

Variations on a Theme of Haydn in the summer of 1873, while at the Starnberger See near Munich; during the same months, he completed the String Quartets, Op. 51. The piano variations, Op. 56b, were published first, in 1873 by Simrock in Berlin; the orchestral setting in 1874, also by Simrock.

Commonly referred to as the "St. Anthony" variations, the piece is based on a theme from the first of a set of six Divertimenti (Feldparthien) -- for many years thought to be by Haydn, but now thought to be by Haydn's pupil, Ignace Pleyel -- the second movement of which is based on an old Burgenland (an Austrian state that abuts Hungary) chant entitled, "Chorale St. Anthony."

Brahms shatters the stately atmosphere of the theme with a pulsating horn passage in the first variation, in which the melodic aspect of the theme has all but disappeared. A great outburst from the strings accents the second variation, while the third returns to the character of the theme, if not the original rhythm and pitches. A climbing woodwind tune traces the general shape of the theme in the quiet fourth variation, while the fifth takes off at lightning speed, emphasizing the falling intervals in the original theme. Brass and winds initiate the martial sixth variation, in which the theme is easily recognized. The seventh variation has some of the character of a Strauss waltz, while slithering contrapuntal lines noodle their way through the eighth. The work closes with a passacaglia in which the theme, gently articulated at first by the woodwinds at the opening, returns with the force of the full orchestra. The repeated, five-measure bass line of the passacaglia is derived from the main theme; because the bass line provides the variation material in this last segment, what we have are variations on a variation of the original theme.

PIERRE MONTEUX
PARIS CONSERVATOIRE
STRAVINSKY



PETROUCHKA



PIERRE MONTEUX
LONDON SYMPHONY
BRAHMS

HAYDN VARIATIONS

Like the other two masterworks of Igor Stravinsky's early career, *The Firebird* and *The Rite of Spring*, *Petrushka* was written and produced in close collaboration with Serge Diaghilev, producer-director of the Ballet Russes. Stravinsky has written of how he wished to refresh himself after the enormously successful *Firebird* by composing a *Konzertstück* (concert piece) for piano and orchestra. Piano vs. orchestra turned out to be a more accurate description, as Stravinsky eventually conceived of the piano representing a puppet endowed with life and contending with trumpet blasts and other violence from the orchestra. He titled it *Petrushka* after, in his words, "the immortal and unhappy hero of every fair in all countries." When Diaghilev paid a visit to Stravinsky in the summer of 1910, he immediately perceived the dramatic possibilities of the work, and they agreed on a full-length ballet exploring *Petrushka's* adventures, tragedy and death at the Shrovetide Fair of St. Petersburg. Alexandre Benois, an associate of Diaghilev's and a devotee of Russian puppet theater from his youth, was employed to assist in realizing the scenario. In May 1911, the score was completed and dedicated to Benois, who was also listed as co-author of the scenario.

After a good deal of music in Scene I dedicated to showing the various patrons of the fair (Benois insisted that these be treated as real people, both in the score and in the choreography), *Petrushka* makes his entrance, eventually loosing the strings that had tied him to his master, the Showman. Scene II shows *Petrushka's* ill-fated attempts to woo the Ballerina, a fellow puppet. In Scene III, the Ballerina falls in love with another fellow puppet, the Blackamoor, much to *Petrushka's* dismay. The fair at large returns in Scene IV, setting the stage for *Petrushka's* death by the hands of the Blackamoor. Though the Showman assures the crowd that *Petrushka* is not really alive, *Petrushka's* ghost comes back to mock everyone who was fooled.

Stravinsky's score for *Petrushka* is brilliant, charming and absorbing, one of the most magical scores in all the classical literature. Stravinsky borrowed folk tunes to illustrate the crowd scenes, used bitonal chords to signify *Petrushka's* dual existence as puppet and living being, wrote his own seductive melodies, and stitched it all together seamlessly with a genius for dramatization and flair for orchestration that could only come from Stravinsky. The opening of the fourth scene, to take just one example, is astonishing: swirling strings that seem to musically depict light, wind melodies soaring over the strings, and finally a full melody, exuberant and blissful, blossoming on the strings. *Petrushka* is filled with such moments. In 1947, Stravinsky revised the score with an eye towards concert performance, paring down the instrumentation, changing metronome markings and making other small revisions. Either version is more than adequate to get to know this marvelous work.

In Brahms' earliest sets of variations, especially those of Op. 9, the melody is of primary importance. His later studies of Beethoven, however, led to a new variation approach, in which he adhered instead to a theme's basic phrase structure and harmonic pattern. As with the *Händel Variations*, Op. 24, the eight *Variations on a Theme of Haydn*, Op. 56a, are bound by a consistent harmonic motion; at times, this is the only perceptible remnant of the original theme. Since its first performance in Vienna, on November 2, 1873, this has been among Brahms' most popular compositions -- a sprawling masterwork based on the simplest of thematic germs, very much in the tradition of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* and Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*.

Brahms composed both the orchestral and two-piano versions of the

PIERRE MONTEUX
PARIS CONSERVATOIRE
STRAVINSKY

PETROUCHKA

PIERRE MONTEUX
LONDON SYMPHONY

BRAHMS
HAYDN VARIATIONS

Petrushka (Ballet, 1911)

1 1st Tableau - The Shrovetide Fair 9:50

2 2nd Tableau - In Petrushka's Room 4:07

3 3rd Tableau - In The Moor's Room 7:30

4 4th Tableau - The Shrovetide Fair (Evening) 13:06

5 Brahms Variations On A Theme Of Haydn 16:56

Stravinsky: Recorded 1957 in France with Orchestre De La Société Des Concerts Du Conservatoire by Decca for RCA

Brahms: Recorded by Decca for RCA 24-25 Jun 1958 at Kingsway Hal

Producer: James Walker Engineer: Kenneth Wilkinson



For more info e-mail us:
admin@highdeftapetransfers.com
or visit our website:
www.highdeftapetransfers.com