



audite

ALLUSIONS AND BEYOND

Transcriptions and transformations for piano duo

PIANO | DUO
TAKAHASHI | LEHMANN



J.S. BACH (1685-1750) / MAX REGER (1873-1916)
Brandenburgisch Concerto No. 5 in D major, BWV 1050

- I. Allegro 9:44
- II. Affettuoso 5:53
- III. Allegro 5:58

J.S. BACH / GYÖRGY KURTÁG (*1926)
Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit 2:33
(Sonatina aus dem „Actus tragicus“) BWV 106

- Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu Dir, BWV 687 4:36**
- O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig, BWV DEEST 3:29**

BERND ALOIS ZIMMERMANN* (1918-1970)
Monologues for two pianos

- I. 1:50
- II. 3:05
- III. 2:53
- IV. 1:59
- V. 8:02

JOHANNES BRAHMS* (1833-1897)
Variations on a Theme by Haydn, Op. 56b
(Chorale St. Antoni) 19:05

- I. 2:06
- II. 1:18
- III. 1:04
- IV. 1:53
- V. 2:28
- VI. 0:59
- VII. 1:21
- VIII. 2:46
- IX. 0:59
- X. 4:06

*TWO PIANOS





The second life

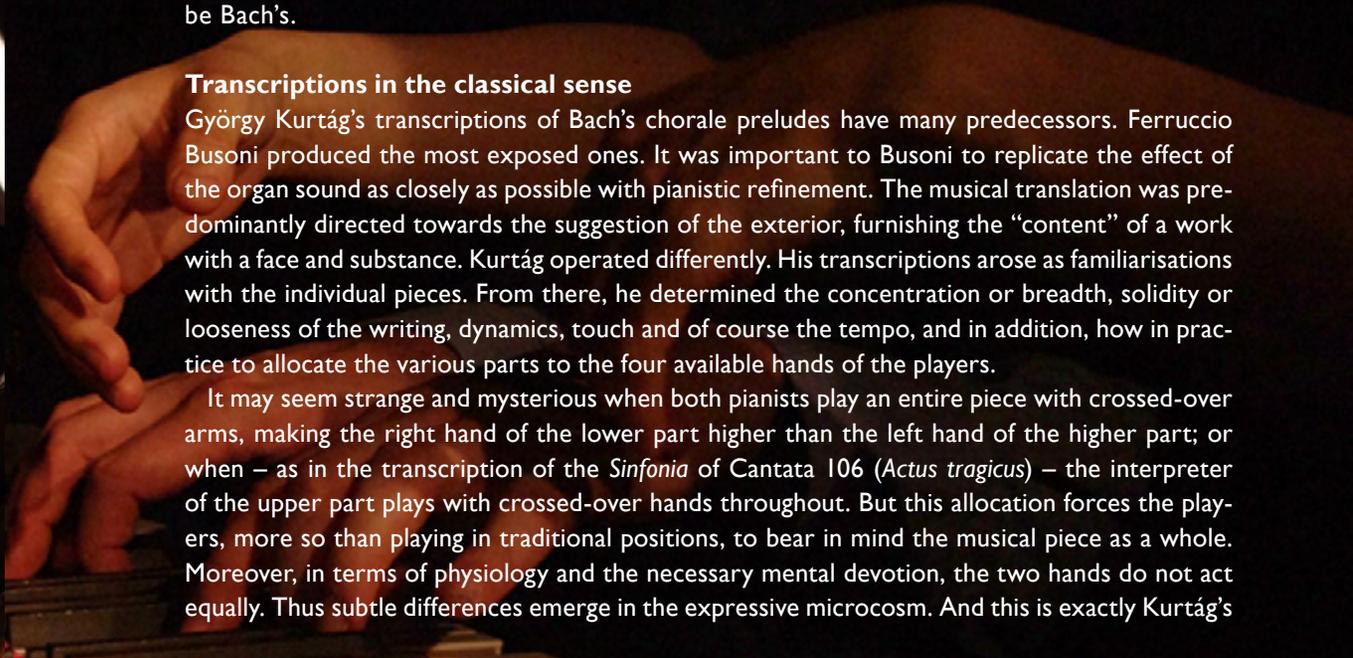
This CD features two groups of works for piano duo. On one side, there are compositions which exist in dual guise: Johannes Brahms produced two versions of his *Haydn Variations*, one for orchestra and one for piano duet; Bernd Alois Zimmermann arranged his *Dialogues* for two pianos and orchestra into *Monologues* for two pianos alone. In both cases, there are several incarnations of one idea and one set of original material. Neither are the versions for two keyboard instruments mere piano reductions of the orchestral versions, nor are the orchestral versions simply instrumentations and colourings of the keyboard versions.

On the other side, there are arrangements and transcriptions in the classical sense: works that have been transferred from one instrument, or a group of instruments, to another. For this recording, transcriptions of works by J.S. Bach have been assembled. Bach himself provided many examples of this practice: he made keyboard concertos out of violin concertos, transferring movements into cantatas, whilst also adding choruses. He familiarised himself with the form and possibilities of the Italian concerto by arranging works by Vivaldi and others for harpsichord or organ, and in the process often heavily revising the material. The same did not happen with his pieces when in the hands of Max Reger or György Kurtág: in their transcriptions, both composers stayed close to original material which they knew to be Bach's.

Transcriptions in the classical sense

György Kurtág's transcriptions of Bach's chorale preludes have many predecessors. Ferruccio Busoni produced the most exposed ones. It was important to Busoni to replicate the effect of the organ sound as closely as possible with pianistic refinement. The musical translation was predominantly directed towards the suggestion of the exterior, furnishing the "content" of a work with a face and substance. Kurtág operated differently. His transcriptions arose as familiarisations with the individual pieces. From there, he determined the concentration or breadth, solidity or looseness of the writing, dynamics, touch and of course the tempo, and in addition, how in practice to allocate the various parts to the four available hands of the players.

It may seem strange and mysterious when both pianists play an entire piece with crossed-over arms, making the right hand of the lower part higher than the left hand of the higher part; or when – as in the transcription of the *Sinfonia* of Cantata 106 (*Actus tragicus*) – the interpreter of the upper part plays with crossed-over hands throughout. But this allocation forces the players, more so than playing in traditional positions, to bear in mind the musical piece as a whole. Moreover, in terms of physiology and the necessary mental devotion, the two hands do not act equally. Thus subtle differences emerge in the expressive microcosm. And this is exactly Kurtág's





strength. His original compositions are also painstakingly considered and designed, taking into account the most minute details.

The dynamics of his Bach transcriptions are based on a *piano* in the most subtle sound form. The basic colouration could best be compared to those black and white hues in drawings or photographs where one immediately recognises the intended colour. Kurtág did not intervene in the musical substance. Every now and again he added doublings at the octave or the fifth to the outer parts, thus reproducing the colour of the organ's overtone stops (so-called Aliquot stops), as for instance in the chorale prelude *O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig*. However, the effect hails from the state of contemplation into which the players enter in order to experience the work's significance whilst enabling it to speak.

Concerto for piano

Max Reger's almost deifying estimation of Johann Sebastian Bach manifested itself, amongst other things, in the fact that he produced around 150 transcriptions of the revered master's works. He employed different techniques for these adaptations. In some cases, he expanded and concentrated the original material, as for instance in the two-part inventions which he fashioned into three-part inventions: this more or less corresponds to the method with which Bach treated Vivaldi's works. In other cases, he inserted indications into the scores relating to expression and phrasing – here, he wanted to give examples of contemporary Bach interpretation, blurring the boundaries between editing and arranging. In yet further cases, he made orchestral works accessible for piano duets. At the request of Henri Hinrichsen, the owner of the Leipzig publishing house CF Peters, Reger arranged the six *Brandenburg Concertos* for two players on one piano. The publisher, who was expropriated by the Nazis in 1938 and killed in Auschwitz in 1942, had intended to contribute to a broader popularisation of Bach's oeuvre. Similarly, new orchestral works such as Brahms' symphonies did not just appear as scores and orchestral parts, but also, as a rule, in piano versions for two and/or four hands. Thus they made their way into the homes of the educated who cultivated piano-playing and were then motivated to hear the compositions in their original form. For that reason, Hinrichsen asked Reger not to create too many technical challenges in his transcriptions. Nonetheless, they demand great skill if they are to be performed.

In contrast to his usual practice, Reger relinquished – with the exception, perhaps, of the first concerto – a large-scale and detailed body of instructions concerning performance, phrasing and dynamics. He reduced them to the structurally necessary, explaining to Hinrichsen that he had “used performance indications mainly to differentiate dynamically between tutti and solo passages. Hopefully the transcription is agreeable to you; [...] I have made it as ‘transparent’ as possible!” The Fifth Concerto proved especially challenging; in the original, the string orchestra minus the second violins is juxtaposed with a solo ensemble consisting of flute, violin and harpsichord.



The central movement is presented by the solo instruments alone. Although Reger did not add anything to Bach's music, he fashioned a piece which made a different impact. The differences in colour disappear, the black and white steps of the piano sound do not indicate unequivocally what originally belonged to the flute, the violin or the upper part of the solo harpsichord; however, listening to it, one does not miss this "information".

The differences between the outer movements, scored for orchestra, and the chamber middle movement are reduced, for Reger follows a custom common at Bach's time: he adds chords to the figured bass, "realising the thorough bass", and, of course, does so artfully. The piano sound, however, does not inform the listener as to what was originally orchestral writing, and what was thorough bass. Curiously, this "levelling" moves the sound closer to the original, for Bach composed the *Brandenburg Concertos* for an ensemble the size of the Köthen court band: this was a small-scale affair, meaning that even orchestral parts were played by single strings, as in chamber music. Bach did not preclude larger-scale orchestras – on the contrary, he wished for them – but he did not necessarily expect them. Differentiations such as those between the tutti and solo passages are realised in the piano version primarily by differing degrees of transparency. These are determined by dynamics, the number of parts, and also the balance between the parts through which effects such as fore- and background can be created.

"The fifth concerto was especially hard to transcribe; I went through a mass of attempts before finally arriving at the right solution", Reger admitted to his publisher. In the end, he produced a piece of transparency, clarity and – especially in the finale – a lightness not necessarily associated with Reger, even though it also manifests itself again and again in his original compositions.

The beautiful side of a dual nature

Johannes Brahms composed his *Variations on a Theme by Joseph Haydn* (which, as transpired later on, is not by Haydn) for two pianos until July 1873; at that stage he was not considering an orchestral version. In early September, however, he mentioned to his publisher Fritz Simrock that the work "really was a set of variations for orchestra" – perhaps in the same spirit in which Robert Schumann, twenty years previously, had called the early piano sonatas "veiled symphonies". Immediately afterwards, Brahms began working on the full score and had his opus 56 published in both versions. As in the case of the Sonata and the Quintet Op. 34, he classified the larger-scale, later version as 56a, and the version for two pianos as 56b. In so doing, he emphasised the autonomous character of the piano version: piano reductions of symphonies and concertos, which often appeared alongside the scores, were never furnished with their own opus numbers.

During the 1850s, Brahms had written his two Serenades and First Piano Concerto: the orchestral version of the *Haydn Variations* marked a new beginning, heading towards the symphony. The symphony's form and dramaturgy acts as a structuring background for the design of the varia-



tions. The movement characters emerge as an outline. The opening movement, delineating the course of events, corresponds to the theme and first variations; they go back to the shape of the theme, revealing its load-bearing elements and establishing the principle of contrast. In variations four and seven, two favourite types of Brahmsian slow movements emerge; numbers five and six suggest two scherzo forms, the fleeting elf-like one, and the sweeping hunting piece. The finale, also marked as such, was cast into the form of a passacaglia, a series of variations on a recurring bass figure: Brahms would revisit it in the finale of his Fourth Symphony.

As a piano work, however, the *Haydn Variations* represent the culmination of a series which had started with the slow movement of his first piano sonata and led, via the *Schumann* and *Handel Variations* as well as the *Variations on a Hungarian* and *an Original Theme*, to opus 56. The first set of variations had been incorporated into a sonata: now the progression and contrasts of the sonata are incorporated into variations. In terms of pure piano music, Brahms closed a chapter with his *Haydn Variations*. The two versions of this work therefore represent both a sense of conclusion and one of departure.

Monologues for two

In 1960, Bernd Alois Zimmermann interrupted work on his opera *Die Soldaten* as the completed sections had already been rejected as being impossible to perform. He turned towards a new work, the *Dialogues* for two pianos and large-scale orchestra. They were intended to prove that organising music in layers of time (as had been practiced in the opera) was just as possible as integrating quotes from the music of the past into the context and structure of a modern score. In addition, he planned to extend the *concertante* principle to all involved, treating the orchestral players as soloists as well. However, he was not entirely happy with the premiere and decided to revise the work. But before he had embarked on this project, he had further thoughts. He explained in a letter to Aloys Kontarsky, one of the soloists at the premiere: "Since it evidently does not suffice to write good pieces as they need performing as well, I have decided, after a three-year struggle, to produce a version *ad usum delphini*." It was to contain two pianos and a handful of "auxiliary" instruments. The Kontarsky brothers urged him to restrict himself to two pianos: the composer adhered to the advice. In the process, it transpired that the orchestra part could not simply be inserted into the piano parts. For that reason, the *Monologues* were written as a second inspection of the musical material, mostly based on the outline of the *Dialogues*. Focussing on time and its different layers became even more significant. Time appears in the sense of Zimmermann's philosophy as a lived-through and historical, as an immediate and reflected medium. The main body of the work is based on a sequence, from which not only series of notes and sound constellations are derived, but also temporal proportions. Zimmermann extracts from it a play of sounds of delicate transparency and dramatic acuity. The proximity towards



opera remains perceptible. Historical time had already been integrated into the *Dialogues* by way of inserting musical quotes. In the final section there are “parts of the Piano Concerto in C major, K467, by Mozart, musical figures from Debussy’s *Jeux*, combined with the quote of *Veni, creator spiritus* and a briefly emerging, typical Jazz phrase. Witnesses from different periods of musical history who surround us daily; dialogues, stretching across the ages, with dreamers, lovers, sufferers and those praying, [...] The quotes are inserted verbatim; by no means an ‘alienation effect’ but an imploring appeal.” It is, as Zimmermann explains elsewhere, “music about music, with manifold intricacies”.

In the *Dialogues*, the quotes were restricted to one section. In the *Monologues* they traverse all sections except for the first. Zimmermann uses them in pairs, superimposing them on one another, each in their proper time, not synchronising their tempos. In the second section, Bach’s organ chorale *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, transcribed from a cantata, meets the „serene Alleluia of a soul that yearns for heaven” from Olivier Messiaen’s organ / orchestral cycle *L’Ascension*; the third section sees Messiaen’s “Prayer of Christ to his Father” from the same cycle alongside Bach’s most idiosyncratic arrangement of the Lord’s Prayer; in the fourth section Zimmermann confronts a motoric passage from Beethoven’s *Hammerklavier* Piano Sonata with typical gestures from Debussy’s *Feux d’artifice*; the other constellations correspond to those in the *Dialogues*. They break through the textures of Zimmermann’s own music as witnesses of a “beautiful foreign land”, referring to a place of yearning and remembrance at the same time.

This CD contains – in Zimmermann’s words – “music about music”; manifold, some of it in several stages of transformation. Chorale melodies which, in one case, originate in the tradition of monophonic singing, were transformed into chorale preludes for organ by Bach. In them, a melody is inserted in various ways into a network of surrounding parts, which in part refer back to the original material of the chorale. Kurtág, on the other hand, imparts a new, reflecting form to the Bachian pieces; his arrangements are written as sonic reflections on music. The primary material has sacred origins, such as the *Pilgrims* song on which Brahms based his *Variations* Op. 56. The variation, however, is the elemental practice, carried out over centuries, of music about music. In the sacred sphere this is mostly represented by the genre of the chorale partitas. Brahms’ variations cannot be traced back to them, for their latent symphonic outline and the harmony-bearing bass refer to secular traditions. A metamorphosis has taken place between these musical spheres which Zimmermann merges in his *Monologues* by inserting quotes and through the form of the (transformed) non-classical concerto. The *Monologues* embody the concept for this CD.

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