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FREDERIC RZEWSKI'S
THE PEOPLE UNITED WILL NEVER BE DEFEATED!
AN ANALYSIS AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

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ABSTRACT

Frederic Rzewski's
The People United Will Never Be Defeated!
An Analysis and Historical Perspective

by

Laura Melton

Frederic Rzewski's The People United Will Never Be Defeated! is a compositional tour-de-force that successfully combines a lengthy series of opposite forces uniting musical trends of both the past and the present. This duality extends to the social and political context of the work as well as its position in the history of keyboard music. Through his highly-organized structural plan, Rzewski achieves a pianistic masterpiece that successfully straddles the fence between the academic high-art of atonality and the more accessible realm of tonality. Despite all the differing influences and styles integrated within the work, Rzewski manages to maintain a certain unity through the lengthy piece, producing a landmark in the history of variation form.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BIOGRAPHY

One of the most unusual American bicentennial works was Frederic Rzewski's *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* A massive set of piano variations over fifty minutes in length, it was written for Ursula Oppens and premiered by her in a bicentennial celebration at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D. C. The work is a compositional tour-de-force that successfully combines a lengthy series of opposite forces uniting musical trends of both the past and the present. This duality extends to the social and political context of the work as well as its position in the history of keyboard music. Attesting to its popularity, it has already garnered four separate recordings and is appearing on solo recital programs with growing frequency, suggesting that it will have a lasting place in twentieth-century piano literature.


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1The four recordings of Frederic Rzewski's, *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* are performed by Stephen Drury (New Albion 063, 1992); Ursula Oppens (Vanguard VSD-71248, 1978); Frederic Rzewski (Hat Art CD 6066, 1990); and Yuji Takahashi (ALM Records ALCD-19, 1989).
There are also several books that place Rzewski in the context of other twentieth-century composers: Howard Pollack's *Harvard Composers*, John Rockwell's *All American Music* and Walter Zimmerman's *Desert Plants: Conversations with 23 American Musicians*. There is, however, only one lengthy analytical study of the work, concentrating primarily on the first set of six variations: Robert W. Wason's "Tonality and Atonality in Frederic Rzewski's *Variations on 'The People United Will Never Be Defeated!'" Therefore, the piece has yet to receive a complete analysis, no one has placed the work in context; and no one has pointed out the astonishing series of contrasts within the piece.

The remainder of this chapter will give general biographical and political information on Frederic Rzewski followed by an analytical overview of the work in Chapter Two. Chapter Three will briefly examine Rzewski's piano output overall in section A, place the work in the context of twentieth-century music in section B, and discuss the work's unique relationship to the big keyboard variation sets from other periods in music history (Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* and Brahms' *Paganini Variations*) in section C. Section D will conclude the thesis with a look at the main sources of duality expressed throughout the work.

* * *

A native of Westfield, Massachusetts, Frederic Anthony Rzewski (b. 1938) is one of the foremost American composers and pianists of the second half of the twentieth century. He began playing the piano at the age of three, with formal lessons beginning at
age four. His musical studies included Harvard (1954-58) and Princeton (1958-60), as well as several years in Europe, beginning with a Fulbright fellowship for study in Rome (1960-62). He has studied with Walter Piston, Milton Babbitt, Roger Sessions and Luigi Dallapiccola, among others. Commenting on his early musical education, Rzewski states, "I experimented with most of the well-known contemporary musical languages. Hearing Schoenberg and Webern, later Cage, Boulez and Stockhausen was important to me. A number of pieces written at Harvard and Princeton show a variety of these influences, and sometimes a synthesis."  

While studying counterpoint, orchestration and composition with Walter Piston at Harvard, Rzewski gained a strong appreciation for the music of Bach. He also befriended several colleagues who would later prove to be influential in his development as a composer. The strongest influence was Christian Wolff, a nontraditionally educated musician and composer, whose Ph. D. was in classics. Wolff's works had also fallen under the influence of John Cage, owing a great deal to his compositional technique of chance.

Rzewski’s studies in Italy (1960-62) marked the beginning of his activity as a professional musician. Acquaintance with Severino Gazzelloni and Franco Evangelisti provided many performing opportunities through their contacts with composers and concert organizers. After several world premieres including Stockhausen's *Klavierstück X* (1962) and *Plus-Minus* (1964), Rzewski gained a reputation as a performer of new piano music by composers such as Boulez, Stockhausen, Bussotti, Kagel, Cage, Feldman and Wolff. At the invitation of Elliott Carter, he spent two years in West Berlin in the Ford Foundation's artist-in-residence program (1963-65) and taught at the Cologne Courses for

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2Frederic Rzewski, CD jacket notes for Frederic Rzewski's *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, performed by Frederic Rzewski (Hat Art CD 606629, 1978).
New Music (1963, 1964 and 1970). Several years later, while in Rome, he formed the group known as Musica Elettronica Viva, performing live electronic music and group improvisations throughout Europe and the United States. This group was one of many new music ensembles formed in the late 1960s that “formed an intricate artistic network with John Cage acknowledged as a sort of guru. Their ideals tended toward the extremes of neoprimitivism and ultramodernism”3 and included the use of “simple noisemakers and electronic synthesizers, static drones and atonality, repetitive rhythms and nonpulsed flux.”4 These groups also focused on improvisation, a feature that would influence Rzewski’s later works enormously.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Rzewski experimented with additive melodic formulas (Les Moutons de Panurge, 1968) and social themes (Coming Together, 1972). He had an increasing interest in the left-wing politics held by many of the musical groups of the late 1960s, but Rzewski’s beliefs in Marxism were atypical of the American avant-garde. According to Pollack, Rzewski’s Marxist thought can be heard as early as his thesis from Harvard (“The Reappearance of Isorhythm in Modern Music”) when he compares tonality to the “bourgeois order.” A number of events in the late 1960s were reflected in his works from this time. For example, a 1969 workers’ demonstration with 100,000 Italian metalworkers was reflected in Street Music. The 1973 work for piano, Variations on “No Place To Go But Around” was based on a leftist theatrical play called The Tower of Money, described by Rzewski as “a grand theatrical presentation of the Anarchist view of society and its transformation by spontaneous and non-violent means.”5

4Ibid.
5Frederic Rzewski, CD jacket notes for Rzewski’s Variations on ‘No Place To Go But Around’, performed by Frederic Rzewski (Finnadar SR 9011).
In addition, Rzewski spoke of the composer's role in society at the 1968 Festival Internationale de Teatro Universitario-Parma when he said, "To create means to be here and now: to be responsible to reality on the high-wire of the present. To be responsible means to be able to communicate the presence of dangers to others." In connection with his political views, Rzewski expressed his concern that music should be written with an audience in mind.

During the time I was living in New York (1971-76), I became more and more concerned with the question of language. It seemed to me there was no reason why the most difficult and complex formal structures could not be expressed in a form which could be understood by a wide variety of listeners. I was also concerned with what appeared to me to be a crisis in theory, not only in music but in many different fields, including science and politics: the absence of a general theory to explain phenomena and guide behavior. I explored forms in which existing musical languages could be brought together. A series of variations for solo piano, *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* was the main expression for these ideas at the time.⁷

Shortly after the composition of this work, Rzewski was invited to become professor of composition at the Royal Conservatory in Liège, where he has taught since 1977. In addition, he was appointed to teach for one year at the Hochschule der Künste in West Berlin (1981-83), two semesters at the Yale School of Music (Fall 1984 and Spring 1988), one semester at the College Conservatory of the University of Cincinnati (Spring 1986), two semesters at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague (Spring and Fall 1987), one semester at the State University of New York at Buffalo (Spring 1989) and one semester...


⁷Rzewski. CD jacket notes for *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*.
at the Hochschule für Musik in Karlsruhe, Germany (Winter 1989-90). He presently divides his time between Brussels and Italy, and tours extensively as a pianist.

In order to understand Rzewski's musical activity, it is important to have a deeper understanding of his politics. The following discussion of his social and political views should clarify Rzewski's message in his works.

After his work with Musica Elettronica Viva, Rzewski began to write works that were more constructive and concrete. When asked about this by Walter Zimmerman in an interview, Rzewski responded that it was his concept of realism. According to Rzewski, realism in music did not need to be expressed by text, but rather, "it requires some kind of consciousness of the active relationship between music and the rest of the world."8 This was much the same as the purpose of "quotiation music"9 of the 1960s and 70s. The effort was being made to write music that communicated something to an audience rather than alienating it. After all, as Rzewski once said, "Music is a form of spiritual expression that potentially influences masses of people."10 This did not mean, however, that the composer was restricted to the use of familiar languages. In other words, the avant-garde styles were not "off-limits." Rzewski also pointed out that if one were to exclude any use of familiar languages, one would severely limit the ability to communicate. In Rzewski's opinion, "If one is seriously interested in communication, then I suppose statistically

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8Quoted in Tan, "Rzewski fuses jazz with classical music to create consciousness-raising concerts." _Keyboard Magazine_ 11 (December 1985): 16.

9"Quotation music" refers to music in the 1960s and 70s which quotes music from the past. Composers that wrote "quotiation music" include Stockhausen and Rochberg.

10Quoted in Tan, "Rzewski fuses jazz with classical music," p. 16.
speaking that a rigorous, say formalistic, style such as the style of the serial composers and so on would be at a serious disadvantage."\textsuperscript{11}

Rzewksi once said, "Musicians and artists must listen to the sound of struggle if they are to contribute anything in the way of harmony."\textsuperscript{12} With this statement, it is clear that Rzewski wants his music to carry a message, to communicate something to the audience. Rzewski had strong political beliefs and was very much connected to the political movements and undercurrents around him. Around the time he wrote \textit{The People United}, he was very active in a performing group called the Musicians Active Collective, a group of New York musicians who were anxious to make a statement, to discover a connection between their music and the political struggles in the world around them. They gave benefit concerts in support of certain political causes such as the Chile Solidarity Committee, a group representing the struggle of the Chilean people, the United Farm Workers, and the Attica Defense Committee.

Identifying the audience became of utmost importance. For a time during the twentieth century, the audience was basically unimportant. The generation in which Rzewski was a student, for example, learned from the serialists. Rzewski’s teacher, Milton Babbitt, wrote a notorious article "Who Cares If You Listen?"\textsuperscript{13} in support of this tendency. This abstract, formalistic music was known as the "most advanced" music, and the audience was not important to the music. This does not mean that music must be universal to react against this idea. So-called political music, for example, speaks to an audience, but many times that audience is limited to those who share the political belief.


\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 311.

\textsuperscript{13}Milton Babbitt, "Who Cares If You Listen?", \textit{High Fidelity Magazine}, viii (1958): 38.
An early work by Rzewski called *It's Coming Together* could be taken as an example of political music, but perhaps more accurately politically-connected music, as it exemplified extramusical connections with an historical event. The work was based on the text of a letter of Sam Melville, a political prisoner who was killed in the 1971 riot at Attica Prison in New York. During the event, thirty-one prisoners and nine guards were killed when Governor Nelson Rockefeller ordered a military attack. In Pollack’s opinion, “no other contemporary event so well encapsulated the Marxist perspective: here was the combined power of capitalism and government in the figure of a Rockefeller responsible for the deaths of prisoners and their guards alike.”¹⁴ In several works that shortly followed *Coming Together*, including *Variations on “Nowhere to Go But Around”* of 1973, there was even more of a political message involved. In *Nowhere to Go But Around*, the variations symbolized “the various classes of capitalist society: lumpen, industrial workers, petty bourgeoisie, clerical-military and big bourgeoisie.”¹⁵

Rzewski’s political views were shared by other composers in the late 1960s and early 1970s. His classmate from Harvard, Christian Wolff, and another friend, English composer Cornelius Cardew, were both Marxists at heart. Cardew’s influences also included Stockhausen and Cage. He gave his official statement of his views on the avant-garde of the 1960s in his 1974 work, *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*.

There are definitely ironic political overtones in the work to be examined more closely in Chapter II. It is a set of variations on the Chilean revolutionary folksong, “¡El Pueblo Unido, Jamás Será Vencido!” (*The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*). This song was very well-known in certain South American and European countries as a song of resistance.


¹⁵Ibid., p. 380.
From 1970 to 1973, Salvador Allende was in power in Chile, commanding the first freely elected Marxist regime in the West. This was a difficult three-year period in Chile with a complex network of political and economic problems that resulted from Allende’s attempt to nationalize many of Chile’s domestic and foreign-owned industries, primarily the copper industry. He also raised wages, improved social services and began land redistribution programs, all of which helped the lower class and angered the middle and upper classes. Also unhappy were American businesses and corporations such as ITT and Anaconda Copper. Chile was soon without foreign capital which caused shortages and enormous inflation, which led to strikes, demonstrations, and counterdemonstrations dissolving Allende’s coalition. This led to a coup in September of 1973 when Augusto Pinochet took over. The ironic twist to the political nature of the piece becomes clear when one considers the CIA’s successful attempt to destabilize the Allende regime by channeling millions of dollars to the opposition via the press, politicians, businessmen and trade unions. Dedicated to Ursula Oppens for a bicentennial celebration in Washington, D.C., Rzewski’s piece was obviously written, in part, to send a political message. Using a revolutionary song might be seen as very appropriate to celebrate our revolution; it seems more likely though that what Rzewski had in mind was thumbing his nose at the United States. In the Chilean coup, the United States played the role of the villain, i.e. the equivalent to Britain in the revolutionary war. Rzewski is using a song that was the rallying cry for the enemies of the United States.

However, as Tom Johnson writes in his review in The Voice of New Music, “This may be political art, but it is certainly not talking down to the masses.”16 This work is astounding in its organization, both musically and structurally. Its recapitulative nature,

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which is about to be discussed, gives the variations an overwhelming sense of unity, similar to the unity the Chilean people must have felt in their defense of the Allende regime.
CHAPTER TWO

FORMAL ANALYSIS

_The People United Will Never Be Defeated!_ is Rzewski's first important work for solo piano. A fifty-minute set of variations, it is a masterpiece in the history of variation form. Rzewski incorporates many different twentieth-century musical styles and techniques, weaving them into a unique and ingenious formal plan. The musical language, although seemingly disparate, is the glue that holds these styles together, creating a cohesive bond between tonality and atonality.

According to Robert W. Wason, "the piece is a kind of autobiography of an artist whose career spans an important segment of recent musical developments, and the souvenirs of that career are everywhere in the piece."\(^{17}\) Upon detailed examination of the work, one can see how experiences in Rzewski's life became sources of major influence for the work. Perhaps the most obvious example is Rzewski's extensive experience in improvisation, a result of his work with Musica Elettronica Viva, an improvising group that Rzewski co-founded in the mid-1960s. In an article in _Down Beat_ magazine, Ken Terry states,

>This [improvisation] is the key to understanding Rzewski's own compositions. Blending classical styles with jazz and pop influences, his work exhibits a degree of melodic inspiration and rhythmic vitality which is quite rare in contemporary classical music. Although many of his pieces

are completely written out, the spontaneous eclecticism of Rzewski's music seems directly related to his experiments with improvisation.\(^{18}\)

Rzewski describes the connection between improvisation and his compositional process in the following manner:

In writing music it is possible to experience one's own identity as not merely an individual, but as a collective. It helps me find the collective part of myself. I began to realize that my brain was not a simple thing, but many brains; there are many people, many individuals in my brain. If you can accept this idea as an hypothesis, it helps you to understand what polyphony is all about. Instead of forcing all parts of my brain to function in unison or in smoothly meshed gears, I try to allow various, different, and conflicting parts of my mind to emerge.

What I'm trying to do in my writing now, and I realize that this has been going on since my experience with MEV, is to portray the mess that is inside my own head instead of trying to force it into a rhetorical, pleasing shape like most classical music does. I find that no matter how hard I try not to, the order is always there.\(^{19}\)

The idea for the structural plan of *The People United* originated with an experiment in improvisation in 1972 with his group, Musica Elettronica Viva. The work that includes this experiment, *Second Structure*, gives a text for improvisation over undetermined pitch material. The only specifications are in relation to the structure. As Rzewski explains,

The idea is that you are given a piece of music that is a certain length, but you have absolutely no idea of what you are going to play. The


structure simply gives you a form for it. The structure contains six parts, dealing with completely spontaneous material.\textsuperscript{20}

The characteristics of each part of the improvisation in \textit{Second Structure} are listed below in Table 1. The cycle is to be repeated six times, resulting in thirty-six stages. It is this plan that was later used as a basis for the structure of \textit{The People United}.

\textbf{Table 1. Stages and Characteristics of an Experiment in Improvisation (Second Structure).}\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|l|p{12cm}|}
\hline
\textbf{STAGES} & \textbf{CHARACTERISTICS} \\
\hline
1 & Points of isolation, no temporal relationship, pitches experienced in and for themselves. \\
\hline
2 & Echoed repetition, in which a relationship is established, creating pulse and rhythm. Previous material is recalled. \\
\hline
3 & Elements of melody, legato, lyrical, expressive qualities. \\
\hline
4 & Overlapping, contrapuntal material, complexity with conflicting sounds. \\
\hline
5 & Sudden changes, abrupt introduction of unrelated material, chords, simultaneous attacks. \\
\hline
6 & Recapitulation, flash-back idea, dimension of unified time, where all these elements co-exist. \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

Rzewski uses this six-stage concept found in the 1972 work, \textit{Second Structure}, for the formal plan of \textit{The People United}. Following the theme, discussed below, there are thirty-six variations in six groups, with six variations each. The first five variations in each

\textsuperscript{20}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 46.

group have their own unique style of figuration, while the sixth is a type of recapitulation variation, in which a summation of the previous five is heard. Throughout the first four sets of variations, the same form is used for Variations 1-5: each is twenty-four measures long, and the second twelve measures are of similar phrase structure to the first.

The fifth set of variations have the following features in common, all of which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter: none of the variations is twenty-four measures long, there are no time signatures given, and there is a general sense of freedom with fewer formal constraints. The struggle implied in the political message of the work dominates the fifth set. Variations which include interpolations of Eisler/Brecht’s *Solidaritätslied* alternate with variations in the highly tonal language of minimalism. The summation variation of this set, Variation 30, is the longest of the entire work, seventy-two measures.

Variations 31-36 are recapitulative variations that return to the former length of twenty-four measures. Each variation in this set summarizes the variations in the same respective positions in the previous sets. For example, Variation 31, the first in this recapitulative set, is based on four measures taken from the first variation in each of the previous sets (Variations 1, 7, 13, 19 and 25). The second variation from the sixth set, Variation 32, summarizes four measures from the second variation in each of the previous sets (Variations 2, 8, 14, 20 and 26). The last variation, Variation 36, summarizes all of the previous variations because it represents the summary of each of the summary variations from the other sets (recall the sixth variation of each set is a summary variation—Variations 6, 12, 18, 24 and 30). It also includes an optional improvisation, followed by the triumphal final version of the theme.

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22Minimalism was a style of composition characterized by tonal ostinato figures that changed gradually over long periods of time. The three composers largely responsible for developing this style in the mid-1960s were Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and Philip Glass.
It was Rzewski who said, "improvisation is the soul of classical music."\textsuperscript{23} Although once seen as a dying art, improvisation is finally returning to modern classical music. In \textit{The People United}, Rzewski succeeds in the ingenious combination of a spontaneous, improvisational sound and a masterfully constructed form. This balance between improvisation and formal detail is one of the most fascinating examples of the dualities that exist in this work. Through an in-depth discussion and detailed analysis of the theme and each variation, one can see Rzewski's unique blend of styles from both the past and the present.

\textbf{Thema.} "The People United Will Never Be Defeated!"

The theme is a Chilean revolutionary folksong, "\textit{¡El Pueblo Unido Jamás Será Vencido!}" (\textit{The People United Will Never Be Defeated!}), composed by Sergio Ortega three months before the coup and performed by a folk group known as Quilapayun. As previously mentioned, it became extremely popular during the Allende years of the Chilean resistance, and continued to be heard throughout South America after the coup in which Pinochet became dictator with the help of the CIA. It was also popular in Italy, where many members of the Chilean government were in exile, members of the Unidad Popular. This is probably where Rzewski originally heard the song, while living in Rome in the early 1970s.

Sergio Ortega, the composer of the song, offers the following synopsis of the circumstances that led to the composition.

One day in June, 1973, three months before the bombing by Pinochet's military coup, I was walking through the plaza in front of the palace of finance in Santiago, Chile, and saw a street singer shouting, "The

\textsuperscript{23}Terry. "Frederic Rzewski." p. 20.
people united will never be defeated”—a well-known Chilean chant for social change. I couldn’t stop, and continued across the square, but his incessant chanting followed me and stuck in my mind.

On the following Sunday, after the broadcast of the show “Chile Says No to Civil War,” which I directed for Channel 9, we went with a few artists to eat at my house outside Santiago. Upon arrival I sat down at my piano and thought about the experience in the plaza and the events at large. When I reproduced the chant of the people in my head, the chant that could not be restrained, the entire melody exploded from me: I saw it complete and played it in its entirety at once. The text unfurled itself quickly and fell, like falling rocks, upon the melody. In their enthusiasm some of my guests made suggestions that were too rational for the situation I was composing in. Out of courtesy I pretended to accept, but arranged myself to leave the text in its symptomatic landscape.

The song was performed in public two days later by the group “Quilapayun” in a heavily attended concert in the Alameda.24

The following is an English translation of the text of the song offered by Elena Hammel and Maria Letona.

Arise, sing, for we will triumph flags of unity advance come marching with me and behold the blossoming of your song and your flag the light of a red dawn announces the life to come. Arise, fight, the People will triumph the life to come will be better let us win our happiness and in a clamor a thousand voices of combat rise and recite a song of liberty with decisiveness the nation will be victorious. And now the People rise in the fight with a giant’s voice they cry The People United will never be defeated The People United will never be defeated.

The Nation is forging unity it will mobilize from North to South from the burning salt flats to the southern forests they will go united in work and battle they will blanket the Nation their step announces the future. Arise, sing the People will triumph millions now demand the truth the ardent battalion is made of steel their hands carry justice and reason woman, with fire and courage you stand beside the worker and now the People rise in

the fight with a giant's voice they cry The People United will never be defeated The People United will never be defeated.\textsuperscript{25}

The length of Rzewski's original statement of the theme is thirty-six measures, the same as Ortega's original tune, and also a significant number for the entire piece (thirty-six variations). The original song is written for guitar ensemble and voices. Rzewski only makes changes in the voicing; otherwise, the theme of the set of variations is the same as Ortega's original song. The basic twelve-measure tune is in D Minor and possesses melodic and harmonic features that make it ideal for the basis of an extended set of variations: rising tonic arpeggiation at the beginning, melodic sequence with tritones over a cycle of descending fifths, and a four-measure phrase structure of A-B-B, each part four measures long. Rzewski prefaces the tune with a four-measure motto, which is accented, marked $ff$ and "With determination" (see Example 1).


\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{c}
\textbf{Thema} \\
\hline
$\frac{1}{4}$ 106 With determination
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{c}
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{example1.png}
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{25}\textit{Ibid.}, trans. Elena Hammel and Maria Letona.
Following the motto are two twelve-measure statements of the theme. The first represents a contrast to the determined motto that opens the thematic section. It is marked \( \textit{mf} \) and consists of the tune in the right hand in jazzlike triplets, accompanied by a broken triad pattern in the left hand, marked \( \textit{mp} \). Its structure is quite simple with three four-measure parts in the form ABB. The first part, A, can be further divided into two identical two-measure phrases in which the tune moves up the triad to scale degree five, and back down by step to scale degree two. The bass movement is typical for variations with downward stepwise motion from I-V. The B part of the tune (four measures long) is most interesting for its harmonic movement around the circle of fifths, beginning on G and moving through C, F, and Bb, before escaping to E for a return to D through A. This becomes a unifying force for the entire piece in its motivic development. Another interesting point is seen when the circle of fifths bass line is combined with the skeleton of the melody; the first notes of each measure yield stepwise descending tenths (see Example 2).

Example 2. \textit{The People United Will Never Be Defeated!}, Thema, mm. 9-12.

In order to connect to the next four-measure phrase, a varied repeat of the B section, the bass line moves stepwise from D through E, F, and F\# to G, the origin of the next circle of fifths bass movement. This second statement of the B part includes increased activity
through the addition of a triplet-rest combination in the left hand, and the return to a louder dynamic marking, f. This four-measure phrase reaches harmonic closure by finishing on the tonic, D. At this point, Rzewski connects the theme to the first variation by writing an eight-measure transition consisting of four measures with progressive repeated chords which crescendo into a final ff statement of the four-measure motto in full texture.

Thus, the thematic section introduces many elements to be explored further in the variations: the twelve-measure varied repetitions of the theme, the circle of fifths bass movement, the outlining of the tenths between melody and bass, and the four-measure bridge to the next variation. The twelve-measure tune is extremely clear and simple in its phrase structure (2+2 and 4+4), a clear attempt at reaching as large an audience as possible through the use of Ortega’s popular tune.

Rzewski had many reasons to use Ortega’s revolutionary song: it satisfied his political beliefs, it stings the bicentennial celebration by celebrating a government that the American government helped to overthrow, it is an inspiring song musically and it is highly accessible, satisfying one of the main facets of his musical philosophy.

SET ONE

After such a tonal theme, the first variation is a little shocking. The emphasis is on octave displacement, as all of the pitch-classes are almost the same, but the registers are quite a bit different. By using such a transparent one-part texture in combination with wide octave displacement, Rzewski is surely paying homage to the music of Anton Webern.

It gives an eerie mood to the once comfortable tune, as the pp, una corda markings and the designation, "weaving: delicate but firm" leave the pianist quietly
managing the wide, acrobatic octave displacements. Though much less obvious, the tune and the bass line are still discernible, despite the use of the entire keyboard. Rzewski also uses articulation and rests to help clarify the tune as can be seen in Example 3.

If one analyzes the variation and removes the octave displacement by notating the pitches in as much of a closed position as possible as Wason does in his analysis, one can see that the pitch classes and rhythmic positions of the pitches are exactly the same with only a couple of exceptions (compare Examples 3 and 4). It is also easier to see that the tonality of D Minor is retained throughout the variation.

Example 4. *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, Variation 1, mm. 1-12. Closed position rendering.\(^{26}\)

There are small exceptions to the similarity of the two examples. The preservation of the one-part texture in Variation 1 necessitates a few adjustments such as the syncopation of the bass line and the deletion of an occasional note of the tune in mm. 6, 8,

10 and 12. Also noteworthy, the two-measure phrases in the A section are varied upon repetition by altering the octave displacement. This creates different shapes in the melodic line, the most dramatic of which can be seen in the bass line in mm. 3-4. One can see the same pattern in comparing the varied repetition of the B section (mm. 5-8 and 9-12). Again, the bass line is more distorted in the second statement, further displaced than in mm. 5-8, where it is usually heard as the lowest voice. It is mainly in the first two measures of the repetition (mm. 9-10) that the melody notes proceed below the bass notes. In mm. 11-12, the bass line returns for the most part, to its original position as the lowest voice, thus clarifying the harmonic reading. It is quite astounding how the simple variation technique of octave displacement can almost completely obscure the tonal nature of the theme, yielding a very atonal sound. In one step, we have the beginning of tonal disintegration.

Rzewski maintains the one-part texture throughout Variation 1 by weaving the melody and bass line together in eighth notes, allowing only one note to be heard at a time. In the second half, he increases the rhythmic interest by decorating with sixteenth notes, but still maintains a one-part sound. As in the first half, he uses articulation and rests to emphasize certain notes to help illuminate the tune. There is the same pattern of octave displacement with the second repetition of the A section altering the registers of the first two measures (mm. 13-14 and 15-16). At the end of the variation, the second statement of the B section returns to the eighth-note texture in transition to Variation 2. The diminution of the second half of the variation is an aspect of many of the variations in the set, as is the slower rhythm of the four-measure transition to the next variation.

In Variation 2 (see Example 5), Rzewski thickens the texture by adding parts, although the texture is still thinner than in the original theme. In the first two measures of the A section, two parts are used, while in the third and fourth measures, one of the voices
is heard in double notes, increasing the texture to three parts. In the B section, the same pattern is observed: the first two measures are in two parts and the second two measures are in three parts. Even with the accented syncopations and continued use of registral displacements, the tune is still audible, particularly in the A section.


In the B section, hearing the tune becomes more difficult because of the seventh skips bouncing between the hands, mostly representing suspensions (see Example 6). The
suspensions and resolutions result from a mixing of the melody and bass line, which makes it very difficult to hear the circle of fifths pattern of the bass line heard so clearly in the theme.

Example 6. *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, Variation 2, mm. 5-8.
Closed position rendering. 27

In the next statement of the B section, mm. 9-12, Rzewski further increases the density with four parts written in a more complicated texture of double suspensions, again alternating between the hands. This is the first time since the statement of the theme that Rzewski has been able to use harmonic variation techniques. Until now, the textures have been mostly linear. The closed position rendering in Example 7 shows these double suspensions more clearly.

27Ibid., p. 118.
Upon analyzing the harmonies in these four measures, one finds a fairly normal progression until m. 10, when the flat VI, A-flat, is substituted for the expected V, G. In m. 11, the progression becomes even more ambiguous as the Neapolitan, B-flat, is implied, questioned through chromatic neighbors, B-natural (B-flat) and E-natural (E-flat), and finally confirmed in m. 12 (N6 - V).

The second half of the variation follows the pattern put forth in Variation 1 with the increased rhythmic activity seen in the inclusion of sixteenth notes. The material is again in diminution for eight measures followed by the four-measure transition, in slower rhythm. The first eight measures are fairly direct, using syncopation and single suspensions, but the four-measure transition is more ambiguous than the harmonic passage in a similar position in the first half of the variation. It is also marked by the first fermata in the piece, followed by the designation, "dragging."

One more point to be made about Variation 2 is the introduction of a motive which will be transformed throughout the piece. It is a four-note motive outlining the following intervals: half step/fifth/half step, all moving in the same direction. It can be seen just

\[28\text{Ibid.}\]
before the transition at the end of the variation, in the first four measures of the B section, mm. 17 to 20 (see Example 8).

Example 8. The People United Will Never Be Defeated!, Variation 2, mm. 17-18. Motive.

Rzewski has gradually moved away from the tonal nature of the theme, preparing us for atonality in Variation 3. Through octave displacement in Variation 1, he took away the immediate recognition of the tune and its important bass line. In Variation 2, he thickened the texture, further clouding the theme with suspensions and ambiguous harmonic transitions. He also introduced a very important feature that will soon dominate the work, an all-combinatorial hexachord.

Upon closer examination of the opening phrase of Variation 3, one finds various transformations of the hexachord Forte calls 6-20.29 The prime form of 6-20 is shown below in Example 9.

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This is a very popular hexachord among twentieth century composers for a number of reasons. First of all, there is its symmetry, the alternating intervals of 1 and 3, and its division into two augmented triads that limits its number of transpositions. According to Wason, it has been used by composers such as Bartók (referred to as the "1:3 model" by Erno Lendvai in *The Workshop of Bartók and Kodály*), Schoenberg (*Wunderreihe* from *Ode to Napoleon, Op. 41*), Scriabin (Piano Sonatas No. 7 and 10), Babbitt ("third-order" all-combinatorial hexachord) and Martino ("Type E"). Hexachord 6-20 has only four forms with regard to pitch-class (see Example 10).

Example 10. Forms of hexachord 6-20: $H^0$, $H^1$, $H^2$, $H^3$

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The possible pitch-class intersections between these forms and are illustrated in the table below:

**Table 2. Hexachord Pairs and Their Pitch-Class Intersections.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hexachord Pairs</th>
<th>Pitch-Class Intersection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H^0 - H^1</td>
<td>Db - F - A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H^1 - H^2</td>
<td>D - F# - Bb (A#)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H^2 - H^3</td>
<td>Eb - G - B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H^0 - H^3</td>
<td>C - E - G#</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the pitch-class intersections between hexachord pairs are augmented triads, as each hexachord is composed of two augmented triads, as stated earlier. Rzewski uses these intersections, or augmented triads, to move or pivot by augmented triad from one hexachord form to another. Wason cites this type of progression between 6-20s as being "analogous to triads in the traditional system."^34 Because of its symmetrical structure and limited number of transpositions, which yield numerous intersections between forms, it is the perfect hexachord to use to straddle the fence between tonality and atonality.

The beginning of Variation 3 represents a dramatic change from the previous two variations. It is marked "Slightly slower, with expressive nuances, \( p \), legato, sustaining some notes (besides those indicated), ad lib beyond notated durations."^35 It opens in two parts with a smooth, legato phrase in the right hand accompanied by sextuplets in the left. The lyrical, expressive quality of the right hand melody enhances the first statement of the 6-20 hexachord in the H^0 form. In addition to the hexachord statement in the right hand,

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^34Wason, "Tonality and Atonality." p. 122.

the opening of Variation 3 yields statements of each of the four forms of 6-20 by combining notes of the right hand phrase with the left hand sextuplet pattern (this reading produces a couple of extra notes in the right hand phrase). The movement, or progression, is $H^3 - H^0 - H^1 - H^2$, as can be seen in Example 11. This passage is the perfect example of Rzewski's using common augmented triads to pivot from one form of the hexachord to another.

Hexachordal analysis.

Wason also points out that compiling all of the pitches in each of these two measures yields Forte's 9-12 collection (0, 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10)$^{36}$, which lacks an augmented triad. He also notes that Russian theorists analyzing Scriabin's piano sonatas that use the 6-20 hexachord also found the 9-12 aggregate as the larger set of which 6-20 is a subset. They called it the "augmented mode" (similar to their labelling of the octatonic scale, the "diminished mode."$^{37}$ The 9-12 aggregate is also known as Messiaen's third mode of limited transposition.$^{38}$

$^{36}$Forte, *The Structure of Atonal Music*, p. 179.
Now that hexachordal use has been established, the last two measures of transition from Variation 2 to Variation 3 are clearer. They can be seen as another instance of foreshadowing the statement of the hexachord as seen in Example 12. The two-part two-note slurs compose the H³ form of 6-20, as well as a tetrachordal subset of the H² form.


The phraseology in Variation 3 is still obvious with the first eight measures composed of two four-measure phrases marked by the trading of material. The right hand line and the left hand sextuplets switch parts in measure five to mark the 4+4 structure as can be seen in Example 13.

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38 Wason, “Tonality and Atonality,” p. 141.
Example 13. *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, Variation 3, mm. 5-6.
Hexachordal analysis.

In measures 9-12, the texture is increased to four voices, following the pattern set in Variation 2. The remainder of the variation also holds true to the structure already seen, with mm. 13-20 in diminution (see Example 14) with a wild outburst of sixteenth-note sextuplets spanning the entire range of the keyboard (this figuration was foreshadowed in mm. 17-18 of Variation 2, see Example 8 above) and the last four measures, a quieter transition in two voices to Variation 4.

Hexachordal analysis.
At this point, one can see a pattern developing in terms of the tonalities that each variation implies. Variation 1 was in D Minor and Variation 2 was in A Minor. While Variation 3 was hardly tonal, it did end on an E Minor triad under fermatas, thus continuing the pattern of rising through the circle of fifths. Variation 4, in B Minor, certainly prolongs this trend. The pace definitely picks up in this variation, with an alternating eighth-note figuration at the beginning, yielding the sound of sixteenth notes. This six-measure phrase is outlining different forms of the 6-20 hexachord in the familiar pattern of alternating fifths and half steps. It can be further divided into three two-measure phrases as is evident from the general rise and fall in the direction of the notes. There is also downward stepwise motion seen in the first notes of each two-measure
group. The overall pattern in both six-measure phrases of the first half of the variation is imitation, with the hands trading the lead position back and forth in a kind of chase scene. The second six measures also divide into three groups of two. In mm. 7-8, the sixteenths rise for two beats in the left hand and fall for two beats in the right hand. This is followed in mm. 9-10 by downward motion from right hand to left hand every two beats, with mm. 11-12 containing upward sixteenths from left hand to right hand every two beats.

The second half of Variation 4, mm. 13-24, represent a change with the return of the "motto" outlined in ff. running sixteenth sextuplets. The last eight measures combine the fairly tonal nature of the first two variations and the atonal techniques of the third variation by restating the tune and its bass line in tenths, well-defined, although octave displaced, amid the continuing hexachordal sextuplet figuration. This is a good example of the accessibility to tonal and atonal languages with the 6-20 hexachord. Mm. 17-20 are marked "broaden slightly" while the transitory mm. 21-24 slow to sixteenth notes as can be seen in Example 15.

Suddenly, in Variation 5, the movement stops. The marking given is "Dreamlike, frozen" with a key signature of F# Minor, following the circle of fifths pattern seen thus far. Rzewski uses a modern keyboard technique of playing chords staccato and catching the remainder of the sonority with the pedal (common in the works of George Crumb). He writes that one should use "a mode of attack consisting of a swift, sudden grabbing motion in which not all of the written notes are necessarily played and some other notes may be accidentally struck; a little like picking berries, or fruit," implying the philosophy of chance music in which certain events occur according to chance (common in the music of John Cage). The isolated chords, mostly F# Minor with various added notes, can still be
seen in phrases of four measures, as has been typical of most of the piece to this point.
The second half, beginning in m. 13, moves a bit more, as is characteristic of the second
half of all variations thus far. While the right hand has the off-beat chords, the left hand
takes on more of a wandering melodic role using accented grace notes where the short
note is to be played louder than the main note. The melody moves mostly by alternating
skips and steps, a familiar pattern from previous variations, and outlines the pure form of
the minor scale. In the last eight measures, the hands trade the chords and melody notes
back and forth before finishing on a C# tremolo marked "with one finger, irregularly,
trembling."

Variation 6 is the last variation of the first set. Rzewski uses it as a kind of
summary variation, compiling elements from each of the previous five variations, in order.
Example 16 shows the beginnings of the first five variations and the first measure of their
corresponding segments in Variation 6.

Example 16. *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* Beginnings of each variation in
Set One with comparison of the summary variation, Variation 6.
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Variations 1-5

Variation 6, mm. 1-2, 5-6, 9, 13, 17-18
In the summary variation, there are four measures from each variation, with two from each half. The tonality at the outset is C# Minor, following the circle of fifths up from F# Minor in Variation 5. Mm. 1-2 utilize the one-part linear statement through octave displacement from Variation 1, followed by mm. 3-4, which show the diminution of the figure in sixteenths and eighths, still in one-part. Mm. 5-6 keep the two-part texture from Variation 2 with its imitation of intervals and dynamics. The next two measures are from the second half of Variation 2, showing the highly rhythmic sixteenth note patterns which weave back and forth between hands. The segment from Variation 3, mm. 9-12, shows the chromatic melody in continuous eighths and triplets, rhythmically pitting two
against three in a slower tempo. In the next two measures, the running sixteenth-note sextuplets start in two beats of upward motion followed by two beats of downward motion. The texture has now thickened to three parts with the alternating half steps and fifths motive being brought out against the sextuplets. The measures from Variation 4 represent the two-part contrapuntal passage of alternating dotted eighths and sixteenths between the two hands, giving way to the sixteenth-note sextuplet statement of the motto. Four measures of the isolated ff and pp chords from Variation 5 lead into the four measure transition of full eighth-note chords outlining the alternating fifth-half step motion with quarter notes in the left hand that become full chords upon the trading of material between the hands in the last two measures. There is a big crescendo and fermatas over the final chords before an acceleration into Variation 7.

After analyzing the first set of variations, one of the most powerful dualities of the work becomes evident: Rzewski’s ability to organize the structure so thoroughly and simultaneously gives the impression of freedom and improvisation. Beginning with Variation 3, Rzewski introduces the all-combinatorial hexachord 6-20 in a flowing, lyrical melody with two-against-three rhythms that yield a free, improvisatory sound. He consciously builds intensity through Variation 4 using increasingly complex techniques of counterpoint before suddenly evaporating into Variation 5, a written-out improvisation of chords and sounds. Bringing back the highly-structured formal plan in Variation 6, he summarizes all that has previously heard. This juxtaposition of formal organization and improvisatory writing is one of the truly unique aspects of the piece.
SET TWO

The first variation of the second set is in G# minor, continuing the rotation through the circle of fifths. The texture has returned to two parts with the two-against-three rhythm first seen in Variation 3. While similar to Variation 3 in terms of rhythm, the texture of Variation 7 is quite different. It is more fragmented with shorter motives spaced out by rests. The octave displacement from the first variation is also present, yielding the use of a wider range of the keyboard. The phrasing is similar to earlier variations with the first eight measures in a 2+2+4 pattern. The next four measures, mm. 8-12, add the use of three-note clusters thrown in with the triplets still trading back and forth between the hands. The second half of the variation continues the trend of thickening texture and increased movement by the omission of the rests from before. The two voices are now locked in a battle of imitative counterpoint with the octave/half-step triplets being used as a repeated motive. Against the triplets are eighth notes that accent the outline of the melody on the off-beats. The last four measures return to the opening texture of the variation as a transition to Variation 8.

Basically centered around D#, the circle of fifths pattern continues in Variation 8 in a more active variation with eighth and sixteenth notes. The most prevalent motive of the piece, half-step/fifth/half-step, is further developed and imitated throughout in a texture that begins in two-part counterpoint (mm. 1-3), increasing to three parts in m. 4, and finally four parts in mm. 5-12. In the second half of the variation, the texture thickens through the doubling of fifths outlining the melody with sixteenths weaving in and out of the middle. The texture gradually thins out as the transition to the next variation approaches. This variation is somewhat similar to Variation 4 in the widespread use of the half-step/fifth/half-step motive and the heightened intensity compared to the previous variation.
Variation 9, in Bb minor, is an obvious referral to Chopin's funeral march from his *Sonata in Bb Minor*, Op. 35. The overall mood is somewhat remote, similar to the "dreamlike, frozen" quality in Variation 5. With whole-note chords, the right hand gives a vague outline of the melody in the opening eight measures, while the left hand repeats Bb minor chords in a pattern of rests and chords in mixed in quintuplets. The next eight measures are similar except that the left hand becomes more sustained, omitting the rests. Mm. 17-20 become more complex rhythmically with quintuplets in both hands, followed by the four-measure bridge in which the left hand returns to the repeated chord idea.

Basically in F minor, Variation 10 is in a completely different style, quite schizophrenic in nature, reminding one of the jagged nature of the music of Boulez. There are glissandos, single-note tremolos, clusters and glissandos played with the palm of the hand, and septuplet groups of displaced sixteenth notes retaining the wide range of the keyboard. There are numerous references to the hexachords through both complete statements and subsets. The second half opens with a series of glissandos outlining a descending bass line, followed by four measures that hint at the tenths that were outlined in the theme. The 0145 tetrachord, a subset of the original form of the hexachord (014589), is used throughout this section of the variation, both in sixteenth-note clusters and in augmentation. The augmentation actually occurs in retrograde-inversion as well (see example 17) with 0145 in the bass line and its inversion in the soprano (0-11-8-7). This is followed by a brief simultaneous statement of two combinatorially-related 6-20s in mm. 17-18 (H¹ in the right hand, H² in the left hand). The four-measure bridge builds in intensity through a series of repeated notes and chords.
Example 17. *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* Variation 10, mm. 15-16.

In Variation 11, Rzewski finds a very remote sense of character similar to that in Variation 5. He gives the indication, "Like fragments of an absent melody -- in strict time," at the beginning. The key signature is given this time so that we will know C minor is implied. Rzewski uses all kinds of twentieth-century effects including an optional slam of the keyboard lid, an optional short vocal cry and whistling while playing. These effects are certainly reminiscent of John Cage and George Crumb. Events and notes are spaced in a manner that seems completely arbitrary, taking away any feeling of rhythm.

Variation 12 completes the rotation through the circle of fifths found in the first two sets. Although many of the variations lack key signatures (Variations 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 12), they have clear tonal centers and have the accidentals within the variation to match the key signature that is implied. Variation 12 acts as a summary variation for the second set following the same structure as Variation 6 by making reference to each half of each variation in two-measure segments. Example 18 shows the beginnings of each of the variations in the second set and the first measure of each of their corresponding segments in Variation 12.


Variations 7-11

Variation 12, mm. 1-2, 5, 9-10, 13, 17-18

Var. 7
Tempo (Lightly, impatiently)

Var. 8
With agility; not too much pedal; crisp

Var. 9
\( \frac{d}{=} 48 \) Evenly

Var. 10
Comodo, \( (\frac{d}{=} 96) \) recklessly

Var. 11
Tempo I' \( (\frac{d}{=} 106) \) Like fragments of an absent melody —
The last four measures again act as a bridge to the next set with chordal, quasi-tonal writing similar to the end of Variation 6.

**SET THREE**

The third set of variations represents a true change in many ways: the compositional style is leaning towards jazz; the tonality remains in D minor for the entire set; and the first of the political songs, *Bandiera Rossa*, is interpolated (*Solidaritätslied* is introduced later in Variation 26). According to Rzewski,

Two songs, aside from the theme itself, appear at various points: the Italian revolutionary song *Bandiera Rossa*, in reference to the Italian people who in the seventies opened their doors to so many refugees from Chilean fascism, and Hanns Eisler’s 1932 Antifascist *Solidaritätslied*, a reminder that parallels to present threats exist in the past and that it is important to learn from them. 39

It is interesting to note that the interpolation of *Bandiera Rossa* occurs simultaneously with a major style change in the music. This style change to jazz could also contain a political message as jazz is more the music of the people and less “high art” music. At the same time, Rzewski introduces the tune from *Bandiera Rossa*, a Marxist song, again an attempt to reach the people.

The fact that Rzewski is heavily influenced by jazz is not surprising. Rzewski was interested in maximum communication with his audience. In his opinion, “Most good jazz

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39 Rzewski. CD jacket notes to *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*
is entirely based on communication." \(^{40}\) As he comments during an interview with Walter Zimmerman,

"How can you be a composer in the United States and not be influenced by jazz? Jazz is perhaps the most powerful music that this country has produced, even though it’s not regarded as such by the official culture. It’s certainly the only kind of music that’s universally respected in the rest of the world as a genuinely American music which is worthy of recognition. \(^{41}\)

Set Three begins with a new version of the theme, structurally very similar to the original theme. For the first half, the left hand is written in simple chordal style with colorful harmonies yielding a chromatically descending bass line. The right hand gives a lilting, embellished version of the theme that sounds highly improvisatory due to freer rhythmic groupings (see Example 19).


\[\text{Var.13} \quad \frac{j}{4} = 72 \text{ or slightly faster}\]

\[\text{PP}\]


As usual, the second half becomes more animated with the left hand now in broken harmony via sextuplet eighth notes and the right hand stating a fuller, more chordal version of the theme. The first interpolation of a political song can be seen toward the end of the second half, at the end of m. 21 with a short cadenza-like hint at *Bandiera Rossa (The Red Flag)*. Example 20 shows the original version of what the *Big Red Songbook* calls “a theme song in both Communist and Socialist Party rallies.”

---

Example 20. *Bandiera Rossa* from *Big Red Songbook*, original version.\textsuperscript{43}

**Bandiera Rossa**

With Spirit

\[\text{A-\text{rise you work-ers, fling to the breez-es The scar-let ban-ner. the scar-let ban-ner. A-\text{rise you work-ers, fling to the breez-es The scar-let ban-ner triumphant-ly.}}\]

\[\text{Wave scar-let ban-ner triumphant-ly. Wave scar-let ban-ner triumphant-ly. Wave scar-let ban-ner triumphant-ly. Wave scar-let ban-ner triumphant-ly.}\]

\[\text{For commun-ism and lib-er-ty.}\]

Arise you workers, your chains of slavery
Will Vanish under the scarlet banner.
Come rally round it, come show your bravery;
The scarlet banner, triumphantly.
Wave scarlet banners triumphantly
Wave scarlet banners triumphantly
Wave scarlet banners triumphantly
For communism and liberty.

\textsuperscript{43}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 77.
The more extended statement of the tune from this song occurs in measure 24, again with a very distant, \textit{ppp} sound, held in the pedal with a strange \textit{ff} chord of an augmented Bb triad over a Bb7 in third inversion (see Example 21).


Interpolation of Bandiera Rossa.


\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example21.png}
\end{center}

Following this somewhat surreal interpolation of the folk song, Variation 14 takes off in a more syncopated, animated way. More interpolated material from Bandiera Rossa is heard in the top voice in mm. 13-20, this time from the B section of the song (see Example 22). In addition to this, Rzewski continues to refer to the cadenza-like statement of the Bandiera Rossa, in diminution and retrograde (see Example 22). The thirty-seconds used throughout Variation 14 to embellish and connect, are actually based on the first four notes of Bandiera Rossa. Rzewski weaves these interpolations into the texture of tonal harmonies and a syncopated motive that trades back and forth between the hands in imitation.

With the marking, "Flexible, like an improvisation," Variation 15 illustrates growing rhythmic freedom with a highly-embellished version of the theme of the third set. The tuplet groupings in the melody range from sixteenths to thirty-seconds to quintuplets, sextuplets, and even groups of thirteen sixteenth notes over two quarters. The left hand introduces a new kind of bass pattern not yet seen in this work, the ground bass. It is a very symmetrical pattern of four rising quarters and four falling quarters, which not only begin by outlining an ascending D minor triad, but also suggest reference to the earlier pattern of tenths between melody and bass. The phrase structure is again 2+2, followed by 4+4. In the B phrase, the left hand combines a rising parallel fifths pattern with a pattern of descending thirds on the downbeat of each measure while the right hand continues to grow freer rhythmically. In the second half of Variation 15, the left hand returns to the ground bass while the right hand refers repeatedly to the half-step/fifth/half-step motive and various versions of the hexachord and its subsets (see Example 23).

![Musical notation image]

The second half also includes two interpolations of the opening four-note motive of *Bandiera Rossa*, once in diminution in m. 17 and once in augmentation in m. 21.

Variation 16 is a virtual hexachord "free-for-all" as Rzewski continues the trend toward greater complexity. All transpositions of the hexachord and many subsets of them wind their way over the entire keyboard in a virtuoso maze of thirty-second notes. Although the variation is marked "same tempo as preceding, with fluctuations," it sounds much faster because of the high degree of diminution. There is only a hint of the ground bass from Variation 15 and two tiny interpolations of the *Bandiera Rossa* motive in m. 10. The entire first half is marked "sempre una corda" even though there are brief crescendi to *mf* and *f*, implying that Rzewski wants to convey a subdued hysteria. In mm. 11-12, the pianist is asked to "gradually release the soft pedal" while making a huge crescendo to *ff* with chords in thirty-second notes. The second half is marked "expansive, with a victorious feeling" and continues the sprawling hexachordal thirty-seconds and includes interpolations of the motive from *Bandiera Rossa* in stretto, with each new entrance entering before the previous one can finish (see Example 24).

Interpolation of opening motive from *Bandiera Rossa*, in stretto.


This gives an incredible sense of climax to a long build-up. In the four-measure bridge, Rzewski gives a brief *pp* respite and an interpolation that is actually indicated with dotted lines, followed by an extremely quick crescendo to *ff* and a return to *pp* just prior to Variation 17.

Variation 17 returns to a quasi-ground bass (seen earlier in Variation 15) with an eight-note pattern spread over four measures. In the next eight measures, there is a repeated pattern framed by ascending thirds (instead of descending thirds as in Variation 15). The right hand bears a resemblance to Variations 5 and 10, each the fifth in their respective sets as is Variation 17. Rzewski marks the beginning, "LH strictly; RH freely, roughly as in space" to denote the duality of a strict, quasi-ground bass pattern in the left hand with a wandering eighth-note pattern in the right hand. The notation of the right hand is also very different. Rzewski writes all eighth notes but stretches them out of their normal proportion to the left hand (see Example 25).


The variation proceeds with phrases that outline hexachords “each like a sudden outburst,” as Rzewski notates. The second half is much the same except that the roles have been reversed. The right hand now has the ground-bass pattern in the upper voice in octave half notes while the left hand proceeds with the free eighth-note outbursts.

The last variation of the third set, Variation 18, follows its role as the summary variation of the set with each two measures again representing half of a variation (see Example 26). As usual, this gives a wonderful sense of build-up as each half of each variation increases in complexity and speed (via the quantity of notes through diminution). The tension releases at the position of the fifth variation of the set, mm. 16-19, and the last four measures, through a return to the outlining tenths and further interpolations of the *Bandiera Rossa* motive, bring the first half of the work to a close on D.
Example 26. *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* Beginnings of each variation in
Set Three with comparison of Variation 18.
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Variations 13-17

Var. 13
\[ \text{\( \frac{d}{4} = 72 \) or slightly faster} \]

Var. 14
A bit faster, optimistically

Var. 15
Flexible, like an improvisation
\[ \text{\( \frac{d}{4} = \text{ca.} 72 \)} \]

Var. 16
Same tempo as preceding, with fluctuations;
much pedal

Var. 17
L. H. strictly \( \frac{d}{4} = 36 \)
R. H. freely, roughly as in space
each phrase like a sudden burst

Variation 18, mm. 1-2, 5, 9, 13, and 17-18

Var. 18
\[ \text{\( \frac{d}{4} = 72 \)} \]
SET FOUR

The fourth set of variations is extremely virtuosic, almost like a set of etudes that concentrates much of its activity on tremolos (Variations 20, 21, and 23) and complex four-against-three rhythmic patterns (Variation 22). This set requires a great deal of physical endurance as the variations represent a non-stop drive of perpetual motion from the beginning of Variation 19, building continuously towards the $ffff$ tremolo in Variation 24. In the first of these, Variation 19, Rzewski changes the texture by way of an energetic study of eighth-note staccato outbursts, which emphasize the half-step/fifth/half-step motive. It is a variation of rhythmic intensity as well as one with a great deal of syncopation and drive. Again the second half intensifies even further with more notes and fewer rests. There is also a mixture of the simplicity of transparent writing (with both hands playing the same pitches, only two and three octaves apart) and more complex, imitative writing.

Variation 20 increases to sixteenth notes, opening with a driving measure-tremolo passage in which the hands alternate sixteenth notes with the right hand outlining the first half of the motto on the off-beats, while the left hand outlines a descending chromatic scale from D to A. The inversion follows in m. 3 with the left hand outlining the tune and the right hand descending the chromatic line. Beginning in m. 5, the sixteenths become much less static by using the half-step/fifth/half-step motive in alternating directions (descending two beats, ascending two beats). Although it is a single line of sixteenths that moves back and forth between the hands, the first two sixteenths of each measure outline the tenths seen several times before in connection to the B phrase of the theme. This pattern proceeds for four measures before being inverted both in direction of movement and the order of the hands used to play it. In the second half, Rzewski modifies the one-line measured tremolo for purposes of intensification by using alternating octaves. This
time, the right hand outlines the second half of the motto on the off-beats while the left hand descends and ascends the chromatic line from D to A and back to D. As in the first half, the parts are inverted for two measures. After the return of the tenths and the half-step/fifth/half-step motive, the four-measure bridge concludes the variation with rapid alternating octaves outlining the second half of the theme. The dynamics throughout this variation cover the spectrum from *ff* passages to rapid crescendi and diminuendi.

Variation 21 continues the intensification within the set with the marking "Relentless, uncompromising." Both hands are locked in a battle of simultaneous sixteenth-note sextuplets which alternate repeated D with a chromatic line in a figure that reminds one a little of Beethoven. They again invert after two measures. The next four measures outline the tenths and continue the development of the half-step/fifth/half-step motive in arpeggiated fashion. Mm. 13-14 represent the only change in texture for this variation. There are four parts, including a two-voiced trill first heard three octaves apart and then one octave apart as the voices are inverted.

In variation 22, Rzewski makes obvious reference to Variation 19 by developing the same half-step/fifth/half-step motive, this time in diminution, alternating with rests. The first measure of Variation 22 is actually the inversion of the first measure of Variation 19. Mm. 5-12 divide into two four-measure units via inversion and follow the hexachord and its transpositions very closely (see Example 27).
Example 27. *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* Variation 22, mm. 5-12.

In mm. 5-12, both hands present the same form of the hexachord in each measure. The two hexachords used are $H^2$ (mm. 5 and 7) and $H^6$ (mm. 6 and 8), which are related combinatorially, completing an aggregate every two measures. In mm. 9-10, each hand
presents a different version with the two in each hand being combinatorially related: RH: $H^2$ and $H^0$; LH: $H^3$ and $H^1$. Mm. 11-12 state the same hexachord in both hands, becoming fragmented in measure 12. Rhythmically and contrapuntally speaking, mm. 9-12 mirror mm. 5-8 as the right-hand eighths and left-hand sixteenths exchange every four measures.

Another interesting point is the linear progression seen on the downbeats of mm. 5-8 in the right hand (G-A-B-C#, a subset of the whole tone scale), and the downbeats in the left hand in mm. 9-12 (G-F-E-D). The two combine to form a D melodic minor scale. The fact that so much of this linear progression is composed of whole tones could be making reference to the combinatorial relation of each pair of hexachord transpositions, $H^0 - H^2$ and $H^1 - H^3$, being a whole step apart.

Continuing the intensification through this fourth set of variations is Variation 23, marked to be played "As fast as possible, with some rubato." This variation refers strongly to Variation 20, with the same measured-tremolo effect of alternating hands and repeated notes, outlining the tune in mm. 1-4. In the next four measures, the quasi-tremolo eighth notes begin to use the hexachord and its transpositions, while in mm. 9-12, each hand alternates stating a complete hexachord in alternating directions. The second half adds octaves for thickness and builds in intensity towards Variation 24 with groups of fifteen eighth notes, marked with the pedal to be held down for the last four measures.

Variation 24, the summary variation of set four, summarizes the previous five variations in the set, but this time a little more freely than in previous summaries (see Example 28). He does not use the tremolos from the beginnings of Variations 20 and 23 in his summary, but refers instead to outlines of the hexachord found later in the variation. The pattern of intensification is retained until the alarm is sounded by a B-flat tremolo with both hands accelerating and making a crescendo to $fmmm$, then slowing down and making a
diminuendo to pppp, the whole process lasting fifteen to twenty seconds. The last eight measures are fragmented and slow-moving with both chordal and linear writing leading to the fifth set.

Example 28. The People United Will Never Be Defeated! Portions of each variation in Set Four with comparison to Variation 24.


**Variation 19, mm. 1-2; 20, m. 5; 21, m. 5; 22, m. 1; 23, m. 9**

**Variation 24, mm. 1, 5, 9, 13, and 21**
SET FIVE

The fifth set of variations begins a new section of the work in several respects. In terms of the tonal scheme, this set returns to the progression through the circle of fifths seen in sets one and two. For the first time in the piece, the variations are longer than twenty-four measures. There is also more of a sense of freedom in these variations aided by the inclusion of several cadenzas. Variation 25 opens with a series of chords played staccato using the pedal to catch the resonance as in Variation 5. Written in 3/4, it is one of the very few times in the piece that Rzewski writes in triple meter (Variation 19 = 12/8 or 3/2). A different atmosphere takes over in m. 7 with legato chords becoming an expressive melodic line by m. 15. The tune is implied in the alto voice in mm. 29-32 before departing into a sequence of fourths skipping wildly around the keyboard over distant-sounding harmonies in the left hand that are reminiscent of Wagner.
Variation 26 opens with eight measures of marchlike staccato chords “in a militant manner,” separated by single line statements of 6-20. This sets the marchlike mood for Rzewski’s arrangement of Eisler’s *Solidaritätslied* (see Example 29 for the original version), beginning with the B section in mm. 9-20.

Forward! and let's remember, what our strength always was and shall be. In famine or in plenty, forward! and remember: it's solidarity! Peoples of this earth, rise up now for this earth is now your due:

It shall be the great provider. And it shall provide for you. Forward! And ask the question: What our strength concretely is worth. In famine and in plenty:

Whose tomorrow is tomorrow and whose earth is the earth?

---

Rzewski’s interpolation using the A section of the song appears in the majority of this variation, beginning in m. 21, transposed to D minor, up a fifth from the original version (see Example 30).

Example 30. The People United Will Never Be Defeated! Variation 26, mm. 21-24. Interpolation of Solidaritätslied.

While the right hand has the tune, the left hand is harmonizing it with 6-20s according to the hexachord transposition that contains the melody notes (see Example 30). All four transpositions are heard every two measures. In addition, the descending chromatic inner voice, at the top of each hexachord, provides interplay between the right hand and the bass line represented by the last note of one measure and the first note of the next. Rzewski
continues the descending chromatic bass line, this time in more obvious half notes, in mm. 29-35, only interrupting the descent once in m. 32 with a quick reference to 6-20 subsets.

Variation 26 is one of the clearest examples of how Rzewski juxtaposes tonal and atonal practices. The tune from *Solidaritätslied* is obviously tonal and implies certain harmonies, most importantly at this point in the set, the oscillation between D minor and A minor. However, Rzewski harmonizes repeatedly with 6-20s. The second time the tune is heard, in mm. 37-52, the texture is thicker with both hands exchanging the tune and the 6-20s. Rzewski often uses the form of the hexachord that contains the root-position triad of the key he is implying. For example, in m. 36, he finishes the first statement of the tune in A minor, and follows it with $H^0$ (C-Db-E-F-G#-A), which contains an A minor triad. He uses the hexachords in this manner throughout the piece to point to certain tonalities. Of the four possible transpositions, three of them contain the i, iv and v triads that are vital to D minor: D-F-A ($H^1$), G-Bb-D ($H^2$) and A-C-E ($H^0$). It is also possible to find i, iv and v in A minor with the hexachords: A-C-E ($H^0$), D-F-A ($H^1$) and E-G-B ($H^3$) (see Example 31).

He also uses other devices that we have seen throughout the work. For example, in the middle of the consequent phrase of the tune, in m. 43, he foreshadows the end of the song in the alto voice, while the tune continues in the soprano. In addition, he uses the same motive in the last two measures of the variation, in diminution (see Example 31).

The first sixteen measures of Variation 27 are divided into two groups of eight, with the hands switching parts in the second phrase. Both the wandering melody and the descending chromatic bass line use hexachords, with the left hand being of particular interest as it states the half-step/fifth/half-step motive repeatedly. Incidentally, Rzewski begins with $H^3$, which includes the E minor triad, evidence of the continuing progression through the circle of fifths seen in sets five and six.

The atmosphere changes after the first seventeen measures as Rzewski inserts a cadenza with the marking, "*quasi una cadenza;* repetitions (or omissions) of figures may be varied ad lib." This is the first opportunity the performer has had to improvise, at least in terms of deciding how many repetitions to play (this foreshadows a later possibility for improvisation). The next section is written in the minimalist style of Philip Glass or Steve Reich with repetitive, motoric rhythms and patterns that change slowly over a long period of time. There are quick changes of meter including duple, triple and irregular time signatures such as 7/8, 11/8 and 18/8. There is also a hint at the *Bandiera Rossa* motive at the end of the free section. After the long minimalist section that culminates with "fierce" chords, Rzewski returns to the opening material of the wandering hexachord
melody and harmony before modulating to B minor for a driving minimalist section written in 21/8 meter (divided 6+5+6+5).

Variation 28 begins by making obvious reference to Variation 26, with a loose interpretation of the tune from *Solidaritätslied*. The second half of the variation is less march-like and more rhapsodic as the downbeats of each measure outline the main notes of Rzewski's theme. It is an extremely tonal variation with descending chromatic whole notes in the top voice over wavelike, triplet arpeggios that wind through both hands (this section is reminiscent of Bach's *Prelude in C Major, WTC I*). There is a return to the minimalist style at the end of the variation before the modulation to F# Minor for the next variation.

Although Variation 29 is very short in comparison to the others in the set (only twenty-eight measures long), the dancelike character is abruptly different with a playful, irregular meter that changes rapidly. As in all the variations that imply minimalism, Variations 27-29, there is no transition or bridge. Therefore the summary variation starts suddenly with violent, ff grace notes six octaves apart.

Variation 30, the summary variation of set five, is the longest of the set, seventy-two measures long. There are four measures for each half of a variation, instead of the usual two. Plus, there are lengthy minimalist sections included, making reference to the extended Variation 27, this time in B-flat minor instead of B minor. Example 32 shows the beginnings of each of the variations in Set Five in comparison to their summaries in Variation 30.

Variation 25, mm. 1-2; 26, m. 21;
27, mm. 1-2; 28, mm. 1-2;
29, mm. 1-2

Variation 30, mm. 1, 9, 17, 45, and 65
SET SIX

The sixth set recapitulates the previous five sets in an ingenious manner. Each variation summarizes the other variations from each set in the same position. For example, Variation 31, in G-sharp minor, includes two measures from each half of Variations 1, 7, 13, 19 and 25. The last four measures of the 24-measure variation summarize the summary of the previous twenty measures by roughly representing each half of a variation in two beats (Variations 1, 7, 13 and 19).

Variation 32, in E-flat minor, proceeds in the same manner, with each two measures representing half of a variation (2, 8, 14, 20 and 26). The last four measures are a diminution of this process, with two beats per variation. There is even a reference to the Bandiera Rossa motive which is heard in the cadenza just before Variation 14, as well as interpolated within the variation itself.

Variations 33-35 continue this recursive process by summarizing the third, fourth and fifth variations, from each set. With this compositional procedure, the characteristics of each of the variations in a certain position (first, second, etc.) within each set of six become more obvious. In this manner, the properties and characteristics of each of the six stages of Rzewski’s original improvisational experiment from Second Structure become
very clear. Example 33 shows the characteristics from each stage of the experiment as they are displayed in the summary set.

Example 33. The People United Will Never Be Defeated! Characteristics from improvisational experiment with Musica Elettronica Viva.

Stage 1
Points of isolation, no temporal relationship, pitches experienced in and for themselves.

33 a.
Variation 31 (summary variation for the first in each set), mm. 1-4.


d = 106

Stage 2
Echoed repetition, in which a relationship is established, creating pulse and rhythm. Previous material is recalled.

33 b.
Variation 32 (summary variation for the second in each set), mm. 1-4.
Stage 3. Elements of melody, legato, lyrical, expressive qualities.

33 c. Variation 33 (summary variation for the third in each set), mm. 1-4.

Stage 4. Overlapping, contrapuntal material, complexity with conflicting sounds.

33 d. Variation 34 (summary variation for the fourth in each set), mm. 1-4.
Stage 5  Sudden changes, abrupt introduction of unrelated material, chords, simultaneous attacks.

33 e.  Variation 35 (summary variation for the fifth in each set), mm. 1-7.

Stage 6  Recapitulation, flash-back idea, dimension of unified time, where all these elements co-exist.

33 f.  Variation 36 (summary variation for the summary variation in each set), mm. 1-6.
In the sixth position of the sixth set, Variation 36, Rzewski undertook the greatest feat of the entire piece—summarizing the summary variations in each set (Variations 6, 12, 18, 24 and 30) as can be seen in Example 34.

Example 34. *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* Beginnings of Variations 1–4 as compared with their summaries in Variation 36, mm. 1–3.
By condensing the elements in this manner, Rzewski achieves an incredible compactness in the texture that gives a frantic summary of the entire piece. There are many places in the work where he uses structure and form to continue the forward momentum and drive of the piece, but Variation 36 carries this one step further. He follows the climax with an optional improvisation, "lasting anywhere up to five minutes or so." In a way, this build-up resembles the orchestra’s crescendo to the I 6/4 chord in first-movement concerto form and Rzewski’s optional improvisation appears as the soloist’s cadenza. The cadenza leads into the final statement of the theme.

Rzewski’s formal structure concludes with a sixty-six measure recapitulation of the theme. Obviously making constant reference to the number six, he states the twenty-four measure theme, followed by an eight-measure bridge. A varied version of the theme returns for twenty-four measures, followed by a four-measure bridge, concluding with the motto, expanded to six measures.

In summary, Rzewski’s overall tonal plan serves to divide the work into three large sections: the first two sets of variations rotate through the circle of fifths (some more obviously in a key than others); the third and fourth sets remain in D minor, forming the middle part; and the fifth and sixth sets return to the earlier progression through the circle of fifths, with the last statements of the theme returning to D minor. It is a very unusual tonal plan in comparison to standard forms such as sonata-allegro form, which has the more stable tonal sections as outer sections and the unstable area in the middle. In Rzewski’s plan, the outer sections are tonally restless while the middle section is stable,
remaining in D Minor. Table 3 shows the length of each variation, the tonal plan of the work, and where interpolations occur.

Table 3. Length of Variations, Overall Tonal Plan (*indicates lack of key signature) and Use of Interpolations (BR=Bandiera Rossa; SL=Solidaritätslied).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIATION</th>
<th>KEY</th>
<th>LENGTH (mm.)</th>
<th>INTERPOLATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SET ONE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dm</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Am</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Em*</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bm*</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F#m*</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>C#m*</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SET TWO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>G#m*</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>D#m*</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bbm</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Fm*</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Cm</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Gm*</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>SET THREE</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Dm</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>BR, m. 24</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Dm</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>BR, mm. 13-20 +</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>diminutions throughout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Dm</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>BR motive, mm. 17, 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Dm</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>BR motive, mm. 18-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Dm</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Dm</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>BR motive, mm. 7-8, 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SET FOUR</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Dm</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Dm</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Dm</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Am*</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Em*</td>
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<td>36</td>
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Theme  | Dm  | 66  |

With _The People United_, Rzewski has provided us with a compositional and technical tour-de-force. Not only is its tonal plan different, but his structural design is truly unique. To my knowledge, there is no other piece in the piano repertoire which uses such a complex structure of recapitulation. The idea of recapitulating every facet of the piece through sets with individual summary variations that are later summarized in the final variation is a spectacular unifying device. In this manner, Rzewski uses his formal musical plan to support his overall message of unity implied in the choice of the song for a theme, _The People United Will Never Be Defeated!_

One of the strongest points to Rzewski’s credit is that he can achieve this sense of unity using a wide compendium of styles over such a vast span of performance time. Through the constant ebb and flow of intensity, the listener’s interest is sustained throughout the work, even on first hearing when many of the structural details are overlooked. Another intriguing aspect of the piece, the inclusion of the borrowed material
in the form of political songs, only serves to strengthen the purpose of the work with the statement Rzewski wants to make about the Chilean spirit during the Allende regime.

To the performer, the work is most assuredly a gift. After repeated playings and endless examination of the score, the pianist is rewarded with a wealth of detail, all part of a unified whole. Even with the work's remarkable technical difficulty, the potential for continuous discovery of its inner-workings provides constant motivation to forge ahead in the process of learning the work, thereby guaranteeing future study and performance by generations to come.
CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A. Rzewski’s Piano Output Overall

Partially because he is a pianist, the majority of Rzewski’s output is for the piano. As Joshua Kosman states,

He’s a pianist of remarkable virtuosity, combining formidable technique, a commanding tone, and pinpoint textural clarity. He improvises at the keyboard with uncommon fluency—pursuing simple material through a dizzying welter of key changes, thematic development, and ornamentation—and he spins those improvisations into pyrotechnic pieces, often extravagant sets of variations based on straightforward popular themes.⁴⁵

He is one of the few virtuoso pianist-composers in the twentieth century, appearing, in this respect, to fit more aptly into the tradition of the nineteenth century with its abundance of pianist-composers including Chopin, Liszt, and Anton Rubinstein.

What’s consistently striking about Rzewski’s best music is the extent to which it adopts the cardinal virtues of 19th-century Romanticism within a thoroughly contemporary context. It’s music that is rhetorically direct and unabashed in its appeal to a listener’s emotions without indulging in the kind of sentimentality and gooey nostalgia that characterizes much of the so-called ‘New Romanticism.’⁴⁶


⁴⁶Ibid., p. 33.
What makes Rzewski undoubtedly a composer of the twentieth century is his extraordinary eclectic ability to juxtapose many different styles into a unified whole. However, this music, especially *The People United*, is different from the eclecticism of George Rochberg, Peter Maxwell Davies or even William Bolcom. According to Tom Johnson, "Rzewski never seems to be quoting or copying, and it is absolutely clear that he is not satirizing. Everything comes out of that little tune, and out of the composer's own variation techniques. The stylistic connotations of various sections seem almost coincidental."47

A brief look at some of Rzewski’s other piano compositions will place *The People United* in context with his other works and provide a more complete picture of his compositional style (see List of Piano Works). In addition to many unpublished works, there are four major published works for piano from the 1970s: *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* (1975), *Four Pieces* (1977), *Squares* (1978) and *North American Ballads* (1978). However, the most important work in relation to *The People United* is a work that has never been published, *No Place To Go But Around* (1974). A theme with eight variations, the work was inspired by the English composer Cornelius Cardew’s *Thalmann Variations* for piano, dating from the same year. Much like Rzewski’s, Cardew’s works reflect the influences of the music of Stockhausen and Cage, as well as his interest in socialism. While Cardew’s work is written in G minor, the theme is a slow,

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chromatic melody, which uses all twelve tones in extreme octave displacement, a technique Rzewski also used in *The People United*. There is a constant bass line, heard in the first variation, that is present and audible during the entire work, as the variations gradually gain speed and intensity.

Written just one year prior to *The People United*, *No Place To Go But Around* was considered by Rzewski to be a trial run for the later work, according to Ronald Lewis\(^{48}\). One of the many similarities between the two works is the inclusion of improvisation. In both works, the improvisation occurs at the height of rhythmic activity. In Rzewski's words, "I try to introduce some kind of improvisational element into a written composition because I feel it's important to bring these traditions [performing written music and improvising] together."\(^{49}\) In *No Place To Go But Around*, Rzewski provides the performer with a set of pitches on which to improvise (see Example 35) and requests that the performer "introduce known melodies which might be derived from such a scale."

\(^{48}\) Lewis, "The Solo Piano Music of Frederic Rzewski." p. 44.

\(^{49}\) Quoted in Tan, "Rzewski fuses jazz with classical music," p. 16.

In Rzewski's own recording of the work (Finnadar SR-9011), he improvises on the opening of the Italian militant song, *Bandiera Rossa*, which is interpolated in the work. Howard Pollack offers the following review of Rzewski's improvisation in *Harvard Composers*.

The middle, improvisatory section warrants special consideration. As played by Rzewski on a recording for Finnadar, it represented a stunning feat of technical virtuosity and musical ingenuity. The composer subjected bits from the preceding variations to erratic tonal and rhythmic twists with demonic, Lisztian flair. Periodically, in utter contrast, fragments and echoes of the socialist anthem, *Bandiera Rossa*, were heard in noble, Schubertian fashion, often modulating by a third. In Rzewski's other piano works, similar allowance was made for improvisation, perhaps not quite on this scale, but of considerable weight nonetheless. Here the avant-garde and neoclassical met on equal footing: such improvisation reflected the composer's Cagean orientation, but at the same time, they looked back to improvisatory traditions represented by Mozart and Chopin.\(^{50}\)

Other similarities between the two works include the influence of minimalism and a type of chromaticism that includes the use of certain tonal features as a basis for

\(^{50}\)Pollack, *Harvard Composers*, 382-83.
modulation as well as harmonic and melodic material. The most prominent shared feature in these two works can be seen in Example 36—a pair of fifths a minor second apart.

Example 36. Common sonorities in *No Place To Go But Around* and *The People United Will Never Be Defeated*.

There are other characteristics of this sonority that lend themselves to ease in modulation. The sonority is essentially a major-major seventh chord (Ab-C-Eb-G), giving both works great potential for jazz sounds. As Gerald H. Groemer points out, when spaced as two fifths a half-step apart, the chord slides easily into several modulatory tonal sonorities, depending on the chromatic resolution of its voices. Examples of this movement are shown in Example 37.


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Four Pieces for Piano (1977)\textsuperscript{52} was written after The People United, again dedicated to Ursula Oppens and premiered by her in Avery Fisher Hall. There is no preconceived program for this work, and no inclusion of political songs or other interpolations. The structure of the work resembles that of a four-movement sonata with a prelude-like first movement; a second movement that sounds like a scherzo; a slower, more contemplative third movement; and a repetitive fourth movement similar to a toccata. While all four movements are based on the same theme, the work, as a whole, is much freer than The People United, with the atmosphere of a fantasy.

Rzewski's next work for piano, Squares (1978), was written for and commissioned by a champion of twentieth-century music, Paul Jacobs (1930-83). Originally, Jacobs asked Rzewski to write the piece to be included on a recording Jacobs was planning that also included Aaron Copland's Four Piano Blues and William Bolcolm's Three Ghost Rags. Obviously intending to record American works influenced by popular idioms, Jacobs finally used Rzewski's next work, North American Ballads, on his recording, because it was much better suited to his overall theme of interpolated popular songs in American compositions.

Squares was based on a series of paintings, Homage to the Square (1949), by the American artist, Josef Albers. The piece is structurally designed to match the form of the paintings. There are four short pieces, each corresponding to the side of a square. Within each piece there is also the idea of equality with eight sections divided into eight parts. Within this formal structure, Rzewski wrote four very different pieces: "Squall," in a style that resembles the disjunct, linear style of Schoenberg with blatant dissonances and wide variety of dynamics; "Hyenas," based on a Pablo Neruda poem and the interval of a whole step, using the entire range of the keyboard; "Noctambule," inspired by insect

sounds, using predominantly seconds, sevenths and ninths; and "Sideshow," referring to the war in Vietnam and Cambodia with irregular meter and jazzlike rhythms.

*North American Ballads* (1979) consists of four sets of variations based on songs related to the American labor movement. There are many influences for this work including a work by Christian Wolff, *Bread and Roses*, based on a traditional song. Rzewski had also become interested in Gestalt psychology in connection with human perception. These ideas on perception led to Rzewski’s fragmented, disjunct style of writing that is often seen when he bases a work on folk songs.

The basic improvisational technique is one that Ives seems to have worked a great deal with, which is to take well-known traditional songs, chop them up into little pieces and to let bits of them be heard in various tonalities. It’s a very interesting thing that Ives does, which seems to be very relevant to today, somehow. It’s a technique which I don’t completely understand, but I’m interested in it. For some reason, a traditional tune like that can be dealt with in a way which, say, a 12-tone row cannot. Even if you don’t know the tune, if it comes from a traditional context, it’s like an old friend, a familiar face, it has a kind of timeless quality. You can hear a little bit of it, the beginning or the end and you recognize it. It has a strong identity which a 12-tone row does not have. Bergson, the French philosopher, pointed out that melodies are like faces. You can hear just a bit of them, and if you know the tune you recognize it, just as you recognize a face. And therefore, he says, melodies exist outside of time. This timeless quality makes it possible to subject the melody to a variety of operations, sometimes some extremely distorting operations, still maintaining the identity of the original melody.  

There are several works for the piano written in the last ten years. Another set of variations composed for Ursula Oppens in 1988 is *Mayn Yingle*. It is based on a

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Yiddish ballad in which a father is distressed about his long work days, which prevent him from spending more time with his son. An emotional work, the piece reflects the melancholy mood of the ballad through its concentration on minor harmonies and a cloud of pianistic virtuosity. This is another work in which Rzewski gives the performer the opportunity to improvise a cadenza, as he does in *The People United*. This could prove to be a very interesting option as pianists perform these works in the future. Improvisation is definitely not a skill practiced by most conservatory-trained pianists of modern times, but there seems to be some movement back to the practice of improvising cadenzas as, for example, in performance of Mozart concertos by Robert Levin. Ursula Oppens gives her reaction to Rzewski’s inclusion of passages of improvisation in the following statement.

> When I started working on Frederic’s music, it was a revelation to me that a person who had never improvised before might actually start to do it. I talked to friends who were jazz musicians, like Anthony Davis, and they taught me ways to practice it, because I had absolutely no idea how to practice things that were not written down. Now this was something I should have known. It made me feel that I had grown up in a misrepresented tradition, because improvisation was part of the classical tradition until about five minutes ago, really.\(^{55}\)

> “The Turtle and the Crane” (1988) was inspired by a Japanese rock garden. It is an understated piece which has long section of repeated notes. Another recent work, *Ludes* (1991), is a less virtuosic collection of twenty-four short character pieces, either preludes, postludes or interludes. The largest piano composition to be written by Rzewski

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\(^{55}\)Quoted in Kosman, “Improvising with a Pencil,” 37.
in the past ten years is a *Piano Sonata* (1991), a thirty-minute work in three movements. The first movement is built on a strange combination of six melodies: “Ring Around the Rosy,” “Santa Claus is Coming to Town,” “L’Homme armé,” “When Johnny Comes Marching Home,” “Give Peace a Chance” by John Lennon and “Three Blind Mice.” The formal structure of the movement reflects the craziness of the combination of tunes; it consists of a number of sections, each half as long as its predecessor. The work eventually “collapses in on itself in a kind of musical black hole.”\(^{56}\) The second movement is a free fantasy on “Taps,” while the third movement is a set of variations on “L’Homme armé,” the French song from the fifteenth century, borrowed many times by Renaissance composers. Commenting on his choice of melodies for this work, Rzewski says he was attempting “to capture the fluency and immediacy of his improvisations in a finished score, and he attributes the presence of some of those ‘silly tunes’ to the workings of his unfettered imagination.”\(^{57}\) Rzewski offers the following explanation in support of his method:

Stravinsky once remarked that composition was simply improvising with a pencil, and I don’t think people have understood that he really meant what he said. Lately, I’ve been trying to take that remark to heart, and to get into a state of mind where I can write off the top of my head, just slapping down ideas on paper as they appear. . . . There’s a kind of mental sleight of hand at work that, when it succeeds, it lets uncensored ideas evade the repressive filter that normally prevents these things from expressing themselves. \(^{58}\)

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\(^{56}\) *Ibid.*. p. 36.

\(^{57}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{58}\) *Ibid.*
In the context of Rzewski’s entire piano output, *The People United* clearly stands out as his most important work. His longest, most complex piece with an ingenious formal and tonal plan, *The People United* covers an enormous range of styles from Baroque to twentieth-century. The next section will place Rzewski’s masterpiece in the context of twentieth-century music in general.

**B. Twentieth-Century Music**

When examined in perspective with the piano literature of the twentieth-century, Rzewski’s work definitely stands out as a masterpiece. There are other wonderful sets of variations for piano from the twentieth century\(^{59}\): Reger’s *Variations and Fugue on a Theme of J. S. Bach, Op. 81* (1904), a work that continues much of the tradition of the variations of Brahms, with an even stronger influence from the Baroque period; Copland’s *Piano Variations* (1930), based completely on a four-note motive that is treated in a manner similar to the serial techniques of Schoenberg; and Rachmaninoff’s *Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op. 42* (1931) and the *Rhapsody, Op. 43* for piano and orchestra (1934), pieces written in the composer’s late-Romantic style. Others include Webern’s *Piano Variations, Op. 27* (1936), a work written in three movements (the third of which is the only reference to variation form) in the composer’s sparsely-notated language of octave displacement; Dutilleux’s *Choral et Variations* from his *Sonate* (1947), a virtuoso

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piece (also in the position of the third movement) with a great deal of color, rhythmic excitement and figuration based on a five-note choral-like theme; and Berio's *Cinque Variazioni* (1953, revised 1966), in which Dallapiccola is quoted. Later sets include Wuorinen's *Piano Variations* (1963), another colorful, virtuoso work written in Babbitt's serial style, but with more of a sense of drama; Rochberg's *Partita Variations* (1976), a piece that freely juxtaposes styles in an overall tonal language; and Crumb's *Gnomic Variations* (1981), an extremely difficult work based on a two-note idea, a tritone, that is developed throughout the eighteen variations, each becoming more extended than the last, with events following in very close succession, unlike the more spacious writing in his two sets of *Makrokosmos*.

In comparison, none of these other sets of keyboard variations is as massive as *The People United* in terms of length, formal structure and organization. None is as comprehensive in the use of styles. The only keyboard variation sets that are at all comparable are Rochberg's *Partita Variations* (1976) and Crumb's *Gnomic Variations* (1981). Rochberg's highly eclectic set, written very close to the time of *The People United*, is in thirteen continuous sections, juxtaposing tonality and atonality as well as making large use of contrapuntal styles. Crumb's eighteen-minute set of variations, written in 1981, is not only highly-organized, as is Rzewski's set, but is also structured in three groups of six, similar to Rzewski's grouping in sets of six. According to Maurice Hinson, the first set is closely related to the theme and explores rhythmic and harmonic

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possibilities. The second set is comparable to the slow movement of the work, more reflective in character, followed by a brilliant ending in the third set.

In the context of twentieth-century music as a whole, Rzewski’s works seem to fit in varying degrees into the body of works from the pluralistic post-modern era of the mid-1970s. Salzman eloquently discusses this niche in his book on twentieth-century music.

Co-existent with minimalist, post-minimalist, and new-age music were, of course, other types of American music, some conceived along more ‘traditional’ lines, some pursuing a post-Cageian path of experimentalism, some moving into technological no-man’s lands. No one could lump all these under such a term as ‘New Romanticism.’ But a great deal of this otherwise variegated and widely differentiated music shared one aspect: accessibility. The anti-modernist tendencies of post-modernism were expressed in various ways, but almost all of them shared a new warmth, emotionality, revival of traditional tonal harmony, and -- especially--accessibility. It was as if, in an age of technological revolution, of social and racial unrest, of dire poverty amid unprecedented plenty, of the threat to all of nuclear annihilation, artists were reaching out to audiences rather than communing only with themselves, secure in the certainty that posterity would understand their message. Thus a major trend of the period might be termed ‘the new accessibility.’

Rzewski has expressed his concerns for the audience (recall the earlier discussion) in his views on humanist realism. He also states that, by making music accessible, one is not limited to non-avant-garde techniques. This thinking paves the way for his set of variations, which makes use of a wide variety of twentieth-century styles.

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The People United provokes associations with a number of other composers, many of whom are twentieth-century composers: Boulez, in the jagged nature of Variation 10 (recall the discussion in Chapter Two); Cage, in the optional use of avant-garde techniques such as whistling, shouting and slamming the lid of the keyboard in Variation 11; Copland and Webern, in the use of octave displacement, especially in Variation 1; the jazz styles of Variation 13; Beethoven, in the relentless drive of Variation 21; Wagner, in the chromatic harmony of Variation 25; and Philip Glass, in the minimalistic Variation 27.

C. Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms

In addition to its associations with the styles of composers from the twentieth century, there are numerous connections between The People United and the variation tradition of the past. With its extensive formal plan, Rzewski’s set has been compared to the master plan of Bach’s Goldberg Variations, the major set of variations from the Baroque period. The People United is a summary of twentieth-century techniques, much in the same way the Bach Goldberg Variations, the Beethoven Diabelli Variations, and the Brahms Paganini Variations were the representative sets from their individual epochs.

One of the many similarities between these works can be seen upon closer examination of the themes chosen by each composer: Bach uses an aria, a typically Baroque theme, Beethoven uses a superficial commercial theme, Brahms uses one of the most well-known works of nineteenth-century virtuoso art music, and Rzewski uses a

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composed protest song. For each composer, the choice of theme reflects aspects of the musical and social world that the composer inhabits.

Each of these works also reflects the time of composition. Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*, composed very late in his output, is certainly viewed as its era’s most sophisticated set of bass-structured variations: it includes many section representative of the time: “dance-like pieces (nos. 4, 19), inventions (nos. 1, 22), concerto movements (nos. 13, 25) a trio sonata movement (no. 2), fughetta (no. 10), overture (no. 16), toccata (no. 29) and quodlibet (no. 30)—a synthesis of Italian, French and German forms as well as contrapuntal and concertante textures.”

Beethoven’s *Diabelli Variations Op. 120* are also late in his compositional opus, his final set of variations not composed as a part of another work (sonata, symphony, etc.). The set is based on a rather uninspiring waltz by music publisher and composer Antonio Diabelli. It was Diabelli’s intent to put together a patriotic compilation of variations from the various composers of the day. The majority of the variations that Diabelli received (after his request for each composer to write one variation) maintained the superficial atmosphere of the theme. Beethoven chose not to submit the requested single variation on such a whimsical theme, but rather composed a long, very serious set of variations that exemplify his characteristic development of thematic motives. In other words, he elected not to build the set of variations on the melody as a unit, but on the individual motives found within it.

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Brahms' two books of *Paganini Variations* were written relatively early in his life, at age 29-30, and reflect the nineteenth-century tradition of virtuosity with their etude-like, almost pedagogical flavor. Many composers in Brahms' time used this theme, Paganini's *Caprice for Violin Op. 1, No. 24*, for it was a true showpiece of contemporary technical virtuosity.

Rzewski's set of variations, written fairly early in his series of piano works, reflects the time of its composition on many different levels: it was based on a theme in support of the Chilean people who had resisted the overthrow of Allende's government in the early 1970s, therefore connecting it with other music being written on political subjects at the time (recall the discussion on Cardew and Wolff); it was written as a commission for the American bicentennial celebration; it interpolated two political songs, alluring it with other examples of quotation music (recall the discussion on quotation music); and it was highly eclectic, using many different styles in a slightly different manner from George Rochberg but suggesting the music of the New Romanticism just the same.

Another similarity is the interpolation of folk songs or other borrowed material. The fact that the *Aria* from the *Goldberg Variations* is not Bach's is no secret, but the thirtieth variation, a *quodlibet*, is more of a surprise. The definition of *quodlibet* ("a composition in which well-known tunes or folk melodies are presented in a polyphonic setting so that different melodies sound simultaneously or in close succession")

the *Harvard Brief Dictionary of Music* cites this variation from Bach’s work as an example. The folk songs, *Ich bin so lang nicht bei dir g’west* (Long have I been away from thee) and *Kraut und Ruben haben mich vertrieben* (Cabbage and turnips have driven me away) are artfully combined in the opening measures of Variation 30. In Variation 22 of the Beethoven *Diabelli Variations*, there is a parody of Mozart, in which “*Notte e giorno faticar,*” from *Don Giovanni*, is used. Only Brahms’ *Paganini Variations* do not contain any interpolated material, they are based on the *Caprice for Violin Op. 1, No. 24* by Paganini. Rzewski’s set of variations interpolates two political songs, *Bandiera Rossa* and Eisler’s *Solidaritätslied*.

Each of these landmark sets of variations is at least forty-five minutes in length, presenting an enormous task for both the composer and the performer. Each set is well-respected as possessing vast technical and musical difficulties: Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* pushed virtuosity to its limits in the Baroque period; Beethoven’s *Diabelli Variations* are perhaps most difficult in a musical sense, in holding the musical thread from beginning to end; and Brahms’ *Paganini Variations* represent the culmination of nineteenth-century studies in virtuosic playing. All three sets of variations are fiendishly difficult for the pianist, but Brahms’ set, labelled *Studies for the Piano* are so difficult, they could be seen as a parody of the Paganini-Liszt tradition of virtuosity. The Rzewski variations are also extraordinarily difficult on a technical level, with many passages of running thirty-second note arpeggios which use the entire range of the keyboard while outlining a reference to the original tune. These figurations are not normal triadic arpeggios, but rather broken versions of the motive discussed earlier (see Example 36),
two fifths separated by a half-step. There are also long, relentless passages of high-intensity playing such as in the fourth set (Variations 19-24) that tend to sound like a series of etudes. This ties the work to Brahms' *Paganini Variations* that are often viewed as two sets of etudes. Other challenges include some of the modern devices that classically-trained pianists may not be accustomed to: whistling while playing (Variations 11, 12 and 36), singing or giving “a short cry” while playing, as Rzewski requests, (Variations 11, 12 and 36), quickly playing chords and catching the resonance in the pedal (Variation 25), and the optional improvisation in Variation 36 that “may last anywhere up to 5 minutes or so,” according to Rzewski’s request. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the piece is dealing with the amount of rapid change Rzewski incorporates into his writing. As in much of Beethoven’s music, there are sudden contrasts in dynamics throughout the work. In addition, Rzewski adds constant changes in register and uses the full range of the keyboard for much of the piece, sometimes asking the performer to cover enormous areas of the keyboard in a very short time (see Example 38).


Perhaps the strongest similarity to Rzewski's work can be seen in Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. The formal organization and details in both works are very carefully laid out. Both are based largely on a repetitive descending bass pattern. In the *Goldberg Variations*, the set is built just as much on the ground bass as on the aria. In *The People United*, it is the opening theme's accompanying sequence through the circle of fifths in the bass that is the motivation for the tonal plan of the entire work (recall the rotation through the circle of fifths beginning an ending with D Minor in the first two sets and the last two sets). Even the 6-20 hexachord and the common sonority (two fifths separated by a half-step) can be seen as "motivic transformations" (see Examples 40 and 41) of the segment of the circle of fifths found in the bass line of the B section of the theme (see Example 39).
Circle of fifths pattern in the bass.

Compare this bass line pattern to the 6-20 hexachord and its “motivic transformations” seen in Example 40.

Example 40. “Motivic transformations” of the cycle of fifths.\(^\text{65}\)

\(^{65}\)Wason, “Tonality and Atonality,” p. 121.
Now examine another use of a transformation of the circle of fifths pattern originally seen in the Theme (see Example 41). This is Rzewski’s virtuosic use of the fifth/half-step/fifth sonority that is so prevalent throughout the work.

Example 41. *The People United Will Never Be Defeated*. Variation 3, m. 17. Another transformation of the circle of fifths bass pattern used as a common sonority in the piece (fifth/half-step/fifth).


There are also sections of Rzewski’s work that make use of a quasi-ground bass pattern (recall the discussion in Chapter Two of Variations 15-17). While Rzewski’s pattern is not a strict ground bass as can be found in the *Goldberg Variations*, it is clearly imitating this style of writing often found in Baroque music.

The *Goldberg Variations* are astounding in the sense that Bach manages to retain the phrase structure throughout the entire set. Robert Marshall views it in the following manner:

What is unique about the *Goldberg Variations* is that Bach not only retains the underlying balanced phrase structure throughout the work but even reinforces it with his variation patterns and figurations. Even more than the
keyboard virtuosity, this thoroughgoing periodicity constitutes the true "modern" or "classical" element in the *Goldberg Variations.*

In a sense, the same is true of Rzewski's work. While there is a definite divergence and freedom in the fifth set, the previous four achieve a masterful persistence of the four-measure phrase (recall the discussion on the Theme in Chapter Two). In addition, both sets return to their themes at the end, lending a satisfying sense of completion through a *da capo* statement of their openings (although not exact in Rzewski's case).

Another similarity between the two works can be seen in the use of an enormous variety of styles within the context of their rigid structural plans. The *Goldberg Variations* is divided into groups of three variations, the third of each group in canon ranging in interval from the unison to the ninth, progressively. Rzewski builds his set on the number six, by dividing thirty-six variations into six groups of six, the sixth of which recapitulates the previous five, the sixth set of which summarizes the previous five sets, and the thirty-sixth variation, which gives a retrospective view of the previous thirty-five. Within this mathematical framework, we hear political songs, atonal music, jazz, minimalism, improvisation and a wide variety of twentieth-century techniques including lid slams and whistles.

Another connection to the music of the Baroque era in general can be seen in Rzewski's frequent use of contrapuntal procedures. Within the *The People United,* one finds an extensive sampling of these devices, also prevalent in the works of the Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School: imitation, inversion, augmentation, diminution and double counterpoint. For example, the second half of each variation basically mirrors the first half, while the lines in one hand are often later found upside

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down in the other. Thus, *The People United* owes a great deal to the influence of Bach and the music of the Baroque era.

There are very strong ties between Rzewski's work and the Bach, Beethoven and Brahms sets examined in this chapter. We can clearly look to these particular sets as forerunners of *The People United* with their common ground in terms of length, complexity of structure, technical difficulty, and of course the sheer quality of the music.

**D. Conclusion**

The dualities that exist within and surrounding *The People United* are truly fascinating. One of the most obvious is the duality that exists between the many twentieth-century aspects of the piece and its strong links to a long-standing tradition as seen in the comparisons with the major variation sets of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. Rzewski aligns himself with tradition simply by choosing theme and variations as a form in which to write, as it is a form that has not been used with regularity in the twentieth-century. As with the work of many twentieth-century composers, one can hear the influence of music from earlier times in Rzewski's work. As was previously stated, much of the set seems to reflect the influence of J. S. Bach, especially in the adept and prolific use of two- and three-voice counterpoint. There are also obvious influences felt from the Romantic period as Art Lange points out:

The dramatic immediacy of his gestures, and the manner in which he explores the entire tonal and timbral spectrum of the piano, are reminiscent of the Romantics—especially Liszt, in the music's shocking virtuosity, and
sometimes Mussorgsky, in some of the craggy, dark writing in the bass register.\textsuperscript{67}

However, this eclecticism does not appear to be of utmost importance to the listener. As Tom Johnson states,

The stylistic connotations of various sections seem almost coincidental. He simply allows the texture to drift back and forth in musical history without showing any particular favoritism between tonal and atonal, classical and popular, romantic and pointillistic. . . I can’t think of any other work that is rooted in the whole tradition of Western music the way this piece is.\textsuperscript{68}

Another conflict exists in the political nature of the piece. Rzewski uses marxist music (\textit{El Pueblo Unido, Bandiera Rossa} and \textit{Solidaritätslied}) in the context of “high art” music. In other words, music intended for the common people appears in a genre associated with the bourgeoisie.

Other examples of this pervasive use of opposites exist in the music itself. Rzewski formulates a highly-organized structural plan and simultaneously gives the music a feeling of freedom through the use of improvisation and improvisational-sounding passages. In addition, he uses atonality via the widespread use of the 6-20 hexachord and tonality via the theme, the interpolated songs and jazz. Through his use of such atonal devices as hexachords and octave displacement, Rzewski creates another sense of duality between his often-preached desire to reach a larger audience and his use of inaccessible

\textsuperscript{67}Art Lange, \ CD jacket notes for Frederic Rzewski’s \textit{The People United Will Never Be Defeated!}, performed by Frederic Rzewski (Hat Art CD, 1990).

techniques. However, Rzewski gives an intriguing twist to this duality, reconciling it by choosing a hexachord (an atonal feature) with so many tonal properties (recall the pivotal nature of the augmented triads found in the various forms of the hexachord).

Despite all the differing influences and styles integrated within *The People United*, Rzewski manages to maintain a certain unity through the recapitulative nature of his overall structural plan, the tripartite tonal structure and the unifying motive of the circle of fifths. With these melodic and harmonic devices and his numerous structural variation techniques, Rzewski achieves a pianistic masterpiece that successfully straddles the fence between the academic high-art of atonality and the more accessible realms of tonality. It is a truly unique synthesis, one that deserves to be recognized as *the* tour-de-force in the genre of twentieth-century piano variations.
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IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

1.0  2.9  2.5
1.1  3.2  2.2
1.25 4.0  2.0
1.4  1.8
1.6

150mm
6"