

Concert Two

The Firm

Leigh Harrold, piano

May 23 2005

Programme

Twelve Variations on an Original Theme

Alban Berg

Three Piano Pieces

Luke Altmann

Ländler

Raymond Chapman Smith

INTERVAL

Schubert Variations

Quentin Grant

Nomura Garden 1

James Cuddeford

Sonata for Piano, Op.1

Alban Berg

Feelings

my friend
wrote Berg
are stars that
guide us only
in brightest daylight

Pilgrim Church provides wheelchair access via the rear (northern) doors.

Toilets can be accessed through the door on the left of the performance area.

Twelve Variations on an Original Theme (1908) Alban Berg

In studying form one ought really to take variation form as early as possible.

Schoenberg thought so too.

Anton Webern

Think of the classical and pre-classical composers, and of their highly skilled treatment of the principle of variation; of the Romantics, with their bold juxtapositions of distantly related keys, of new chordal formations arrived at by chromatic alteration and enharmonic change, and their natural embodiment in tonality; and finally think of Brahms' art of thematic and motivic work, often penetrating into the smallest details.

Alban Berg

Tonality and rhythm provide for *coherence* in music; *variation* delivers all that is grammatically necessary. I define variation as changing a number of a unit's features, while preserving others. The change of features serves as an *annihilation* of former *obligations* and eventually as a gradual introduction of the new qualities that will make up the characteristics of the subsequent idea.

The preservation of features constantly secures logic, and upon the presence or absence of these *connectives* is based the greater or lesser degree of *fluency*.

One of the most important functions of the changing of features is the production of *liquidation*.

A liquidation can, at one point or another, cease to eliminate; instead it can begin to develop and add new features. It then will have changed into a *transition*. A transition must have a goal. Like a bridge it leads from one bank of the river to the other. Between them an abyss might preclude communication.

Arnold Schoenberg

These pieces are designed to be perceived as a set or even as a short sonata. They are each composed with a different technique - the first is a study in symmetry, the second is composed largely in two part counterpoint with Ligetian harmonies, and the third uses a jazz-based ostinato. There is no thematic connection between them - rather, their unity is achieved through their playing order of fast/slow/fast and through certain harmonic idiosyncrasies.

People go many different ways.

Whoever traces them and compares them will see strange figures taking shape.

Novalis, Die Lehrlinge zu Sais

No.1	A	maio	or. C	on	tenerezza

Ländler

- No.2 F sharp minor, Andantino
- No.3 E major, Grazioso e giocoso
- No.4 C sharp minor, Andante moderato
- No.5 D flat major, Allegretto, ma non troppo
- No.6 B flat minor, Andante non troppo e con molto espressione
- No.7 A flat major, Allegretto teneramente
- No.8 F minor, un poco agitato
- No.9 F major, Adagietto, molto lento e ritenuto
- No.10 D minor, Vivace, molto grazioso
- No.11 C major, Allegro con brio
- No.12 A minor, Non presto

June, 2001 - sitting on the Ringstrasse, taking 6am breakfast with my esteemed colleague, Herr Professor, Doktor Grant, I resolved to keep a musical journal of our first, weird and wonderful, Viennese sojourn.

Initially the plan was for a daily diary of Landler, the Austrian country-dance precursor of the more lasciviously civilized waltz. But gradually my pieces took on the ternary shapes of brief intermezzi with the landler's simple, sixteen bar sentences left for what would become a later set of little dances.

My Landler, then, aren't really landler at all - although I was relieved to find that Schubert had experimented with a similar hybrid in 1827.

The references, the paying of homage to Schumann, Brahms, Mahler and Zemlinsky are so obvious as to hardly need comment. They are heard through lenses polished by a later, more reductive aesthetic and a somewhat fortuitous arrival at a kind of diatonic serialism.

The music of the early Romantic composer Franz Schubert has always been a great, great love of mine. I love its simplicity, its lyricism, its melancholic nature - the uncomplicated clarity of its forms and the imaginative harmonic devices used to build these forms. If I could, only in part, capture some of this simplicity and light gravity in some of my music I would have achieved a great deal.

Here I begin with two tiny waltzes of the composer as a starting point (combined and slightly altered to form the first piece) to then set off on a small journey through eight little pieces that all in some way comment on Schubert and his music. They are actually not all variations on these waltzes (some were written before their inclusion) but rather variations on the idea of Schubert's music in general. But let me emphasise that this is not merely a gentle exercise in nostalgia. Though referencing the music of nearly two hundred years past it also has its eyes on the present and the future. We are constantly reminded that the movement of history is not a straight line but is rather circular in form, and that things such as the death camps are not only events of our past, but also await us. A conversation that can include an awareness of the shapes that have gone before can inform us in our constant examination of the paths ahead.

There is a sleeping song in all endlessly dreaming things and the world will begin to sing if you find the master word.

Joseph von Eichendorff, Sängerleben

For several years now I have loved and studied the aesthetics and design principles of Japanese gardens. Nomura's immaculate private 400 year old garden, which is attached to the samurai's house in Kanazawa in north west Japan, contains a small waterfall which can be contemplated from three contrasting viewing rooms. This solo piano work is the first in a three part cycle which can be played either as independent movements or together as a triptych.

The world of dew is a world of dew... and yet, and yet...

Issa

Sonata Op. 1 (1908)

Alban Berg

The Piano Sonata differs from his later works in that it shows Berg adapting himself to the world of composition and does not raise the question of his originality. He is absolutely himself in some features, which are already very characteristic, but not yet quite wholly himself. He is adapting himself, making preparations for his voyage, still on the shore and scanning the distant countries that he is going to explore. He feels the attraction of the distant future but is still tied to the recent past. He is collecting his arms and making his preparations. The nostalgia of this opus 1 is the nostalgia of a boy. What labyrinths lay before him, between the Sonata and the *Chamber Concerto*, before he was to become wholly, completely and irredeemably himself!

Pierre Boulez

Berg's Sonata is music which looks back over a dynasty, which reflects the excitement and instability of transition, and which prophetically forecasts the future.

It is music from the twilight of tonality. Its language is one of collapse and disbelief, of musical *weltschmerz*, the last stand of tonality betrayed and inundated by the chromaticism which gave it birth.

Glenn Gould

You are the Foreign Minister of your own dreamworld. Wiesengrund-Adorno to Berg

I gladly take the chance of paying tribute to the work and creation of my pupil and friend Alban Berg. For he and our mutual friend, his fellow-pupil Anton von Webern, were after all the most powerful confirmation of my effect as a teacher, and these are after all the two who in times of the severest artistic distress gave me support so firm, so reliable, so full of affection, that nothing better is to be found in this world.

But anyone who would like to believe that I am here only repaying gratitude and friendship by these words of recognition must not forget that I can read a score; from certain scores which at that time struck all other musicians as hieroglyphics I could gain a living image of the ideas there, and arrive at an impression of this talent. And it is my pride that the certainty of this impression, and its correctness, put me in a position to guide these high gifts whither they had to go: to the most wonderful flowering of their individuality, to complete independence. But the necessary character - that, he himself provided; it was there from the very first lesson. And he will retain it to his last hour.

I would most like to say: 'Friendship above all!'

But I have to say: 'Art above all!'

Here again I need not hesitate; here the demands of friendship and of art are one; here the friend can exuberantly praise the artist, and the artist the friend. Indeed, both have to, if they are to be just.

And I want to be just: hail, Alban Berg! Arnold Schoenberg April 10, 1930



Alban Berg with his portrait by Arnold Schoenberg.

Please join us after the concert for complimentary drinks, and tortes by Gabriele.

next concert

Monday, 27 June 8pm Pilgrim Church

The Firm

presents

The Settembrini Trio

BERG Adagio
CHAPMAN SMITH Wie aus der Ferne
KOTLOWY New work
GRANT 11 broken dances
ERNST LUDWIG LEITNER Tempus Edax Rerum
BERG Four Pieces, Op.5

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