

THE FIRM

2019

CONCERT 4

The Firm's annual concert seasons
are conceived, programmed, curated and directed by
composers Quentin Grant and Raymond Chapman Smith.

The Firm was founded in 1996.

This is our 125th concert.

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experienced.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal

Elder Hall provides wheelchair access via the side (eastern) doors.

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Bonython hall.

NOV 25th 2019

The Firm

presents

Konstantin Shamray, piano

Anne Cawrse

Introduction, Theme and Variations

- TINY INTERVAL -

Ludwig van Beethoven

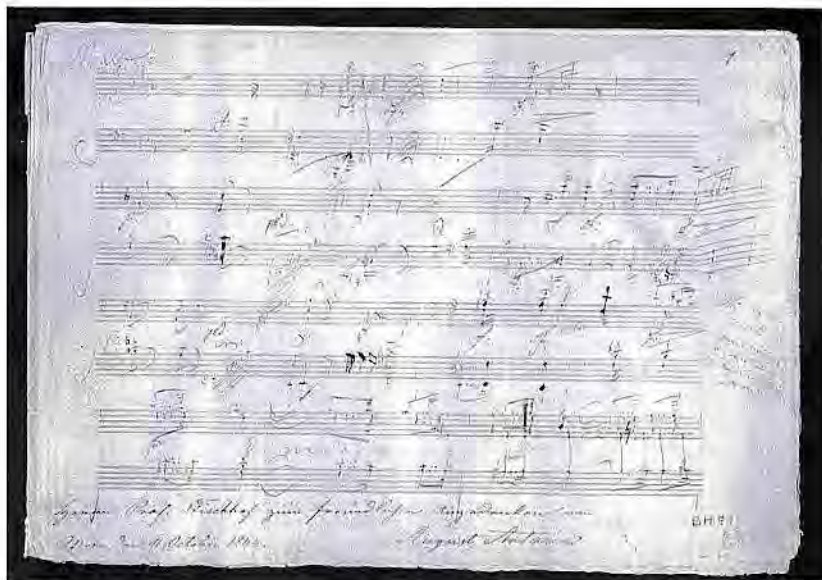
33 Variations on a waltz by Anton Diabelli in C
'Diabelli Variations' Op 120 (1819-23)

Anne Cawrse

Introduction, Theme and Variations

I wrote this piece for the Firm in 2004, when they had Beethoven as their 'Composer-in-Residence'.

It is a collection of six variations, imitating the loose variation style and techniques used by Beethoven in the final movement of his Sonata in C minor, Op.111. The Introduction serves as a virtuosic establishment of key (an unstable C natural minor/Phrygian) and the motivic basis for the theme. Of particular interest to me in Beethoven's sonata are his fascination with trills and double dotted rhythms, and his commitment to the opening key until the penultimate variation joyously modulates to the major. These ideas are all exploited as developmental and variation techniques throughout my piece, which I hope to act as a stimulation for a musical and emotional journey, as well as an exercise in variation technique, and a workout for the pianist!



Ludwig van Beethoven

33 Variations on a waltz by Anton Diabelli in C 'Diabelli Variations' Op 120 (1819-23)

Theme: Vivace –

Variation 1: Alla marcia maestoso

Variation 2: Poco allegro

Variation 3: L'istesso tempo

Variation 4: Un poco più vivace

Variation 5: Allegro vivace

Variation 6: Allegro ma non troppo e serio

Variation 7: Un poco più allegro

Variation 8: Poco vivace

Variation 9: Allegro pesante e risoluto

Variation 10: Presto

Variation 11: Allegretto

Variation 12: Un poco più moto

Variation 13: Vivace

Variation 14: Grave e maestoso

Variation 15: Presto scherzando

Variation 16: Allegro

Variation 17: Allegro

Variation 18: Poco moderato

Variation 19: Presto

Variation 20: Andante

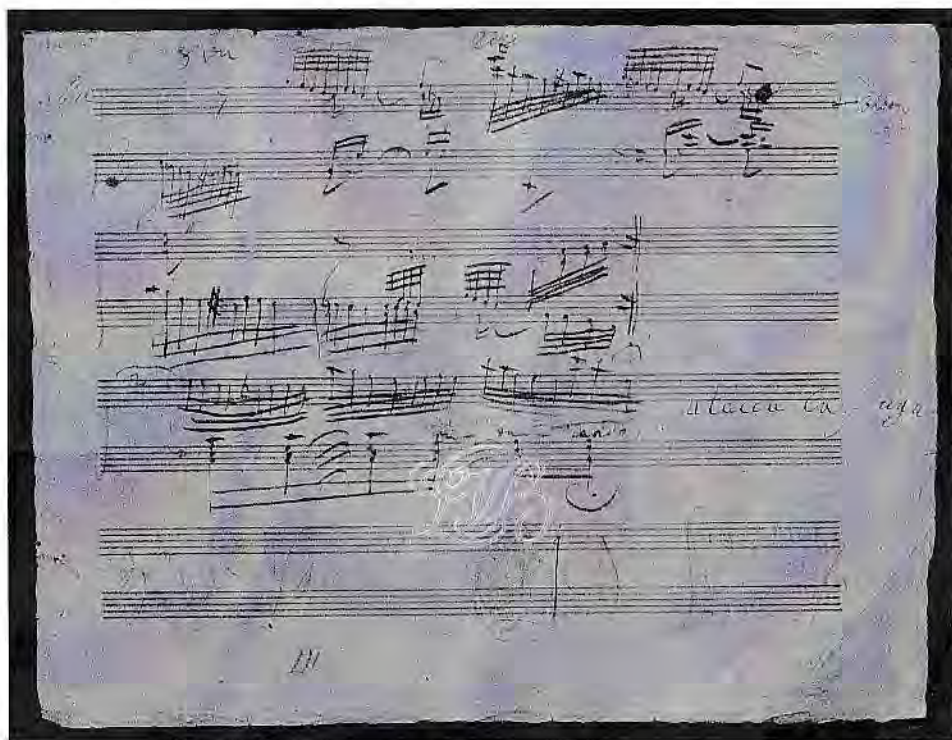
Variation 21: Allegro con brio – Meno allegro – Tempo primo

Variation 22: Allegro molto, alla 'Notte e giorno faticar' di Mozart

Variation 23: Allegro assai

Variation 24: Fughetta: Andante

- Variation 25: Allegro
- Variation 26: Piacevole
- Variation 27: Vivace
- Variation 28: Allegro
- Variation 29: Adagio ma non troppo
- Variation 30: Andante, sempre cantabile
- Variation 31: Largo, molto espressivo
- Variation 32: Fuga: Allegro
- Variation 33: Tempo di Menuetto moderato



There is no better example of a great musical work rooted in commonplace experience than Beethoven's 'Diabelli' Variations. Hans von Bülow dubbed the thirty-three variations 'a microcosm of Beethoven's art', and Alfred Brendel has described them as 'the greatest of all piano works'. Yet this enormous musical edifice was built from a trivial waltz that the composer originally dismissed as 'a cobbler's patch' on account of its mechanical sequences! In order to appreciate the Variations fully we should savour their paradoxical origins. Not only did Beethoven ennoble Diabelli's theme by transforming it into a variety of shapes and characters, but he also subjected it to critique, poking fun at its primitive aspects. The 'Diabelli' Variations create a uniquely coherent design of vast dimensions, filling nearly an hour in performance time.

The genesis of the work reaches back to 1819 when the Viennese music publisher Anton Diabelli circulated a waltz of his own invention to fifty composers, each of whom was requested to contribute a variation to a collective endeavour. The project was designed to generate publicity for Diabelli's firm. The collaborative volume, with variations from Carl Czerny, Franz Schubert, and the young Franz Liszt among many others, was published independently from Beethoven's gigantic set. Despite Beethoven having expressed an initial distaste for it, the theme nevertheless triggered a creative brainstorm. Before long he had conceived not one, but twenty-three variations, ten fewer than the final number. The study of Beethoven's manuscripts from 1819 has cast new light on the structure and import of the piece. After having set it aside for several years, he expanded his draft from within in 1823, adding variations 1, 2, 15, 23 to 26, 28, 29 and 31 to the pre-established order, while greatly elaborating the conclusion.

During the process of composition, Beethoven often de-emphasized or obliterated the most obvious similarities between the variations in his sketches, while imparting to each finished variation a sharply defined individuality of character. The waltz is treated as a reservoir of unrealized possibilities out of which the variations generate an almost encyclopaedic range of contexts. The psychological complexity of the 'Diabelli' Variations arises above all from this tension between the commonplace theme as point of departure and the seemingly unlimited horizon of the variations. The range of pulse, movement, texture and sonority explored here is so prodigious as to fully justify von Bülow's description of Op 120 as 'a microcosm of Beethoven's art'.

No other piece by Beethoven is so rich in allusion, humour and parody. Trivial or repetitious features of the waltz, such as the C major chords repeated tenfold with a crescendo in the right hand in the opening bars, can be mercilessly exaggerated as in Variation 21, or dissolved into silence as in Variation 13. Inconspicuous elements of the theme, such as the ornamental turn heard at the outset, can assume astonishing importance, as in Variations 9, 11 and 12 which are based throughout on this turn. Several variations allude to Mozart, Bach and other composers. The most obvious of these is the reference, in the unison octaves of Variation 22, to 'Notte e giorno faticar' from the beginning of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. This allusion is brilliant not only through the musical affinity of the themes – which share, for example, the same descending fourth and fifth – but through the reference to Mozart's *Leporello*. Beethoven's relationship to his theme, like *Leporello's* to his master, is critical but faithful, inasmuch as he thoroughly exploits its motivic components. And like *Leporello*, the variations after this point gain the capacity for disguise. Variation 23 is an étude-like parody of pianistic virtuosity alluding to the *Pianoforte-*

Method by J B Cramer, whereas Variation 24, the *Fughetta*, shows an affinity in its intensely sublimated atmosphere to some organ pieces from the third part of the *Clavierübung* by Bach.

The work as a whole consists of one large form with three distinct regions. The opening variations generally remain close to the basic attributes of the theme (such as its metre) but show gradually increasing freedom, which at last turns into dissociation with Beethoven's juxtaposition of two contrasting canonic variations (Nos 19 and 20), whereas in No 21 the structural parts of each variation half are themselves placed into opposition. In the opening bars of Variation 21, a grotesque exaggeration of the turns and repeated chords from the waltz annihilates the inward stillness of Variation 20; this most shocking contrast is placed at the temporal mid-point of the entire cycle. The Janus face of No 21 marks the extreme limit of the progression toward dissociation that had begun about ten variations before.

A sense of larger formal coherence is created in part through unusually direct reference to the melodic shape of the original waltz in its original register in three of the variations inserted in 1823 – Nos 1, 15 and 25. Variation 1 is an impressive but somewhat stilted march in which the bass initially spells out the descending fourth from the waltz, creating accented clashes with the treble; Variation 15 is a miniature (the shortest of all thirty-three variations) with a static and peculiar harmonic plan, and its capricious two-octave skip in the bass in the second half has provoked 'correction' from puzzled editors. By parodying the theme directly in these variations, with its melodic contours intact, Beethoven made the waltz itself into an indispensable foundation for the overall musical progression. And if the elusive caricature embodied in Variation 15 calls forth the

theme again as a kind of hallucination at the very moment when drastic, bewildering contrasts have gained the upper hand, this allusion to the outset of the work is broadened in the following pair of march variations, Nos 16 and 17, which are counterpoised to Variation 1 (the march more stilted in character).

In Variation 25 the waltz is reincarnated as a humorous German dance, but this image is gradually obliterated in the interconnected series of fast variations culminating in No 28, in which harsh dissonances dominate every strong beat throughout. This series of variations also marks the beginning of a consolidation in the form of the whole.



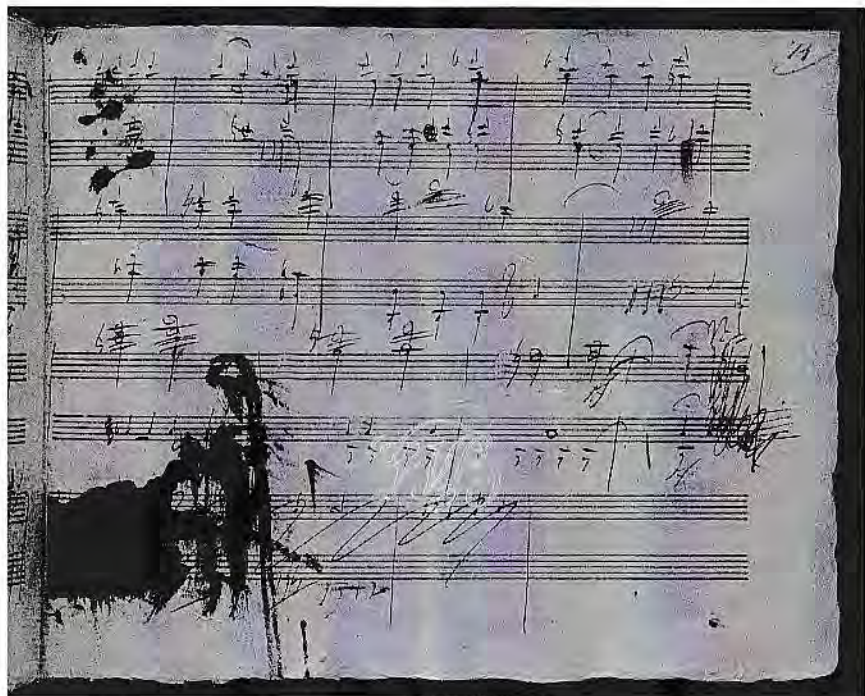
The process of rhythmic intensification from No 25 to No 28 offers special challenges to performers. Beethoven spreads the sixteenth-note motion drawn from the bass of the waltz parody (No 25) over all the pitch registers in the ensuing

variation (No 26). The legato phrasing embraces paired groups of three sixteenths each, suggesting a metre of 6/16, but Beethoven retains the 3/8 metre (as well as the basic tempo) of No 25. The rhythmic impulses of the triple metre thus fall on the second and fourth sixteenths of each group of six notes, with the phrasing extended over the bar-lines throughout. This shifting pattern of metrical impulses imparts dynamic tension to the figuration, enhancing the upbeat character of the first half of each phrase. Then, in No 27, Diabelli's 'cobbler's patch' sequences of a rising semitone and a third become the basis for the figuration in rhythmic diminution, expressed in rapid triplet sixteenth-notes. Diabelli's motif is written in steady quarter-notes, but Beethoven compresses his motivic variant so radically that it appears no fewer than twenty-four times in the opening eight bars of the variation! The dissonant semitone relation derived from the theme infuses the music with an intense energy, generating a frenzied chain of imitative motivic entries driving into the highest register in the second half of the variation. This climactic passage is Beethoven's ultimate parody of the 'cobbler's patch' sequences from the waltz.

Variation 28 then carries Beethoven's rhythmic development to yet another stage, as the process of foreshortening motivates a compression of the metre to shorter bars of 2/4 time, while reducing the basic content of the music to the dissonant semitone – now expressed in the multiple contrapuntal voices embodied in the accented diminished-seventh and augmented-sixth chords.

After Variation 28 we enter a transfigured realm in which Diabelli's waltz and the world it represents seem to be left behind. A group of three slow variations in the minor culminates in Variation 31, an elaborate aria reminiscent of the decorated minor variation of Bach's 'Goldberg' set, but also foreshadowing the style of Chopin. The energetic fugue

in E flat that follows is initially Handelian in character; its second part builds to a tremendous climax with three subjects combined simultaneously before the fugue dissipates into a powerful dissonant chord. An impressive transition leads to C major and to the final and most subtle variation of all: a Mozartian minuet whose elaboration through rhythmic means leads, in the coda, to an ethereal texture unmistakably reminiscent of the fourth variation of the Arietta movement from Beethoven's own last sonata, Op 111, composed in 1822. The many parallels between Op 111 and the final Diabelli variation are structural in nature and extend to thematic proportions and the use of an analogous series of rhythmic diminutions leading, in each case, to the suspended, ethereal texture; but the most obvious similarity surfaces in the concluding passages outlining the descending fourth C-G, so crucial in both works.



Herein lies the final surprise: the Arietta movement, itself influenced by the Diabelli project, became in turn Beethoven's model for the last of the 'Diabelli' Variations. The end of the series of allusions thus became a self-reference, a final point of orientation within a work of art whose vast scope ranges from ironic caricature to sublime transformation of the commonplace waltz.



Beethoven



Diabelli

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Next concert: December 9th

Bethany Hill, soprano
Yundi Yuan, piano
Mitch Berik, clarinet
James Rawley, guitar

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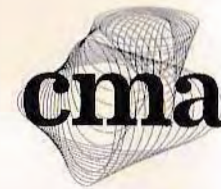
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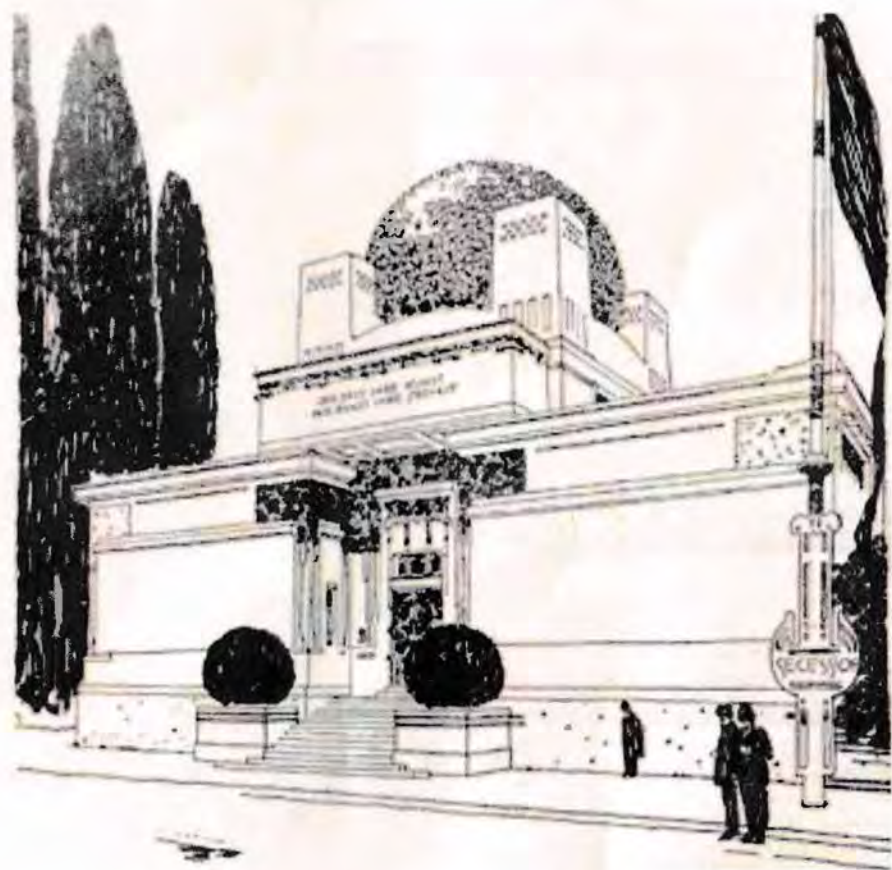
Elder Hall

Martin Victory

All the Firm musicians

The Australia Council





Pavillion Secession, Vienna, built 1897

“To every age its art, to every art its freedom”

This was the motto of the Vienna Secession, the Firm’s Movement-in-Residence for 2019 which, however obliquely, will be referenced throughout our programming for the year.