moves to a higher register when the soprano joins in. The accompaniment, a mixture of arpeggios and trills, is at this point in the bass. Later, when the theme moves back to the baritone, the accompaniment also moves, this time appearing in the treble register of the piano.
In 1847 Liszt retired from the concert stage. At this point he no longer needed a repertory of virtuoso pieces for his own performances, but his interest in piano pieces based on operatic material did not die out. He continued to compose in the genre sporadically for the next thirty-five years, still producing a number of masterpieces. Liszt was now much freer in the choice of operatic material to incorporate in his works, but at the same time his late compositions in the genre show a more restricted and selective approach to the opera. If his conception of an opera would require a large work, then he would produce a series of fantasies based on the same work, as he did with Meyerbeer’s Le Prophète (1849-50) and L’Africaine (1865). If his focus was not on the opera as a whole, then he would select a single scene or event, as he did with most of his late paraphrases on Verdi’s operas. He also continued transcribing, or nearly transcribing, portions of operas, as he typically did with Wagner’s works. In addition, he further developed the fondness for dance rhythms that he had first shown in his fantasy on Robert le Diable, as in the Waltz from Gounod’s Faust (1861?). The latter is an important work, as it marks the composer’s departure from the concept of fantasy in favor of that of the concert paraphrase. “A paraphrase differs from a fantasy in that it is usually not as multi-sectional and generally draws on one particular scene or incident in the opera.”19 To this new notion are associated Liszt’s compositions on Verdi’s operas Ernani (1849), Rigoletto (1859), Trovatore, and Aida (1871-79). These works are based on one or two scenes of the opera and rework the thematic material within the limits of the scene. The themes selected are mostly ensembles, and here is where Liszt shines in his awareness of tessitura and voice placement, and his special gift for recreating vocal effects.

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19 Suttoni, “Piano and Opera,” 318.
Around the middle of the nineteenth century, the opera-based fantasy started to decline and gradually lost its place in concert programs. Fantasies aimed at the amateur market were still in demand and continued to prosper for a few more decades. Several reasons are responsible for the decline of the genre. By 1850 most of the pianist-composers who contributed to the fortune of the opera fantasy were either dead or had retired from the concert world, and with them the figure of the pianist-composer gradually died out. At the same time, piano technology had fulfilled its potential, and experiments in keyboard technique were no longer necessary. A third, and significant reason is represented by a change in opera itself. The themes of the late Verdi’s operas and of all of Wagner’s output did not meet the requirement of melodic simplicity so essential to a theme to be included in an operatic fantasy. The newer melodic styles produced tunes that did not easily lend themselves to thematic transformation of any kind. One more element that surely contributed to the decline of the opera fantasy is the increasing emphasis that was gradually placed at the end of the century on originality and authenticity.20 As a result, in the latter half of the nineteenth century the piano literature inspired by opera was mostly represented by paraphrases or transcriptions of portions of an opera.

Among the composers who produced opera-based piano pieces after Thalberg and Liszt, we can mention Jochim Raff (1822-82), Hans von Bülow (1830-94), Karl Tausig (1841-71), Anton Rubinstein (1835-81), Paul Pabst (1854-97), and Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924). Of them, Busoni is undoubtedly the most significant. “His two opera fantasies are, in their individual ways, both a summary and an abstraction of the history

of the form."²¹ His early fantasy on Cornelius’ *Barber of Baghdad* (1886) is an easy piece for the amateur market, written when Busoni was in need of money. His *Chamber Fantasy on Carmen* (1920) is an entirely different work. It is based on a solid dramatic plan, and the succession of themes is so structured that Busoni can end his fantasy very much in the way the opera itself ends. Moreover, the treatment of themes is varied and effective.

Nowadays the operatic fantasy still holds a place in the repertory of a number of concert pianists, who allocate space to it at the end of their recitals or offer a short one as an encore. But the true artist is now measured by his or her interpretations of the classics – Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin – and the more brilliant pieces reside mainly in competitions, where the best operatic fantasias (especially Liszt’s *Don Juan, Rigoletto*, and *Norma*) are often performed, although unfortunately valued almost exclusively for their virtuosic content. In the concluding chapter I will return to this issue.

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²¹ Suttoni, “Piano and Opera,” 331.
Chapter Three: Di Liberto *Fantasy on Cavalleria Rusticana* by Pietro Mascagni

**Genesis of the Piece.**

The idea of writing a piano fantasy on opera themes came to my mind almost four years ago, while I was working on several of Liszt’s operatic fantasias. The fact that I was facing a challenge became immediately clear. Who really needed or would be interested in yet another piece of this kind? Apart from a few exceptions, composers had stopped writing in the genre about a century ago, and few are the performers who nowadays care to keep that repertory alive. It is quite natural to compare a new piece to the masterpieces produced in the same genre by previous generations of composers. As soon as I started thinking about the operatic fantasies of the romantic period, written by such composers as Thalberg and especially Liszt, and later by Busoni, it immediately became clear to me that my composition could have been nothing more than a bold attempt to follow in their footsteps, and that I was likely to face a failure. The possibility of creating something new and totally personal did not even enter my mind. I am not a composer, and although I am not uncomfortable writing music (I did so before), my familiarity with the contemporary languages of music did not seem sufficient for me to try to fly on my own. For months I was uncertain whether to pursue my goal or to give up with dignity, having not yet spoken to anybody about my foolish idea. I eventually decided to try, and I never had any doubt as to which opera I wanted to employ. It had to be Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

My first encounter with *Cavalleria* took place when I was only five years old. I went with my family to a choral concert that featured choruses from famous operas, such
as *Norma, Traviata, Cavalleria*, and others. My older sister Carmela sang in that choir. Then extremely young, I lacked any means of understanding and judging music. Yet the chorus “Viva il vino spumeggiante” bewitched me to such an extent that I could never forget its melody. When I grew older and started my musical training, it became my dream to perform that music. Since I am a pianist, my only opportunity to perform operatic music never transcribed for my instrument was to write my own fantasy on it.

My enthusiasm for this effort was further ignited by two events that happened when I was considering the project: one was an episode of the cartoon “Lupin,” the other was a music-history seminar I took at the Shepherd School of Music in the spring of 2003. Lupin, a famous French thief, carried out the most spectacular of robberies. In the episode I was watching, sometime during the summer of 2002, Lupin, after stealing a very famous painting, replaced it with an imitation by a living artist who amused himself by making replicas of masterpieces of the past. On viewing this, it occurred to me that I had just found a good reason to imitate the virtuoso-composers from the nineteenth century. My purpose would not be to enrich the piano literature or for higher philosophical reasons, but simply to amuse myself and to see how close I could come in my own work to the giants of the Romantic period. Later, during my first year of doctoral studies at Rice University, I enrolled in a seminar offered by Dr. Marcia Citron, “Opera on Film.” The main purpose of this class was to analyze in detail several opera productions done for television or cinema and movies with soundtracks in which operatic music plays an important role. The onstage performance of parts of Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana* included in Coppola’s *The Godfather III* created an animated discussion. The numbers chosen by Coppola to accompany some of the events of his
story are Turiddu’s Siciliana, Alfio’s aria “Il cavallo scalpita,” the brindisi scene “Viva il vino spumeggiante,” and portions of the finale. As will be seen later, Coppola’s choices influenced my own selection of themes.¹

Cavalleria Rusticana

The birth of Mascagni’s Cavalleria Rusticana is linked to the music publishing company Casa Musicale Sonzogno. The Casa Musicale Sonzogno was established in Milan in 1874 by Edoardo Sonzogno, an enlightened man who is notable for popularizing culture in Italy. Besides the music publishing company, the publishing empire he founded included his grandfather’s outstanding book publishing house, several periodicals of various types, and the daily newspaper Il Secolo. Edoardo also initiated the publication of two music magazines, Il Teatro Illustrato and La Musica Popolare, as well as a series of piano arrangements of the best-known operas that were offered at a low price. In the second half of the 1880s, in order to set up an Italian repertory of his own, Edoardo announced a series of competitions for new operas. Pietro Mascagni (1863-1945) won the second edition of this competition with his Cavalleria Rusticana, which was first performed at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome in 1890, immediately becoming a great and lasting success.

The opera marked the beginning of Verismo in music. Verismo, first developed in the 1870s in Italian literature, has as its major representatives the Sicilian writers Giovanni Verga (1840-1922), Luigi Capuana (1839-1915), and Federico De Roberto (1861-1927). The literary movement shared some characteristics with French Naturalism

– an impersonal narrative style, an interest in the lower social strata, and a realistic approach to every-day life. It also developed individual traits: the *veristi* gave a distinctly regional personality to their work, succeeded in reassessing a link between art and reality, and achieved an objectivity that required total consistency of form and content. Verga’s *Cavalleria Rusticana*, a short story published in 1884, was the first “scena popolare” (popular scene, as these stories were labeled) to be turned into an opera. The 1890s witnessed a brief flowering of operas on veristic subjects, in Italy and abroad.²

The action of *Cavalleria* takes place in a small Sicilian village on Easter day, at the end of the nineteenth century. Turiddu (tenor), returning from military service, discovers that his former lover Lola (mezzosoprano) is married to the village carter, Alfio (baritone). After seeking comfort with Santuzza (soprano), he has now rekindled his relationship with Lola. Santuzza confronts Turiddu to try to gain him back (“No, Turiddu, rimani ancora”), but she is arrogantly rejected. Alfio enters the scene at this point (“Il cavallo scalpita”), and Santuzza awaits him to reveal the affair between his wife and Turiddu. Turiddu, standing in the village square, invites the congregation exiting from church for a glass of wine at his mother’s tavern (“Viva il vino spumeggiante”). Alfio joins the crowd and challenges Turiddu to a duel to avenge his honor. Before going off to fight, Turiddu bids a tearful farewell to his mother, Mamma Lucia (“Mamma, quell vino è generoso”). Soon a villager cries that Turiddu has been murdered. ³

² Casa Musicale Sonzogno (Accessed [02-18-06]), http://www.sonzogno.it/index_en.htm
Analysis of the Fantasy

The fantasy is based on three numbers from the opera. These are the duet between Santuzza and Turiddu “No, Turiddu, rimani ancora;” Alfio’s aria “Il cavallo scalpita;” and the refrain of the choral brindisi scene. The themes come from unrelated events in the opera and they appear in the same order as in the original. They portray all the main characters and the key events of the drama, consequently outlining a sort of summary of the opera and providing the fantasy with a dramatic unity of its own. At first I thought of opening the fantasy with Turiddu’s off-stage Siciliana “O Lola, ch’hai di latti la cammisa.” But I soon discarded the idea, as it seemed to me that this melody did not suit the needs of thematic transformation very well. Furthermore, I decided to avoid a simple transcription of the theme, as it never would have sounded as beautiful as the original. I then decided to replace it with the duet between Santuzza and Turiddu, which presents the two main characters and their impossible love. Alfio’s aria stands for his naïve love for Lola. The two themes together present the intricate love affairs on which the plot is based. The brindisi, the third theme I use, is a hymn to the power of wine: it is compared to the beloved’s smile, bringing bliss and joy. The chorus has a crucial role in this scene as in the opera in general, representing the voice of the people. Love affairs and betrayals in Sicilian society are not a personal, but a social matter; therefore the position of the people/chorus is not merely relevant musically. The chorus is unquestionably one of the main characters in Cavalleria.

The most crucial event in the whole drama is exemplified by Turiddu’s and Santuzza’s duet. Turiddu is here given a chance to fix his wrongdoing, but his passion for Lola is such that he chooses not to return to Santuzza. This seals his bad luck. Santuzza’s
wish "A te la mala Pasqua, spergiuro" is full of premonition. Curses of this kind are to be understood as extremely serious utterances in the context of Sicilian society of the time. This is the very event that determines Turiddu's destiny, and for this specific reason I decided to employ it as a sort of recurring event framing the other themes of the piece.

One might wonder why I did not incorporate the Intermezzo in my Fantasy. I consider this one of the most beautiful orchestral pieces ever written; therefore, I did not want to touch it. After all, even Liszt decided to omit "Casta Diva" from his masterpiece Reminiscences of Norma.

Below is the general plan of the Fantasy:

| mm. 1-16 | Introduction - *Grave* | G major |
| mm. 17-29 | Duet Theme - *Andante* | G major (original key A-flat major) |
| mm. 30-33 | Transition - *Grave* | |
| mm. 34-114 | Alfio's Aria - *Allegretto* | E major/minor, E-flat major |
| mm. 115-28 | Transition | |
| mm. 129-52 | Duet Theme - *Andante* | A-flat major |
| mm. 153-56 | Portion of Prelude - *Andante, sostenuto* | A-flat major (original key F) |
| mm. 157-76 | Transition - *Allegretto, spiritoso* | |
| mm. 177-266 | Brindisi Scene | G major |
| mm. 267-79 | Transition | |
| mm. 280-312 | Duet Theme - *Largo maestoso-Vivo* | G major (original key A-flat) |
| mm. 313-29 | Coda | G major |
The fantasy begins with a triumphal fortissimo flourish in which the head of the duet theme is presented in augmentation by a succession of chords (Ex. 3-1).

Example 3-1: mm. 1-8.⁴

In the following eight measures a chord progression moves from E-flat major, to C minor, A-flat major, D-flat major, back to C minor, and finally to a French augmented-sixth chord that leads to the dominant of G major. This progression is meant to create harmonic tension and a sense of anticipation for the theme to come. The first presentation of the theme “No, Turiddu, rimani ancora” follows in G major (Ex. 3-2). It is characterized by a meditative quality obtained by means of soft dynamics, fermatas interrupting the melodic flow of the phrases, the wandering of the resulting fragments of the melody from one register of the piano to the other, and a chorale-like accompaniment.

⁴ All examples © 2005 Casa Musicale Sonzogno.
Example 3-2: mm. 17-30.

This first statement of the main theme of the fantasy has the quality of a flashback, a sort of reminiscence of something that happened in the past. The theme is used much differently than in the opera, where it first appears after Turiddu’s off-stage *Siciliana*. In the opera the tune acts like a premonition; it prepares the listener for what will be the key event of the drama.

The four transitional measures following the duet theme are characterized by low tremolos in the left hand. They are meant to imitate the timpani in the orchestra. From a
dramatic point of view, the tremolos create suspense and a blurred moment that I use as a link between events.

In mm. 34-41 (Ex. 3-3) the choral introduction to Alfio’s aria is presented in G minor (the original is in the major mode).

Example 3-3: mm. 34-41.

The presentation of the theme in minor is for a specific reason. Alfio sings in this aria about the joys of his job, traveling from village to village, and returning home to his faithful wife. I employ the choral introduction to this aria as a commentary to foreshadow Alfio’s tragic discovery of his wife’s affair with Turiddu. Alfio’s theme then begins in m. 42 (Ex. 3-4). Although he is a baritone, the aria is cast here in a very low register for contrast and coloristic purposes. To obtain a sharper and more agile sound, the right hand plays beneath the left. This crossing of hands is here therefore not a choreographic gesture, but a merely practical device.
Example 3-4: mm. 42-50.

In m. 60, the melody moves to the upper register where it is presented in octaves, to enhance the effect of the change of dynamic from the initial *mezzopiano-mezzoforte* (mm. 34-59) to *forte-fortissimo* (mm. 60-73, Ex. 3-5). Tremolos appear again in mm. 70-73, this time in the high register of the instrument. Their purpose is to sustain the long, high notes of Alfio’s aria, to fight the natural decay of the sound in the piano.

Example 3-5: mm. 60-73.
In mm. 74-98 the second part of the aria, assigned in the opera to the chorus, is presented, this time starting in the original key of E major and moving through different harmonies, as in the original. The section in mm. 74-88 is characterized by a melody exchange between the two hands in the high register of the instrument. Chromatic arabesques and scales running from one hand to the other present a real challenge to the clarity of the melody. Example 3-6 displays the first part of this section:
Example 3-6: mm. 74-79.

Two introductory measures prepare the varied repetition of the theme that begins in m. 101. The theme appears in *legato* triplets in the right hand, while the left hand plays light broken chords, imitating the orchestral *pizzicato* (Ex. 3-7):

Example 3-7: mm. 99-104.
The structure of “Il cavalo scalpita” is faithful to the original up to m. 106. Starting in m. 107, a repetition of the section of mm. 60-73 is presented, but after the first six measures the tonal center switches from E-flat major toward A-flat major, through the use of diminished chords. To further increase the tension created by the harmonic activity, an accelerando is introduced in m. 113 and the dynamic indications call for an increase of volume that results in a triple forte in m. 119. The excitement leads into a cadenza-like passage starting in m. 123 which confirms, with three downward arpeggios in a very soft dynamic, the dominant of A-flat major. This moment marks the return of the duet theme, now presented in the original key of A-flat major. The tune is repeated twice. The first time, mm. 129-42 (Ex. 3-8), the main melody is in the left hand, while the right hand produces a series of Chopin-like arabesques in the upper register of the instrument.
The second presentation of the theme (mm. 143-52, Ex. 3-9) is an example of the "three-handed technique," which I borrowed from Liszt's Reminiscences of Norma, a piece I have known and played long before I embarked on the composition of this Fantasy. The main melody is played in octaves alternately by each hand in the middle register of the keyboard while arpeggios are running above and below it. This technique gives the listener the impression that more than two hands are playing at the same time.
Example 3-9: mm. 143-45.

This section represents the climax of the Fantasy. The elements contributing to the climax are the presentation of the crucial duet theme in its original key (A-flat major) and the use of the whole of the keyboard through the three-handed technique. The section is also conveniently located half way through the piece. The triple-forte minor-seventh chord in m. 151 is perhaps the loudest moment in the Fantasy and wants to imitate the percussion section of the orchestra (Ex. 3-10).
Example 3-10: mm. 150-51.

The following four measures (152-56, Ex. 3-11), marked *Andante, sostenuto*

present the initial fragment of the opera’s opening prelude in A-flat major (the original
key is F), ending with a fermata in the middle of the phrase. The intrusion of this theme at
this place, in the middle of the fantasy, might seem totally inappropriate, with no
dramatic justification. But it offers a moment of rest from the intensity of the events thus
far, and a necessary relaxation after the climax, providing one more occasion for a
flashback and a sudden change in the character of the piece.
Example 3-11: mm. 152-56.

In m.157 the *brindisi* scene begins with a mysterious character. The tempo values are doubled in the Fantasy for the sake of clarity. The head of the theme is repeated three times - in A-flat major, A-flat minor, and C-flat major (B major) respectively - and is each time interrupted by a fermata on a pause. An extraneous element is introduced on the downbeat of the fourth measure of the fragment, where the long note of the melody is prolonged by a reiteration of the same note in a higher register. This provides the theme with a character that is Wittier than in the original (Ex. 3-12).

Example 3-12: mm. 157-60.
A transitional, virtuoso passage in broken octaves leads to the first full presentation of the *brindisi* theme “Viva il vino spumeggiante,” beginning in m. 174, in the original key of G major (Ex. 3-13). In the opera, the tune is first sung by Turiddu, then repeated by the chorus. The first exposition of the theme in the fantasy (mm. 174-93) represents Turiddu and is fairly straightforward and undemanding technically: the theme in octaves is sustained by a simple chordal accompaniment in the left hand.

Example 3-13: mm. 174-84.

The reiteration of the tune (mm.194-225), on the contrary, is compositionally more complex and quite challenging to perform. The theme is in the top line, constantly played by the last two fingers of the right hand, while chromatic scales are running up and down below it, in both hands, with the right hand often engaged in chromatic scales in double
thirds. This increase in activity aims to portray the crowded square of the village on Easter day, and the people joining in Turiddu’s toast (Ex. 3-14).

Example 3-14: mm. 192-201.

Measures 226-79 represent the climax of the scene. The four-measure phrases are clearly divided in two two-measure sections, characterized by different techniques of thematic transformation. The first section corresponds to the word “Viva,” marked ritenuto as in the original. The long notes of the melody are held by arpeggios that span
two octaves and help express the *ritenuto* feeling. The left hand accompanies with widely-spaced chords meant to sustain the loud dynamic. The rhythm of the second section ("il vino ch’è sincero") is driven by a descending chromatic scale in the left hand that emphasizes the return of the *tempo*, while the melody in the right hand continues in a more linear fashion (Ex. 3-15).

Example 3-15: mm. 224-33.

In mm. 243-59 the same techniques are employed for the closing of the theme.
A transitional passage based on fragments of the theme just heard follows in mm. 259-79.

In mm. 280-85 the duet theme is introduced for the third and last time employing once more the "three-handed technique" (Ex. 3-16). It is presented in G major (originally in A-flat major) to conclude the piece in the same key as the beginning. This time the melody is embellished with scales instead of arpeggios.

Example 3-16: mm. 278-85.
In mm. 286-312 the second part of the duet theme is characterized by quintuplet figures that represent an acceleration of the last presentation of the same theme. The section closes with widely spaced chords (mm. 311-12) marked "allargando molto" that prepare the martellato coda (mm. 313-24) based on the brindisi tune presented in broken octaves. Mm. 325-27 reproduce the original closing of the brindisi scene: a series of four fourths in octaves (Ex. 3-17).
Example 3-17: mm. 323-29.

Final Remarks

As stated at the beginning of the chapter, the model for my fantasy is clearly Liszt. My choice of the themes to create a dramatic unity, the techniques employed to vary and transform the original themes, and the type of instrumental technique employed in the virtuosic passages all point to the Hungarian master of the genre. The choice of the themes and the use of the “three-handed technique” have already been discussed above. Further examples of the model are the use of tremolo in mm. 30-33, a favorite Lisztian feature to achieve mysterious sonorities, as in the Canzonetta di Salvator Rosa from Years of Pilgrimage, II - Italy; the use of chromatically descending diminished broken chords (mm. 66-67); and the use of chromatic ascending scales in thirds (mm. 79-80), a distinctive feature of the B minor Sonata. Moreover, the cadenza-like passage in mm. 123-25 is reminiscent of a similar passage in Liebestraum. The arpeggio in m. 151 recalls Liszt’s writing in his transcendental etudes. The passage in mm. 270-75 represents the quintessential Lisztian cadence, with the only possible difference being that Liszt might have dared to write the descending scale for one single hand. The final broken octaves of
mm. 313-26 are also a trademark of Liszt, and the last three chords (mm. 327-29) recall the finale of the Tarantella from Years of Pilgrimage, II, which closes in the same key.

The spirit with which I started and completed this work is that of someone who intended to learn from a master of the past by imitating his style. At the same time, the model was only the skeleton on which I organized my own musical ideas and expressed my very close and personally-felt relationship with this beautiful opera. Although it is not up to me to judge my work, I can say that it truly was an enriching and exciting journey, and that I was fortunate enough that someone was interested in my work and wanted to publish it.

My relationship with the editor Sonzogno started in the fall of 2004 when I ordered a few scores by a living composer. In December of that same year, via e-mail, I asked the firm if they knew of a small editor in Italy to whom I could submit my recently-finished fantasy on Cavalleria Rusticana. They soon replied that they were personally interested in looking at the score. I had thought it impossible that Sonzogno, the same publisher that over one hundred years ago had made Cavalleria famous, would now ask to see my piano version of that opera. On April the 1st 2005 (April Fool’s) I received an e-mail from Sonzogno, whereby they informed me that they were sending a contract by mail. At the end of May 2005 I was in Milan to sign the contract, still not fully believing that all this could be happening.
Chapter Four: Conclusion

Opera has been my passion since I was a young boy, and as I grew and began to play the piano, I came to know that several pianist/composers of the past had written a great number of pieces for their instrument that were inspired by opera. Only much later, when I came to the United States in 1999, did I start to approach this repertoire, and in a few years I learned and performed some of my favorite operatic fantasias, mainly by Liszt. I have had high regard for Franz Liszt and his music since I was a teenager, and I have always considered his operatic fantasias among the masterpieces of the genre.

This body of works is usually considered second-class music and disregarded by most artists. Great pianists of only a couple of generations ago, such as Vladimir Horowitz (1903-89), Claudio Arrau (1903-91), and Jorge Bolet (1914-90), still cherished this repertoire to some degree and regularly included operatic fantasies in their recital programs. Horowitz, for instance, wrote and performed his own Variations on a Theme from Bizet's Carmen. In our time, the link with this musical tradition seems to be lost, and only a few performers are familiar with these works, now mostly employed to show off exceptional technical abilities in competitions. The focus is rarely on the musical content, a fact that shows how little these performers are usually concerned with the opera that inspired the composer of the fantasy. One of the extremely few first-class classical artists that nowadays maintains a close relationship with the operatic piano pieces of the past and at the same time carries the tradition of the pianist/composer writing in the genre is the young Russian-born pianist Arcadi Volodos (b.1972).
The tradition of improvising variations and paraphrasing on given themes is still alive in jazz. Although the musical language of jazz is quite different from that of the romantic operatic fantasies, the principles on which its improvisatory practices are based are very similar. It is a moment for the soloist to show not only his technical abilities but also his understanding and interpretation of the theme employed and his abilities in varying and manipulating a theme or tune. The skills of two of the major jazz pianists of our century are described in a recent article by James K. Williams:

In the history of Jazz only two pianists have exhibited keyboard technique comparable to that of Franz Liszt and other legendary classical virtuosos. The first was Art Tatum (1909-1956). Although Tatum usually performed with a trio, he was practically a one-man band. In his public performances and recordings, Tatum improvised by paraphrasing, that is, by reharmonizing, embellishing and altering existing melodies. His abilities in this regard made him a legend within the jazz community as well as among classical piano virtuosos who often frequented the New York nightclubs where he performed. Oscar Peterson, the second jazz pianist of virtuoso caliber, has often been compared to Tatum, but the analogy is shallow. For while Peterson possessed a dazzling technique (prior to his stroke in 1990), he is more capable of playing a wide range of musical roles, from solo pianist, to one among equals in a trio or quartet, to an accompanist for a noted singer or instrumentalist. Peterson has also employed a wider range of improvisational techniques. He could paraphrase, as we will see, but he could also improvise melodies that were daring, original, and breathtaking in their length and brilliance.¹

These accounts of modern jazz performances very much resemble the accounts of the performances of great piano virtuosi of the romantic period and of the reactions their art elicited from their audiences.

It would be interesting to begin a discussion of the musical significance of operatic fantasies written for the piano. Many opinions in favor and against could be

quoted. I could even speculate that the fact that there are still a few performers who consider this repertoire first-class music and even write pieces in the genre is a sure sign of its intrinsic value. The discussion could be endless, but at the same time would not lead to any new or original thought. We can safely state that one of the musical trademarks of the last half century is a certain cult for authenticity and an "artistic insecurity...that has gradually turned our search for authenticity into a compulsion."\(^2\) For the majority of musicians and scholars today everything must be as authentic as possible, from the edition of the score to the instrumentation and the instruments employed for performance, from the configuration of the seating to the staging, the acting, the use of body movements, the embellishments, and so forth. If this seems to be the main trend of our times, a much smaller group of musicians, at the other extreme, is very little concerned with authenticity and more interested in the performance as creative act. I believe this second group of musicians and scholars are the ones more inclined towards arrangements and transcriptions in general, and opera-inspired works in particular. Between these two opposite and extreme positions lie a number of more moderate approaches to authenticity as applied to musical performance.

As for myself, as probably most musicians and non-musicians, I equally enjoy an authentic performance of Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos* and a transcription of a Chopin Prelude for cello and piano. I do try to be as accurate as possible in my performances of the repertoire of each period, which to me means to be true to the original spirit of opera fantasies as well. I am aware of the fact that this repertoire was regarded as brilliant entertainment even in its own era, but I am also convinced that it was considered good music. My conviction that the masterpieces of this genre should be regarded as musically

\(^2\) Ibid., 23.
valuable is based on a very simple assumption. I believe no one would dare to regard
Verdi’s Rigoletto as second-class music. Given this, why should Liszt’s Concert
Paraphrase on Rigoletto be considered of little musical value? The fact that Liszt’s piece
employs non-original material and transforms it to create a technically challenging piece
does not seem to me sufficient to demote Verdi’s music to second rank.

I would add one more consideration to the discussion. The genre of variation on a
theme is extremely close to that of the fantasy on a theme. Operatic fantasies grew out of
the improvised practice of varying famous operatic themes on the spot. Variation and
fantasy simply represent two different ways of manipulating original and non-original
material. If we take the example of Brahms’ Variations on a Theme by Handel, Op. 24,
for piano, for instance, no one would ever think that the non-originality of the theme
could diminish the greatness of this extraordinary piece. And this is, too, a challenging
piece. So why should certain kinds of uses of non-original material be musically more or
less valuable than others? Busoni has the following to say on variation form:

This is odd, because if the variation form is built up on a borrowed theme,
it produces a whole series of transcriptions and the more regardless of the
theme they are, the more ingenious the type of variation. Thus,
arrangements are not permitted because they change the original whereas
the variation is permitted although it does change the original.\(^3\)

The only judgment I personally feel persuaded to impart on a piece of music is
generally only related to other pieces in the same genre. I would never attempt a
comparison between Liszt’s Concert Paraphrase on Rigoletto and a Brahms’ Intermezzo.
I would also never compare Liszt’s Rigoletto to his B-Minor Sonata, or Mozart’s
Requiem to his variations on the French popular song “Ah vous dirai-je, maman.” Of
course this is only my point of view, as it is my choice to promote the masterpieces of the

piano operatic repertoire. However, I do feel I can remind those who do not appreciate this music that they should try to consider it in the context of the genre. Then they would be able to understand that while many opera fantasies are little more than commercial music, some of them truly are masterpieces.

The value of my own work I cannot judge. It can simply be considered one of the recent attempts in the genre. I enjoyed working on it and I enjoy performing it. It is to me a way to live a little in the world of opera I love so much and also a way to express this love to others. The reaction to this piece of one of my best friends, the Polish pianist Nina Drath, was to me the most flattering. After she heard the piece at its premiere at Weill Hall (Carnegie Hall) in September 2004, she expressed the desire to see the opera, which she doesn’t know. If this were to be the only merit of my piece, I would consider myself sufficiently satisfied and proud to have inspired someone’s curiosity and interest for Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana.*
Bibliography


