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## PREFACE

Busoni's transcription of the Chaconne from Bach's Partita No. II for Unaccompanied Violin (BWV 1004) was an early product of the composer's extensive and searching creative preoccupation with the music of his predecessor, one which, together with the transcriptions of the organ works, formed his 'preliminary steps towards the more elaborate studies which are in the nature of commentaries on Bach written not in words but in music.'<sup>1</sup> Those 'commentaries' include not only editions of Bach's music – such as that of *Das wohltemperierte Klavier*, with its astonishing compendium of insight brought to life in both words and music – but also some of Busoni's finest creations, not the least of which is the *Fantasia contrappuntistica*. Yet Dent's metaphor for Busoni's relationship to Bach's music needs to be complemented by another – perhaps 'transmutation' – to express the sense in which Busoni's many-faceted imagination interacted with Bach's originals. As the sole acoustic recording of Busoni playing Bach reveals, it required no 'transcription' for the pianist to evoke a highly personal vision through his predecessor's music: the performance of the First Prelude and Fugue from Book I of the '48' is a spellbinding glimpse of a characteristically Busonian experience.<sup>2</sup>

Exactly when Busoni prepared the transcription of the Chaconne is not clear, but since it was advertised in the January 1893 issue of Hofmeister's *Monatsbericht* it seems likely that it was completed some time the previous year, perhaps during his time on the staff of the New England Conservatory at Boston (1891–2). The first performance was given by Busoni in a concert (the last in a series of four) at the Union Hall, Boston on 30 January 1893.<sup>3</sup> The programme was:

Bach-Busoni	Chaconne for Violin Solo (Concert arrangement for the piano) (First time)
Schubert	Fantasia, Op. 15 Allegro con fuoco ma non troppo Adagio ( <i>Der Wanderer</i> ) Presto Allegro (Liszt's Version) <sup>4</sup>
Busoni	1. Etude-fugue [Op. 16, No. 5, Kindermann 203] 2. Scene de Ballet [Op. 20, Kindermann 209]
Chopin	Nocturne, C sharp minor Fourth Ballade, F minor
Liszt	<i>Waldesrauschen</i> <i>Lucrezia Borgia</i> , Fantasia, No. 1

This was a substantial recital (the third in the series had consisted of nine items, of which the first was Liszt's Fantasia and Fugue on BACH, and the second the 'Hammerklavier' Sonata by Beethoven!) but according to the review in the *Boston Herald* on 31 January, it was extended by the inclusion of two preludes by Busoni.<sup>5</sup>

Since then the transcription of the Chaconne has established and maintained a firm place in the repertoire, yet for all its popularity it has remained somewhat controversial. One of its first critics was its dedicatee, the Scottish-born pianist and composer, Eugen d'Albert (1864–1932). The two men had known one another for some time, but Busoni's attitude to d'Albert distinguished between his pianism – which Busoni admired – and his music, which he disliked. It is probable that these sentiments were returned: it took d'Albert some time – perhaps more than a year – to respond to his colleague's gesture of friendship and one reason was (presumably) the lack of enthusiasm he felt for the work, a response he did little to hide when he finally wrote to Busoni from Milan on 30 March 1894:

Dear Mr. Busoni,

Only today ... was it possible for me to answer your kind lines, to express my delight in the dedication and the in the arrangement of the Chaconne, and to apologise for my overdue letter....

I played through your arrangement immediately on receipt, and it pleased me greatly, though, I must confess to you, not as much as your arrangement of the E<sup>b</sup> major Fugue.<sup>6</sup> I think the Chaconne won't tolerate an arrangement for two hands. In my opinion the only solution is to be found in the Brahms arrangement for the left hand alone. Any other adaptation must be necessarily too modern and I find this to be the case with your arrangement. It's something else to arrange an organ fugue – but a piece written for violin alone, conceived within the compass of the violin-clef, definitely loses by the introduction of basses and, for example, broken octave passages. This is my very humble opinion ...<sup>7</sup>

Nearly two months later, on 20 May 1894, Busoni addressed these observations in a draft response to d'Albert.<sup>8</sup> Busoni thanks d'Albert for his letter, but politely points out that the publication of his transcription itself indicates that he does not share his colleague's views:

I start from the impression that Bach's conception of the work goes far beyond the limits and means of the violin, so that the instrument he specifies for performance is not adequate [for its realization].

He continues by taking up d'Albert's reference to Bach's organ fugues, writing that he finds the Chaconne equivalent to any in terms of intellectual content, expression and structure; if anything in it seems smaller or more limited it is because of the choice of instrument. Finally Busoni points out that Bach was himself willing to arrange a fugue for violin solo (from the First Sonata) for organ.

Whether a revised version of this draft was sent is not known, but clearly it was d'Albert's views that prompted Busoni to discuss his transcription of the Chaconne in the first of the appendices to his edition of Book I of *Das wohltemperierte Klavier*: 'Von der Übertragung Bach'scher Orgelwerke auf das Pianoforte', where he expands the arguments of his draft letter:

To Eugen d'Albert  
**Chaconne**  
For Unaccompanied Violin

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)  
Arranged for concert performance on the pianoforte by  
Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924)

**Andante maestoso, ma non troppo lento**  
*Feierlich gemessen, doch nicht schleppend*

5

9 *f sempre molto energico*

13 *sempre assai marcato*  
*più f*

17 *ten.*  
*p subito*  
*dolce*

21 *pp*  
*una corda*  
*mf*

25 *molto espress. e legato*

29

*p molto dolce non arpegg.*

32

*p poco espress. quasi f p quasi f*

35

*p [quasi f] poco dolce*

38

*[7] 1 2 4 1 3 2 1 dimin. poco*

The following sources for Bach's text are referred to in the Editorial Commentary:

- A** **Autograph.** Facsimile edition: *Sei Solo a Violino senza Basso accompagnato... da Joh. Seb. Bach.* Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1950.
- BG** *Johann Sebastian Bach's Werke, herausgegeben von der Bach-Gesellschaft zu Leipzig. Siebenundzwanziger Jahrgang, erster Lieferung. Kammermusik, Band 6.* Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1877.
- FE** **First edition:** *TRE / SONATE / per il Violino solo / senza Basso / Del Sig<sup>te</sup> / SEB: BACH.* Bonn: N. Simrock, [1805?]; plate No. 169.

**DE** **David's edition:** *SECHS / SONTATEN / für die Violine allein / von / JOH. SEBASTIAN BACH / STUDIO / ossia / TRE SONATE / per il Violino solo senza Basso. / Zum Gebrauch bei dem Conservatorium der Musik zu Leipzig, / mit Fingersatz, Bogenstrichen und sonstigen Bezeichnungen versehen / von FERD. DAVID. / Für Diejenigen welche sich dieses Werk selbst bezeichnen wollen, ist der Original-Text, welcher nach der auf der Königl. Bibliothek zu Berlin befindlichen Original-Handschrift des Componisten aufs genaueste revidirt ist, mit kleinen Noten beigefügt ... / NEUE AUSGABE.* Leipzig: Fr. Kistner, [1843?], plate Nos. 1385–7. The transcription, printed in small type below David's edited text, is of a manuscript copy by Anna Magdalena Bach which at the time was believed to be an autograph.

## VARIANT READINGS

Bars 1–7. P<sub>1</sub>–P<sub>3</sub> have the following reading of these bars:

**Andante maestoso, ma non troppo lento.**  
**Feierlich gemessen, doch nicht schleppend.**

Bar 19. Staccato dot on last semiquaver in RH lacking in some reprints of P<sub>4</sub>

Bar 29. Tenuto mark in RH lacking in P<sub>2</sub>

Bars 57–60. RH in P<sub>1</sub> reads:

**largamente**  
**breit**

Bars 66–69. In P<sub>1</sub> the LH is laid out thus:

Bar 75. P<sub>1</sub> has the following *ossia*:

**ossia:**