

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

RECITAL AND CONCERTO WORKS BY
BACH, BEETHOVEN, AND BRAHMS

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Music

in Music, Piano Performance

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ABSTRACT

RECITAL AND CONCERTO WORKS

BY BACH, BEETHOVEN, AND BRAHMS

By

Sorn-a-nong Varikarn

Master of Music in Music, Piano Performance

A research and analysis of German composers' works spanning from the Baroque to the Romantic eras. This includes works by Bach, Beethoven and Brahms from the solo and concerto recital.

**Johann Sebastian Bach: Prelude and Fugue in A-Flat Major, from Book II of the
Well-Tempered Clavier, BWV 886**

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) was a German harpsichordist, organist, clavichordist, violinist, kapellmeister, and composer during the Baroque era. Bach has contributed numerous vocal and instrumental compositions. Bach's famous works for the keyboard genres include *Inventions*, *Sinfonias*, *Toccatas*, *Partitas*, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, *French Suites*, *English Suites*, *Italian Concertos*, *The Art of Fugue*, *The Goldberg Variations* and many more.

Bach wrote two collections of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* totaling 48 *Preludes and Fugues*. The first collection dated from approximately 1722, which was about twenty years before the second collection. These works were written for the equal temperament tuning system. Bach wrote these works in all major and minor keys. The preludes were written in a relatively free form with particular patterns, such as the simple lyrical or etude-like passages. The fugues were written in a strict form compared with the preludes. The combination of both the preludes and fugues made each set distinct in terms of mood, effects, and colors, making it more challenging to the musician. These works may have been written for technical challenges, thus, they are particularly complex and difficult.

Bach's Prelude and Fugue in A-Flat Major BWV 886 is from the second volume of the Well-Tempered Clavier. The prelude is in a chordal form, alternating with polyphonic voices. The right hand opens with a chord figured-like, followed by the question and answer passage. The dotted rhythm of the left hand gives a very strong sense of rhythm and firmness. The notes of the dotted rhythm on the left hand also mark the chords triads. Moreover, not only is the left hand an accompaniment, but it is another independent voice that is as significant as the right hand. As a matter of personal taste, I prefer the prelude to be performed in a legato style among the voices.

In the fugue, the subject spans over one octave which is rare in this genre. The fugue has four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass. The subject is introduced in the alto voice, then soprano, tenor, and the bass. The Mugellini edition marks the beginning of the fugue as *dolce* and *legatissimo*. In my opinion, I prefer it in a sense of triumph. I find it more convincing to make sure that the entrance of every subject has a sense of victory instead of femininity.

Johann Sebastian Bach: Keyboard Concerto in D minor BWV 1052

Apart from the solo keyboard genres, Bach also composed many concertos. As early as the Brandenburg Concerto No.5, in which the keyboard already had occupied a dominant position in the orchestra. To some extent, we can consider this piece as the ancestor of the later thirteen keyboard concerti. Among those, three concerti (BWV 1060-1062) were written for two clavichords, two concerti (BWV 1063-1064) were written for three clavichords, one concerto (BWV1065) for four clavichords, and the other seven concerti(BWV1052-1058) were written for one clavichord. All of these concerti were composed not long after Bach moved to Leipzig during 1730-1733. As far as the scholars were concerned, these works were not new compositions, with the exception of BMV1062, but were rearranged from older concerti for other instruments. Scholars believe that Bach wrote six violin concertos, but only three are known. However, musicians try to revert to the original violin concerto by reducing the keyboard part on a violin. Even though these thirteen concerti were not Bach's most beloved works, they are reminiscent of the extraordinary freedom and happiness of the Baroque art.

Concerto BWV 1052 in D minor is the longest concerto of the seven keyboard concerti. This piece was a transcription of a violin concerto Bach wrote earlier. It features the Italian style of fast-slow-fast movements. The piece was scored for keyboard instrument with strings and basso continuo.

The first movement opens with an elegant and majestic theme by the solo and the tutti. Though written in the key of D minor, this movement has the sense of seriousness

consistency throughout the movement. The movement portrays a drama between the solo and tutti, alternating the same material to gain domination and sharing the same material at times to unify. The way Bach employs the ensemble is not only as an accompaniment, but he calls the attention by the interactions of the violin and viola parts as well. The movement has an improvisation-like cadenza before it recaps and ends with the ritornello.

The second movement, marked as Adagio, offers a respite between the fast two movements. Written in G minor, this aria-like movement features the passacaglia bass-like intensity throughout the movement. The repeated basses throughout this movement are G-G-B flat-B flat- D- D; the second G, B flat and D should be softer than the first one as Bach wrote slurs between each group of two repeating notes. Also, the tempo should be considered in three beats and should not be performed too slow; otherwise, it would feel more like 6/8 tempo. Bach added unexpected dissonances which give it a feeling of tragedy. The melody line, though tragic and uneasy, is expressive and captivating with the powerful orchestral bass line.

The quick third movement gives a feeling of joy, happiness, and the “in the air” feeling. Similar to the first movement, the third movement has a startling assortment features comprised of fast energetic rhythm, the development of the theme, the surprise harmony and key change. Both the first and third movements are technically challenging in terms of the repeated notes and quick running notes.

Ludwig Van Beethoven: Piano Sonata Opus 110

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) was a German-born pianist, composer and a true genius of his time. He was the composer during the transition from the Classical to Romantic period. Beethoven wrote a total of 32 piano sonatas, known as the “New Testament”¹ in the music world. His piano sonatas can be divided into three periods: early, middle, and late. Sonata Opus 110 was written in 1821, and was a remarkable work from the late period, which was from 1815 to 1827. Other famous works such as *Missa Solemnis* and the Ninth Symphony were also written during this period. In 1818, Beethoven was completely deaf. Meanwhile, he had to struggle for the right to raise his nephew, Karl, after the death of Beethoven’s brother. Like many of the works written during his late period, Piano Sonata Op.110 is very philosophical, reflective, expressive, and introspective, containing many mood changes, deep affections and emotions throughout the piece. In this piece, you can picture his beautiful memories, his thoughts, his fate foreseeing his death, the serenity and calm in his heart, and the voice of God. During Beethoven’s late period, his experimentation of the traditional conceptions of composition brought music to a new height such as using vernacular language in his markings, including the fugue and the use of dramatic trills and rests. There are three movements.

¹ Beethoven's Sonatas: *From Darkness to Light* (NPR, Accessed May 12, 2016) <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5528318>.

I. *Moderato cantabile molto espressivo*

The first movement is in sonata form and begins with a meditative beautiful four-bar phrase, which is the first theme. The first phrase looks like an introduction at first sight but it is not. The thirty-second (thirty two notes or thirty second (rhythm) notes) notes from bar number twelve to nineteen is challenging due in part to the necessity of maintaining the piano dynamic while articulating the a-flat and shaping the left hand harmonies. The second theme begins with a harmonic change. The development section is in the key of f-minor where Beethoven develops the idea from the first theme combined with new elements, such as the sixteenth scales-like passages in the left hand. The harmonic change is interesting here as it progresses to unexpected harmonies prior to the recapitulation. The recapitulation is short in comparison to his other sonatas. Eventually, before ending the movement with a soft A-flat major chord, Beethoven introduces a singing melody, which is reflective of the mood of the opening section.

II. *Scherzo in F minor*

In ternary form, this short movement begins with an ascending octave-pattern in the left hand while the right hand plays in contrary motion. In my opinion, the descending right hand can apply a diminuendo, in contrast to the crescendo in the left; this creates an X shape in dynamic between the two hands. This interpretation brings out more tension and intention. In addition, there are clear dynamic markings in the initial four measures; piano in the first two bars, and forte in bars three and four. Also, worth mentioning is the syncopated rhythm beginning with the ninth measure, resulting in the *sforzando* on the

upbeat in the left hand. Meanwhile, the right hand should maintain the pulse of a German dance. The middle section of this movement is extraordinarily challenging because of the disjunct motions and running passages, while the dynamics have to be alternated between soft and loud passages in a manner. The fifteenth measure coda begins with a one measure forte chord alternating with one measure of silence, and ending with a half note F major chord in the right hand and the soft F major arpeggio in the left hand. What should be understood is that silence is the actual downbeat of the alternation. In other words, we should feel the accent on the silence or silent beat.

III. *Recitative, Arioso and fugue*

The third movement is a special movement because it begins with a recitative and arioso prior to the fugue. The B-flat minor chord is marked *una corda*, which gives this movement a darker color from the ending of the second movement F major. The repeated A (tie or tied A notes) in the right hand give it a kind of vibration, representative of bell-ringing. The recitative is full of expression and serenity. The tempo indications in the opening seven bars vary often, beginning with *adagio ma non troppo, piu adagio, andante, adagio*, and finally to *meno adagio*. The rhythm is similar to a fantasy but it does not give license to the performers. The initial *arioso* is in the key of A-flat minor which depicts sadness. The initial fugue begins with A Flat-D Flat-B Flat-E Flat- C-F- E Flat- D Flat- C. The second arioso is similar to an interlude prior to the entrance of the second fugue. It is darker than the first arioso. The tiny rest in the second arioso expresses the feeling of choke. The second fugue can be seen as an inversion of the first fugue with the subject inverted to D –A –C – G- B-F Sharp- G-A-B.

After the second fugue in the third movement, Beethoven shows his genius skills in rhythm by shortening the value of each note and adding more notes, while employing a slower tempo indeed, which turns out to be a feeling of acceleration to one's ears.

This sonata should be performed *attaca* but there could be a short break between the first and second movement. The first movement starts with the chord A Flat major and ends with the A Flat major chord. The second movement is a fast scherzo in two and opens with f minor chord, which is the relative minor of the A flat major and concludes with F major. The third movement should be played *attaca* and begins with the recitative in B-flat minor, *arioso* in E-flat minor, then the fugue in A-flat major, and the second *arioso* in g minor, and then the fugue goes to G major before ending in A-flat major.

Johannes Brahms: Handel Variations Op.24

Brahms was a 19th century *master* composer, conductor, pianist and an expert of variation. He continued the tradition from the old German school. Brahms, as a Romantic composer whose inspiration was from the Baroque era, wrote several sets of variations during his lifetime: these include the works from op.1 to op.120. He composed seven sets of variations for the piano: op.9, op.21 no.1 &no.2, op.24, op.23, op.35, op.56a, and op.56b. Brahms' *Variations on a Theme by Handel* was written in September 1861 and published in 1862. This set of variations was based on an aria theme from the third movement of Handel's B-flat major *Harpsichord Suite No.1, HWV 434*. This piece consists of twenty-five variations and a large extended fugue. The piece was initially devoted to a "Dear Lady Friend"² (Clara Schumann) as a birthday present, according to Brahms' manuscript in the same year of composition.

Handel's theme (see figure 1) is a simple one, thus it was a perfect choice for Brahms since it gave him more freedom to expand. The theme is in binary form and Brahms put all the repeats in all of his variations in this set except for variation 13. Although the original theme is Handel's, all the variations are in Brahms style with the exception of the first one. The theme and the first variation can be understood as they are still Handel. The rest of the variations are all different in character from the theme.

² Johannes Brahms, *Handel Variations op. 24*, Urtext Edition, (Duisburg: G. Henle Verlag HN272, 1978), Preface.

Figure 1. Johannes Brahms, *Handel Variations*, Op.24, mm.1-8.

Johannes Brahms, Op.24
(Veröffentlicht 1862)

Aria

The importance of the bass

Brahms emphasizes the importance of the bass, as can be clearly seen in his variations 1, 10, 12. In variation 1, he clearly marked the importance of the bass in the left hand of each beat and he was just playing around with the melody in the right hand. He put the accent on the weak beat to create a more lively character and syncopation. The inner voices of the right hand also display a chord on the upbeat (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Johannes Brahms, *Handel Variations*, Op.24, mm.9-12.

Var.1

Another example is variation 10. Brahms wrote the left hand to be played as if the chord was playing the harp. He also played with the dynamics, beginning with a forte and ending in a pianissimo (see figure 3).

Figure 3. Johannes Brahms, *Handel Variations*, Op.24, mm.89-90.

Var.10

f energico

m.d.

p

pp

In variation 12, the upper voice of the left hand plays an important role as the notes are part of the chord as well as the melody line. The right hand is meant to portray a feeling of a soft caress. The smooth texture of the left hand is evident in the singing bass melody. (see figure 4).

Figure 4. Johannes Brahms, *Handel Variations*, Op.24, mm.105-108.

8 (182)

Var.12

soave

pp

Baroque Era Style

In the Handel Variations, there are some of the specific styles in Brahms' composition that display his use of compositional techniques from the Baroque Era. These include variations 6, 8, 13, 19, 22 and the fugue.

In variation 6, Brahms uses the imitative canon between the two voices. The soft minor key suggests a mysterious touch and the extended range he uses in writing the octaves makes the piece reminiscent of a two part invention (see figure 5).

Figure 5. Johannes Brahms, *Handel Variations*, Op.24, mm.49-50.



In variation 8, Brahms used the repeating staccato B-Flat bass and the F bass in the left hand throughout and also gives it a strong sense of pulse. Frequently the passacaglia is in triple meter but Brahms uses compound meter for this variation. In addition, he places the crescendo in the upper voice while maintaining the constant left hand ostinato bass, the right hand displays a rising crescendo of the melody before it begins a new phrase in measure four. From measure four to five, the melody and the crescendo repeat the same pattern but the inner voices are reversed to the upper voice. In the middle section, a large contrast is noted when he changes the dynamics to piano, places the slur in the upper line, and changes the key to B-flat minor, before returning back to B-Flat major near the end

of the variation. He played with the top two voices in this piece by switching between the upper register and lower register (see figure 6).

Figure 6. Johannes Brahms, *Handel Variations*, Op.24, mm.65-70.



The first slow variation of the thirteen variations, variation 13, strikingly offers a significant contrast to the feel and mood of this piece. This variation gives the markings of *molto sostenuto* and expressive. The character of this variation is a funeral march. He avoids the use of repeat signs in this variation but instead, writes the fourth-eighth and twelfth-sixteenth bars in a higher octave. The left hand's rolling chords also suggest the rolling of drums. Handel also composed a funeral march at his time, but it was called the dead march, from the third act of oratorio *Saul* (see figure 7).³

³ Donald Burrows, *Handel, Master Musicians Series* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)

Figure 7. Johannes Brahms, *Handel Variations*, Op.24, mm.113-118.

Var. 13
Largamente, ma non più

f *espress*

J. B. 56

Interestingly, in 1861, Brahms used the sicilian dance rhythm in composing variation 19. This dance is a type of dance rhythm from the Baroque era. However, the Sicilian dance is frequently a slow dance but in this variation, Brahms marked it as *leggiere* and *vivace*, and also indicates dynamics and ornamentations throughout the variation. The character of this variation can be considered as an important achievement during the Romantic era, in the style of Brahmsian Sicilian (see figure 8).

Figure 8. Johannes Brahms, *Handel Variations*, Op.24, mm.174-181.

12 (136) Var. 19
leggiere e vivace

p

Variation 22 also employs the technique of *passacaglia* in the inner voice of the right hand and also on the two lower voices of the left hand. The use of five voices, two melodies: the main melody is in the upper voice of the right hand and the sub melody is in the upper voice of the left hand. Because this variation is in a higher tessitura than previous variations, the tone produces a light and clear motion as the left hand has sixteenth notes like a musette. I personally imagine it as the stars with shimmering sound(see figure 9).

Figure 9. Johannes Brahms, *Handel Variations*, Op.24, mm.214-215.



Key

“Key is like elastic, in that the more you expand it the thinner and weaker it becomes.”⁴

In Brahms’ *Handel Variations*, he keeps most of the variations in the key of B-flat major. However, three variations (5,6,and 13) are written in the parallel key. Of all the 25 variations, only one variation was written in the submediant key, which is variation 21 in the key of G minor. This could be another reason why the piece has a strong structure.

The purpose of the G minor key, before the last five variations, was perhaps to break the intensity of the mood, before it builds back up again from variations 23-25, reaching the

⁴ McV.,D., “Review of *The Technique of Variations : A Study of the Instrumental Variation from Antonio de Cabezon to Max Roger* by Robert U.Nelson. Vol.31, No.1 (*Jan, 1950*), 67.

climax in the fugue.

Fugue

Beginning with an aria and ending with a fugue, it was amazing how Brahms combines and transforms the ideas into such a beautiful set of variations. The fugue is one of the most complex composition styles which requires high level of knowledge, and at the same time displays the intelligence, strong logical mind, maturity and caliber of the composer. There was a question whether the last variation and the fugue should be played without a pause. If there is a pause, I feel the climax part will not be connected and thus, the way of playing and emotion flow will not be effective. I believe that Brahms intentionally wrote this piece to consist of variations and fugue, and in Variation 25, if Brahms had really wanted to have a short break before the fugue, he would have put a fermata sign. In this case, I surely think the fugue should be played right after the finish of Variation 25 (see figure 10).

Figure 10. Johannes Brahms, *Handel Variations*, Op.24, mm.243-248.



In Brahms' Handel fugue, he uses many complex melodies hidden in the third, sixth, octave, which is typical of his style of composition. Another typical Brahmsian style that

can be seen in the fugue is *hocket*. He alters the leading melody lines between the left and right hands. Unlike the earlier fugues written by other composers, Brahms uses an extended range of dynamics such as pianissimo, forte, fortetpiano, fortissimo, piano dolce, sforzando, and also employed the use of pedal. The fugue sounds orchestral in scope. In the climax of this piece, he marked the use of *col ped.*, indicating that he wanted this section to have a pedal throughout. This part shows the sound of the bells ringing in the high and lower registers of the octave keyboard, as well as the reverse theme, which is hidden in sixteenth notes between the inner voices of the F-octave (see figure 11).

Figure 11. Johannes Brahms, *Handel Variations*, Op.24, mm.327-329.



Brahms took advantage of the new modern piano of the time and wrote a fugue in a way that could never have worked on the old pianos. In 1856, Clara Schumann passed on a Conrad Graf piano (no.2616) to Brahms.⁵ This piano was one of the pianos Brahms was associated. Graf pianos had been invented by a Viennese technician during the nineteenth century. Not only did the piano have up to the six and a half octaves in the 1800s, but the iron frame also was able to support heavier strings that in turn could support greater tensions. Other innovations include metal studs to anchor the strings and double

⁵ George S. Bozarth and Stephen H. Brady. 2009. "The Pianos of Johannes Brahms," in *Brahms and His World: (revised Edition)*, edited by Walter Frisch and Kevin C. Karnes. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 73.

escapement, which made it possible for the key and hammer to respond rapidly.⁶ The fast action key makes it possible for a single note repetition. We can also see the use of the repetition of notes Brahms did compose in his variation 8. The *una corda* (left pedal) allowed the pianists to make a greater dynamic contrasts, for example in the transition part, when Brahms modulates the key to D-Flat Major, and indicates *dolce*(see figure 12). In my opinion, it was the *new piano* that made this part effective. Furthermore, the use of the left pedal, together with the sustain pedal, makes the legato line more smooth, sweet, and tranquil.

Figure 12. Johannes Brahms, *Handel Variations, Op.24*, mm.273-278.



In conclusion, Brahms integrated a number of musical ideas from the Baroque period with his own musical concepts and styles to compose his Handel Variations. This masterwork best displays the Baroque influence on Brahms' keyboard works. A number of references can be made, as mentioned throughout the paper; these references could perhaps indicate some of Brahms' trails of thought during the time of composition.

⁶ Walter Frisch, *Music in the Nineteenth Century: Western Music in Context*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 240.

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Appendix A: PROGRAM I

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

MIKE CURB COLLEGE OF ARTS, MEDIA, AND COMMUNICATION

MUSIC DEPARTMENT

PRESENTS

SORN-A-NONG VARIKARN

A student of Professor John Perry

In her Master of Music Recital

Saturday, November 14th, 2015, 4:30pm

Cypress Recital Hall

PROGRAM

Well-Tempered Clavier, Book II

Prelude and Fugue in A-flat Major, BMV 886

.....Johann Sebastian Bach

(1685-1750)

Sonata in A-flat Major, Op. 110

.....Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

I. *Moderato cantabile molto espressivo*

II. *Allegro molto*

III. *Adagio ma non troppo--Fuga, Allegro ma non troppo*

Intermission

Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op.24

.....Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

In partial fulfillment of the Master of Music degree

in Piano Performance

Appendix B: PROGRAM II

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

MIKE CURB COLLEGE OF ARTS, MEDIA, AND COMMUNICATION

MUSIC DEPARTMENT

PRESENTS

SORN-A-NONG VARIKARN

A student of Professor John Perry

In her Master of Music Recital

Second piano by Chi Zhang

Saturday, April 30th, 2016, 2:30 pm

Cypress Recital Hall

PROGRAM

Keyboard concerto in D minor BWV 1052 ----- Johann Sebastian Bach

(1685-1750)

I. *Allegro*

II. *Adagio*

III. *Allegro*

In partial fulfillment of the Master of Music degree in Piano Performance