

TRANSCRIPTIONS OF BACH'S VIOLIN WORKS BY BUSONI AND
RACHMANINOFF: CASE STUDIES IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY BACH
REVIVAL IN ITALIAN AND RUSSIAN COMPOSITIONAL SCHOOLS

by

Xiaoqian Sun

(Under the Direction of Liza Stepanova)

ABSTRACT

This document explores transcriptions of Johann Sebastian Bach's violin works by Ferruccio Busoni and Sergei Rachmaninoff, focusing on their contributions to the early 20th-century Bach revival within the Italian and Russian compositional schools. The study examines Busoni's transcription of Bach's Chaconne from Violin Partita No. 2 in D minor (BWV 1004) and Rachmaninoff's transcription of the Prelude and Gavotte from Violin Partita No. 3 in E major (BWV 1006). By comparing the two composer-pianists, this research shows how they took different approaches to adapting Bach's music for the piano, focusing on their different aesthetic tastes, compositional techniques, and interpretative decisions. Busoni's approach reflects the Italian school's dramatic and expressive style. In contrast, Rachmaninoff's transcription embodies the Russian school's polyphonic clarity and refined elegance. The study aims to provide a valuable resource for pianists, scholars, and educators interested in the intersection of Baroque and Romantic musical traditions.

INDEX WORDS: Bach transcriptions, Ferruccio Busoni, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Chaconne,
BWV 1004, Violin Partita No. 3, Bach revival, polyphony, piano transcriptions.

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XIAOQIAN SUN

B.M., Shanghai Conservatory of Music, China, 2016

M.M., The New School-Mannes School of Music, The United States, 2021

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by

XIAOQIAN SUN

Major Professor: Liza Stepanova

Committee: Liza Stepanova
Evgeny Rivkin
Richard Lee

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott

Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School

The University of Georgia

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background: Bach Revival in the 19th Century

In our time, Johann Sebastian Bach's compositions are widely considered to be exemplary models of form, harmony, and counterpoint, appealing to scholars, musicians, and composers alike. However, in Bach's own day, especially in his later years, his music came to be seen as old-fashioned, and the public's interest in his compositions gradually disappeared during the second part of the 18th century, when he was primarily remembered as an organist and a master of counterpoint—even though some of his acolytes, like Baron von Swieten, treasured his manuscripts, sharing them with Mozart, among others).¹ The strongest impetus for a Bach revival was provided by the Romantic movement in the first half of the 19th century, which admired the past. Some Bach followers, especially in Berlin, began to study his manuscripts and eventually presented historical concerts of Bach's music.² Interest in Bach grew steadily and reached a high point in 1829 when Felix Mendelssohn conducted the *St. Matthew Passion*, BWV 244. This concert was a milestone in music history and became “the decisive turning point in Bach's reputation.”³ After these early performances, Bach gradually entered the world stage.

At the same time, the piano rose in prominence as a concert and home instrument. In the

¹ Donald Mintz, “Some Aspects of the Revival of Bach”, *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol.40, No.2 (Apr. 1954): 201-221, accessed October 24, 2024, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/739671>.

² Nicholas Temperley and Peter Wollny, "Bach Revival," *Grove Music Online*, accessed 7 Jan. 2025,

<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000001708>.

³ *Ibid.*

early 19th century, Bach was seen primarily as a composer of instrumental music⁴ (a perception that took decades to be corrected), and his keyboard music was published early on. The popular online repository of out-of-print scores, IMSLP, features a publication of the first volume of the *Well-tempered Clavier* from 1800 by Hans Georg Nägeli. The appetite for new keyboard music grew with the piano's rising prominence, and soon, the public was not satisfied with the existing new repertoire, so transcriptions became a great option for musicians.⁵ Composers started to transcribe organ, string, chamber, orchestral, and even choral works for piano. Thus, prompted by the Bach revival movement and the need to expand the piano repertoires due to the high public demand, countless piano editions, arrangements, and transcriptions of Bach's music became a staple of many pianists' repertoires.⁶

Bach's vocal and string pieces have often been adapted by other composers, giving them a chance to engage with and create new interpretations of his music. Among these, Bach's six sonatas and partitas for solo violin (BWV 1001–1006) stand out as some of the most frequently transcribed pieces, adapted for many instruments from the piano to full orchestra. They are some of the most popular and important works in the violin repertoire and are complicated polyphonic works with implied counterpoint and harmonies, which offer many possibilities for expansion and reinterpretation. The popularity and complexity are probably some of the main reasons for their appeal to transcribers. By transcribing these works, composers can show their mastery of compositional skills by highlighting hidden layers of counterpoint and enhancing harmonic richness. Meanwhile, composers also bring their own character and style to

⁴ Nicholas Temperley and Peter Wollny, "Bach Revival".

⁵ Glen Blaine Carruthers, "Bach and the Piano: editions, arrangements, and Transcriptions from Czerny to Rachmaninoff" (PhD Diss., The University of Victoria, 1986), p.71-79.

⁶ Carruthers, "Bach and the Piano: editions, arrangements, and Transcriptions from Czerny to Rachmaninoff," p. 9-10.

transcriptions, transforming existing works into pieces that reflect both respect for the original and personal interpretation. Thus, transcriptions are not only a tribute to Bach but also a vehicle for the transcriber's own compositional creativity and pianistic skills.

Project description and program

This project, in the form of a lecture–recital, will focus on two prominent composers active in the early 20th century who follow in the footsteps of their 19th-century predecessors: Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924) and Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943). Both made significant contributions to the repertoire of Bach transcriptions, especially transcriptions of works based on Bach's violin partitas, and their backgrounds and works will be explored in later chapters.

In my lecture–recital with accompanying paper I intend to perform the following focal works, one by each composer:

- Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924): Chaconne from Johann Sebastian Bach's Violin Partita No.2 in D minor, BWV 1004.
- Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943): Prelude and Gavotte from Johann Sebastian Bach's Violin Partita No.3 in E major, BWV 1006.

Rationale

As I will demonstrate in my literature review, there is first a noticeable imbalance in the number of studies conducted about the Rachmaninoff transcription compared to the Busoni. While the Bach–Busoni Chaconne has been analyzed from many different angles, Rachmaninoff's work, as well as transcriptions of Bach by other Russian composers, have been comparatively less studied, and I argue that they are still insufficiently known. My paper aims to add to the research on this topic.

Secondly, to my knowledge, there is not a study available that would look at the Busoni and the Rachmaninoff side-by-side. Among many available transcriptions of various genres of Bach's music for a multitude of instruments, these two works stand out as particularly related, both initially written for solo violin and transcribed for piano by great composer-pianists of the first half of the 20th century. At the same time, Busoni's Chaconne and Rachmaninoff's Transcription of *Violin Partita No.3* represent two different approaches in compositional goals, texture, treatment of the original material, and other aspects. Comparing these two approaches provides valuable insight into what composers prioritize as they translate Bach's music from one medium to another, and a discussion of the differences in their approaches helps clarify interpretative decisions for both works.

Lastly, it should be of interest to performers and scholars alike to consider the origins and aesthetic goals of Bach revival movements in different parts of Europe.

Purpose

This lecture-recital is primarily aimed at performers and teachers of these works. Through analysis and comparative discussion, I highlight musical and pianistic issues, especially those stemming from the origins of these pieces in string writing. I hope that the comparative analysis between the two composers, which is not commonly found in research about these works that tend to treat them separately, is enlightening to professional musicians.

Literature Review

The following brief overview of literature relevant to my studies can be divided into several categories: biographical sources for Busoni and Rachmaninoff, musical analysis of Busoni's and Rachmaninoff's compositional techniques, and the composers' own writings and

recordings as primary sources.

Sources for the two composers include books by Larry Sitsky (1986)⁷, Edward J. Dent (1933)⁸, Max Harrison (2005)⁹, and Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda (1957)¹⁰. For the study of Busoni, his own writings about music are of great value, including *The Essence of Music*¹¹, *Sketch of A New Esthetic of Music*¹², and *Letter to His Wife*¹³. These writings illuminate Busoni's attitude toward composing, transcription, his view on other composers, and more. The musical analysis of Busoni's Chaconne can be found in numerous books, dissertations, and journal articles. For example, *The Bach Chaconne for Solo Violin* (1985)¹⁴ surveys the history of transcriptions of the Chaconne and offers a detailed analysis of the original work. Marina Fabrikant's dissertation¹⁵ is dedicated entirely to Busoni's Chaconne. Paul Banks's unpublished presentation¹⁶ focuses on a comparison of Busoni's project to earlier transcriptions by Schumann, Brahms, Raff, and others and shows how Busoni synthesized those earlier efforts. My discussion of Rachmaninoff's transcription will build upon two helpful dissertations: "The Keyboard Style of Sergei Rachmaninoff as Seen through His Transcriptions for Piano Solo (1993)",¹⁷ and "Reconciling the Analyst and the Performer: Interpreting Polyphony in Russian/ Soviet Piano Transcriptions of J.S. Bach's Works (2019)."¹⁸Nadezhda

⁷ Larry Sitsky, *Busoni and The Piano: The Works, the Writings, and the recordings* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986).

⁸ Edward J. Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni: A Biography* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1974)

⁹ Max Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: life, works, recordings* (London: Continuum, 2005)

¹⁰ Sergei Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A life time in Music*, (New York: New York University Press, 1956), accessed September 9, 2024, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015007892360&seq=9>.

¹¹ Ferruccio Busoni, *The Essence of Music and Other Paper*, trans. Rosamond Ley (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957).

¹² Ferruccio Busoni, *Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music*, trans. Dr. Th. Baker, (New York: G. Schirmer, 1911).

¹³ Ferruccio Busoni, *Letter to His Wife*, trans. Rosamond Ley (London: Edward Arnold & Co), accessed September 10, 2024, <https://www.rodioni.ch/busoni/bibliotechina/lettere/gerdaEN/gerdaEN1.html>.

¹⁴ Georg Feder, *The Bach Chaconne for Solo Violin*, ed. Jon F. Eiche (American String Teachers Association: 1985)

¹⁵ Marina Fabrikant, "Bach-Busoni Chaconne: A Piano Transcription Analysis" (DMA Diss., University of Nebraska, 2006).

¹⁶ Paul Banks, "Busoni and Bach's Chaconne in the nineteenth century," accessed September 5, 2024. <http://pwb101.me.uk/busoni-and-bachs-chaconne-in-the-nineteenth-century/>.

¹⁷ Jonathan F Sokasits, "The Keyboard Style of Sergei Rachmaninoff as seen through His Transcriptions for Piano Solo" (PhD Diss., The University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1993), accessed September 10, 2024, <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/keyboard-style-sergei-rachmaninoff-as-seen/docview/304069596/se-2>.

¹⁸ Nadezhda Koudasheva, "Reconciling the analyst and the performer: Interpreting polyphony in Russian/ Soviet piano transcriptions of J.S. Bach's works"(DMA Diss., The University of Sydney, 2019).

Koudasheva's research in the latter dissertation also provides some historical context for Rachmaninoff's interest in Bach and informs a comparison between Russian and Italian schools and their interest in Bach.

CHAPTER II

FERRUCCIO BUSONI AND HIS TRANSCRIPTIONS

Biography

Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924) was an influential composer, pianist, transcriber, and a central figure among composers of the Italian school who were interested in Bach’s works. He was born in Italy but lived in Germany for most of his creative life. Larry Sitsky, a Busoni expert, writes about this dual heritage that while Busoni admired the German school’s structure and organization, he retained a “Latin love of melody.”¹⁹ Sitsky asserts that Busoni’s early works reflected German traditions and were dedicated to Brahms, but his later music put more emphasis on melody and layered harmonies, showing a deeper link to his Italian background.²⁰ As a virtuosic pianist and composer, many great predecessors deeply influenced Busoni’s development: Liszt, Brahms, Beethoven, Mozart, Wagner, Bach, and others. Of his many influences, Bach was the most enduring and favorite composer since childhood, and this love lasted throughout Busoni’s life. Busoni became acquainted with the works of J. S. Bach at an early age when he was studying piano under his father. Scholar Edward J. Dent translates Busoni’s account of his early memory of Bach (taken from the epilogue of Busoni’s edition of Bach’s keyboard works) in his book *Ferruccio Busoni: A Biography*:

I have to thank my father for the good fortune that he kept me strictly to the study of Bach in my childhood. He educated me in this way to be a “German” musician and

¹⁹ Larry Sitsky, *Busoni and The Piano: The Works, the Writings, and the Recordings* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

showed me the path which I never entirely deserted, though at the same time I never cast off the Latin qualities given to me by nature.²¹

This epilogue, written in August 1923 during the last year of Busoni's life (he died on July 27, 1924), is evidence of his enduring commitment to Bach's work. Busoni was drawn to contrapuntal thinking; he constantly returned to Bach's works and rediscovered a rich source of ideas in him.²² Thus, he completed a large number of projects that are related to Bach. Scholar Larry Sitsky divided Busoni's works into several categories:²³ (1) transcriptions (e.g., of Bach's Choral Preludes for the organ, the organ Toccata and Fugue in D minor, and a lot of violin pieces); (2) editions (notably, of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* from a complete edition of Bach's keyboard works in twenty-five volumes, or of the Fantasy and Fugue in A minor from a seven-volume Busoni-Bach Collected Edition); and (3) original compositions inspired by Bach's works (including Sonatinas and *Fantasia Contrappuntistica*).

Busoni's Transcription of Bach's Chaconne, Overview

Among Busoni's transcriptions of Bach's works, Chaconne's popularity is reflected in the many recordings and analyses. Busoni transcribed the Chaconne in 1893 and dedicated it to Eugen d'Albert, the Scottish-born pianist and composer. However, d'Albert did not like the transcription and expressed his negative opinion in a letter on March 30, 1894: "I think the Chaconne won't tolerate an arrangement for two hands. In my opinion, the only solution is to be found in the Brahms arrangement for the left hand alone. Any other adaptation must be necessarily too modern."²⁴ Busoni defended the "modernizing" approach of transcribing

²¹ Ferruccio Busoni, "Zeitgemässe Nachwort zu der Bach-Ausgabe von Ferruccio Busoni," *Der Bar Yearbook* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1923), translated by Edward Dent in *Ferruccio Busoni: A Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 17–18.

²² Larry Sitsky, "Busoni and Other Composers," *Busoni and The Piano: The Works, the Writings, and the recordings* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 181.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 177–206.

²⁴ As quoted in Paul Banks, "Busoni and Bach's Chaconne in the Nineteenth Century," accessed February 25th, 2025, https://pwb101.me.uk/busoni-and-bachs-chaconne-in-the-nineteenth-century/#_ftn2.

Bach's works in line with late-Romantic aesthetic in the introduction to his edition of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* by Bach:

“Outsoaring his time by generations, [Bach's] thoughts and feelings reached proportions for whose expression the means then at command were inadequate. This alone can explain the fact, that the broader arrangement, the "modernizing", of certain of his works (by Liszt, Tausig, and others) does not violate the "Bach style" - indeed, rather seems to bring it to full perfection; - it explains how ventures like that undertaken by Raff; for instance, with the Chaconne are possible without degenerating into caricature.”²⁵

Scholar Glen Blaine Carruthers points out that Busoni's approach to transcription was deeply rooted in his philosophical views on music.²⁶ Busoni believed that transcription had become an independent artwork, no matter whether the starting point of composition was original or unoriginal;²⁷ the notation is itself the transcription of an abstract idea.²⁸ It was also the reason for his bold treatment of Bach's music. Therefore, his transcriptions went far beyond simple adaptations and instead represented a new interpretation of the works for a modern instrument. Even though numerous other composers had transcribed the Chaconne, including Carl Debrois van Bruyck (1828–1902),²⁹ Joachim Raff (1822–1882),³⁰ Johannes Brahms, and others, Busoni's version is widely considered to be the highest achievement and culmination of the history of piano transcriptions of the Chaconne.³¹

Transcribing Bach in the Italian Tradition: Other Composers and Their Contributions

Busoni's interpretation of Bach also represents the musical aesthetic of several other composers of the Romantic period. Busoni himself was greatly influenced by Liszt who produced some of the most successful Bach transcriptions for piano earlier in the century.

²⁵ Ferruccio Busoni, "Introduction," *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (New York: G. Schirmer, INC., 1894), p.1.

²⁶ Carruthers, "Bach and the Piano: editions, arrangements, and Transcriptions from Czerny to Rachmaninoff," p. 80.

²⁷ Ferruccio Busoni, *The Essence of Music and Other Paper*, trans. Rosamond Ley (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), p. 95.

²⁸ Ferruccio Busoni, *Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music*, trans. Dr. Th. Baker (New York: G. Schirmer, 1911), p. 18.

²⁹ Van Bruyck is a Viennese composer and author, and the first transcriber of the Chaconne for piano.

³⁰ Joachim Raff transcribed the Chaconne for a large orchestra in 1873 and dedicated it to the Philharmonic Society of New York. A major characteristic of this work is the polyphonic realization. The information on other transcriptions of the Chaconne is collected from the following book: Jon F. Eiche, *The Bach Chaconne for Solo Violin* (New York, NY: Alfred P. Knopf, 2010), p. 49-52.

³¹ Georg Feder, *The Bach Chaconne for Solo Violin*, ed. Jon F. Eiche (American String Teachers Association: 1985), p. 54.

Likewise, Karl Tausig (1841–1871), a Polish virtuoso pianist, composer, and a favorite pupil of Liszt, used similar techniques as both composers, creating a grand effect through octave doublings and a heightened dramatic expression.³² He transcribed the Toccata und Fugue for organ in D minor, BWV 565; Prelude, Fugue and Allegro for lute in E flat major, BWV 998; and many chorale preludes.³³

Several Italian composers, including Busoni's students, followed in Busoni's footsteps cementing an Italian tradition of Bach transcription. Egon Petri (1881–1962) was one of Busoni's most distinguished pupils and focused on the works of Johann Sebastian Bach, Franz Liszt, and Busoni, following his teacher's example.³⁴ Petri's piano transcriptions include Bach's Fantasia in C minor, BWV 906, the soprano aria "Schafe können sicher weiden" (Mvt. 9) from Cantata BWV 208 (along with several other transcriptions from Bach's vocal works), and Three Minuets, BWV 841–843. Alfredo Casella (1883–1947) was an Italian composer, pianist, and conductor. He helped to revive interest in early Italian music, published valuable editions of the keyboard works of J.S. Bach, and transcribed Bach's Chaconne for orchestra.³⁵ At the same time, he had a close relationship with Busoni.

In conclusion, Busoni's transcriptions of Bach's works are steeped in his unparalleled knowledge of Bach's music, having edited numerous volumes of Bach's works. They are also infused with the Romantic ethos of Liszt and Tausig, and it will be seen in the analysis how Busoni uses similar techniques to heighten the dramatic expression in Bach's work. At the same

³²Carruthers, "Bach and the Piano: editions, arrangements, and Transcriptions from Czerny to Rachmaninoff," 89-95.

³³ "Bach-Tausig: Piano Transcriptions of Bach's Works," *Bach Cantatas Website*, accessed October 24, 2024, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/NVD/PT-Tausig.htm>.

³⁴ Aryeh Oron, "Egon Petri (Piano, Arranger) - Short Biography," *Bach Cantatas Website*, accessed January 6, 2025, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Bio/Petri-Egon.htm>.

³⁵ The Editors of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Alfredo Casella: Neoclassical, Symphonies, Piano," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified July 20, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alfredo-Casella>.

time, his own creativity as a composer has made his best transcriptions, such as the Chaconne, a benchmark for younger composers, influencing younger generations of musicians, especially in Italy, to follow in his footsteps.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF BUSONI'S TRANSCRIPTION OF BACH'S WORKS: CHACONNE

Introduction: Busoni's Chaconne as an Organ Work

Earlier in his career, Busoni's best-known transcriptions were piano versions of Bach's organ works. He had a mature system and claimed that he intended to "reinforce and perfect" the Liszt-Tausig methods of organ transcription.³⁶ When we compare Busoni's and Liszt's organ transcriptions, we can find a lot in common, starting with the prominent use of piano octaves to imitate organ registration.

Among all of Busoni's transcriptions, the Chaconne occupies a special place because the original work is for solo violin, but Busoni chose to treat the piano transcription as if he was adapting an organ piece. Busoni himself has clearly stated that this was his intention, writing in his discussion of organ transcriptions as part of an appendix to his edition of *The Well-tempered Clavier*:

The editor [in several Preludes and Fugues]... has devoted much care to the registration... His piano transcription of Bach's Chaconne for violin may also be added to this series, inasmuch as the editor has, in both cases, treated the tonal effects from the standpoint of organ-tone. This procedure, which has been variously attacked; was justified, firstly, by the breadth of conception, which is not fully displayed by the violin; and, secondly, by the example set by Bach himself in the transcription for organ of his own violin-fugue in G minor.³⁷

This concept helps explain a lot of Busoni's compositional choices. When we compare Busoni's version with Bach's original, we can find that he is faithful to Bach in many respects.

³⁶ Ferruccio Busoni, *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (New York: G. Schirmer, INC., 1894), p.154

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.167.

Busoni didn't make many changes in harmony or structure. However, he doubled lines, changed registers, and filled out the texture to make it as rich and full as an organ piece.

Typically, when analyzing transcriptions, we just need to compare the original text and the adaptation. But given the special treatment of the Chaconne, it is more than a translation from violin to the piano. If we wish to explore Busoni's thoughts and writing techniques in this work, the best way is to think of Chaconne as having three versions: the original violin version, Busoni's imaginary version for the organ, and the piano transcription. This process of analysis allows us to deduce where many of the elements of the piece came from and why it was written the way it was. This section will analyze Chaconne by following methods that he frequently used in transcriptions of organ works, as Liszt and Tausig did.

Busoni's Realization of the "Imaginary Basso Continuo"

The first method we will explore is how Busoni realized implied bass lines in the Chaconne through organ-like pedal points and added texture in the transcription. Before we turn to examples from the Chaconne, let's see how Busoni handles transcription from a Bach organ work to the piano. In the first appendix to Busoni's edition of the first volume of the *Well-tempered Clavier*, Busoni takes the opportunity to discuss his attitude towards transcribing Bach's organ works for the piano. Busoni shares his belief that every musician should attempt to play organ works for the piano as the best way to get to know Bach. He further writes:

The piano possesses certain characteristics which give it an advantage over the organ: Rhythmic precision; emphatic exactness of entrance; greater impetuosity and distinctness in passage-playing; ability of modulating the touch: clearness in involved situations; rapidity, where required; a simpler mechanism, always ready, and everywhere at hand.³⁸

³⁸ Ferruccio Busoni, "First Appendix to Volume I," *The Well-Tempered Klavier* (New York: G. Schirmer, INC., 1894), p.154.

Busoni acknowledges that the piano does not have the same sound continuity as the organ. However, especially the bass notes of the piano can have significant sustain with the help of the pedal, and where that is not sufficient, note repetition can come to the rescue. Figure 3.1 shows this principle at work in Busoni's transcription of an organ work by Bach, Prelude and Fugue in D major, BWV 532. In the original version of measures 10-14, Bach uses a tied F-sharp as a pedal tone for five measures. In the transcription, Busoni doubles the F-sharp at the lower octave, which already provides greater sustain, and also repeats it every measure to achieve the continuous sound that this pedal tone would have on the organ.

The image displays a musical score for the Prelude and Fugue in D major, BWV 532, measures 10-14. The score is presented in two parts: the original manuscript (top) and Busoni's transcription (bottom). The original manuscript shows a tied F-sharp in the bass line for five measures. The transcription shows a double F-sharp in the lower octave, which is repeated every measure to achieve a continuous sound. The transcription includes performance instructions such as "sehr breit in Ton und Zeitmass", "legato veloce", and "lunga m. d.".

Figure 3.1 Bach (top) and Bach-Busoni (bottom), Prelude and Fugue, BWV 532, mm. 10–14.

Busoni used the same method in the Chaconne, but his adaptation had to go further due to special characteristics of the violin. Because the violin doesn't have the same ability to sustain multiple polyphonic levels, string crossings, rolls, and note repetition can be used to create the illusion of multiple voices. Furthermore, in many places in the original Chaconne, the bass line is implied through context rather than explicitly heard. The theorist Heinrich Schenker called the analysis of such implied lines "imaginary basso continuo." In transcribing this piece, Busoni embraced the opportunity to make these imaginary lines a reality using the sound world of the organ and the capabilities of the modern piano. In Figure 3.2 (top), an example from Bach's violin version, there are arguably two implied levels of sustained bass lines. There is a descending bass line D-C-B-flat that is only a 16th-note in the violin but implied to last the whole measure. Busoni goes further than that in his analysis of the passage through transcription. Busoni imagines a long pedal point D that is sustained for several measures even as the bass changes, similar to the long pedal points typical of the organ. In his transcription, Busoni repeats this imaginary pedal point in octaves on every downbeat for four measures to create a continuous, extended organ pedal point effect.

The image displays three musical excerpts. The top excerpt consists of two staves of music in G major. The first staff has a red circle around the note D4, with a red line extending to the label 'D'. The second staff has red circles around notes C4 and Bb4, with red lines extending to labels 'C' and 'Bb' respectively. A green line is drawn above the second staff, labeled 'D'. The middle excerpt is a piano score for measures 78-81, marked 'mf dolce espress.' and 'tranquillo'. It features two staves. A red label 'Two Manual Parts' is placed between the staves. Red circles are drawn around notes in both staves, with red lines extending to a label 'D: Imaginary Pedal Point (Pedal Part)'. The bottom excerpt is a piano score for measures 80-81, also featuring two staves. Red circles are drawn around notes in both staves, with red lines extending to a label 'D: Imaginary Pedal Point (Pedal Part)'.

Figure 3.2 Bach (top) and Busoni (bottom) Chaconne, mm. 78–81.

Coloristic Possibilities of the Organ and Their Realization at the Piano

The second important technique used by Busoni in the Chaconne involves doubling and tripling lines to simulate organ registration (stops) and the grand power of the instrument. Organ works were designed to be played in spacious church sanctuaries with high ceilings, and the acoustic effect of playing unaltered organ works on the piano is incomparable to the organ.³⁹ Additionally, organ possesses unique timbre capabilities through the process of registration, when different sets of pipes can be activated by pulling stops to double or triple played lines in different registers. Thus, if transcribers want to imitate both the varied timbres and the power

³⁹ Carruthers, “Bach and the Piano: editions, arrangements, and Transcriptions from Czerny to Rachmaninoff,” 93.

of an organ on the piano, octave doublings are an obvious way to make up for this disadvantage.⁴⁰ It is not surprising that a large number of octave doublings already appear in Liszt's and Tausig's transcriptions. However, Busoni takes this idea further than his predecessors. For example, in Liszt's six transcriptions of Bach's organ works, such as preludes and fugues, BWV 543 or BWV 545, Liszt doubles the pedal part and combines it with the manual part of the organ whereas we will see that Busoni uses several additional options in his transcriptions. A similar conclusion can be drawn from comparing Busoni's transcription of Bach's Toccata and Fuge in D minor, BWV 565 with Karl Tausig's.⁴¹ This comparison makes clear that Busoni was not simply trying to imitate the earlier composers but build and expand upon their ideas.

In his essay "On the Transcription of Bach's Organ-works for the Pianoforte," Busoni outlines all doubling possibilities of the organ, which can be used in piano transcription: simple doubling of Pedal-Part, simple doubling of Manual-Part, doubling in the Octave of all Pedal- and Manual-part, tripling in Octaves.⁴² Let's take a look at how these doubling techniques are used in the transcription of the Chaconne.

a) Doubling of Pedal and Manual Part

In general, doubling in the higher octave should be regarded as an imitation of a 4-foot stop; doubling in the lower octave should imitate an 8-foot stop. Because the octave sounded by a given pipe is inversely proportional to its length, a 4' stop speaks exactly one octave higher than an 8' stop on the organ. For example, in Busoni's Chaconne mm. 182-189 and mm. 198-

⁴⁰ Ibid, 40.

⁴¹ Sitsky, *Busoni and The Piano: The Works, the Writings, and the Recordings*, p.295-314

⁴² Ferruccio Busoni, "First Appendix to Volume I," *The Well-Tempered Klavier* (New York: G. Schirmer, INC.,1894), p.150-160.

205, Busoni doubles the top-line melody of Bach's version in the lower octave; this reflects Busoni's intention to imitate the sound of playing the melody with an 8' stop on the organ. At the same time, Busoni thinks as a pianist: sometimes, when he wants to obtain a perfect legato line in octaves, he makes sure to distribute the octaves between two hands.⁴³ In addition to this technique, Busoni sometimes uses other consonant intervals such as sixths, fifths, and fourths (together making up chord inversions in the prevailing harmony) instead of doubling the line at the octave. This not only produces organ-like harmonic effects but also creates variety in double-notes, avoiding monotony and making them more comfortable to execute pianistically. Figure 3.3 shows examples of the techniques discussed above: elaborate hand distributions as well as variety in doubling the lines not only with octaves in different registers but with other intervals within the harmony.



Figure 3.3 Busoni, Chaconne, mm. 54-55(top) and mm. 82(bottom).

⁴³ Ferruccio Busoni, *Ibid*, 158.

Octave doublings in the bass correspond to doubling of the pedal part of the imaginary organ version and are usually played by the left hand without redistributions. However, there are some creative variations for pianistic reasons. For example, sometimes Busoni alternates octaves and single notes. The single notes add faster energy to the passage while remaining pianistically comfortable, and occasional inconsistent octave doublings in the right hand may not be noticed acoustically in rapid passages as overtones from other notes and registers ring in pedal.⁴⁴

Busoni applied similar methods to his other organ transcriptions, such as the Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565. From his use of different kinds of octave doubling patterns and his own detailed explanations, we can see that he was interested in the timbral implications of organ registration, a subject to which he devoted a subheading in his essay about organ transcription,⁴⁵ and not simply to increase the volume and add virtuosity, as was perhaps Liszt's and Tausig's primary intention.⁴⁶

b) Tripling the passages

Not always satisfied with mere doubling of lines, sometimes Busoni triples or even quadruples them. In his essay on transcribing the organ works, Busoni writes that he would add a third octave when both hands in the manual part are already in parallel octaves. Sometimes, he omits the middle octave for pianistic reasons and because the combination of the highest and lowest notes can produce enough overtone effect, so that the omission of the middle octave does not result in an empty sound.⁴⁷ Figure 3.4 shows these methods as applied to the

⁴⁴ Busoni, *Ibid*, p.159.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.167-168.

⁴⁶ Carruthers, "Bach and the Piano: editions, arrangements, and Transcriptions from Czerny to Rachmaninoff," 95.

⁴⁷ Busoni, *The Well-Tempered Klavier*, p.159.

Chaconne, further broadening the range of color and fullness in the piece. In mm. 118-121, the arpeggios result in a quadrupling of the texture; in mm. 198-204, Busoni also uses sixteenth note arpeggios to add to the doubling already present in the chords.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Busoni's Chaconne. The top system, covering measures 118-119, is in the treble clef with a 3/4 time signature and a key signature of one flat. It features a complex arpeggiated texture with fingerings (2 5 1, 1 5 2) and dynamics like 'ten.' and 'marcato mit Bedeutung'. The bottom system, covering measures 198-200, is in the bass clef with a 3/4 time signature and a key signature of two sharps. It features sixteenth-note arpeggios with dynamics like 'non legato' and a handwritten note 'D major'.

Figure 3.4: Busoni, Chaconne, mm.118-119 (top) and mm.198-200 (bottom).

Effects Heightening Dramatic Characterization

In addition to simple octave doubling as used by other transcribers, Busoni shows great interest in color and register, with the overall goal of achieving greater musical drama bordering on exaggeration, which is also a characteristic of late Romanticism. Busoni describes the extreme care to be given to all decisions as follows:

The transcriber should consider whether darker or lighter, stronger or weaker, milder or sharper tone – effects are to be chosen; whether doublings are to be employed, and, if so, what kind; the position – high or low, dispersed or close; how the pedals are to be used; exactly what dynamic signs are needed. He should provide for diversity in his

combinations of doublings and style of writing, seeking variety and contrast.⁴⁸

A good example of Busoni's choices is found at the very opening of the Chaconne. Bach's original opening already projects grave majesty with its use of chords and dotted rhythms in the dark key of D minor. Busoni seeks to further intensify this feeling by making a number of decisions. First, he changes the register to an octave lower, making the sound heavier and more solemn but also enhancing the sense of unease and tension. Busoni also adds a full chord to Bach's single-note upbeat (see Figure 3.5).

Andante maestoso, ma non troppo lento
Feierlich gemessen, doch nicht schleppend

Figure 3.5 Bach (top) and Busoni (bottom), Chaconne, mm. 1-4.

Bach's choice of a single note for the upbeat gives the theme more direction and also projects with sufficient strength on the violin. However, when Busoni moved the theme to the heavier lower register, single notes were not adequate for the grand character he was envisioning. In addition to filling out chords, he also placed a *tenuto* marking on the upbeat to avoid any hint of lightness. Thus, Busoni makes the opening feel deeper and more dramatic by using the lower register and adding additional voices.⁴⁹

Busoni greatly expands the registral and dynamic range of the piece in both directions. In mm. 75-77 of Busoni's version (see Figure 3.6), he extends a cadenza-like diminished

⁴⁸ Ferruccio Busoni, *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (New York: G. Schirmer, INC., 1894), p.168.

⁴⁹ Marina Fabrikant, "Bach-Busoni Chaconne: A piano Transcription Analysis" (DMA Diss., University of Nebraska-Lincoln), 28-29.

seventh arpeggio by one bar, sweeping over seven octaves of the keyboard (as opposed to Bach's two octaves on the violin). The passage builds to a climax in measure 78, and the next variation immediately follows in a startling *subito piano*.

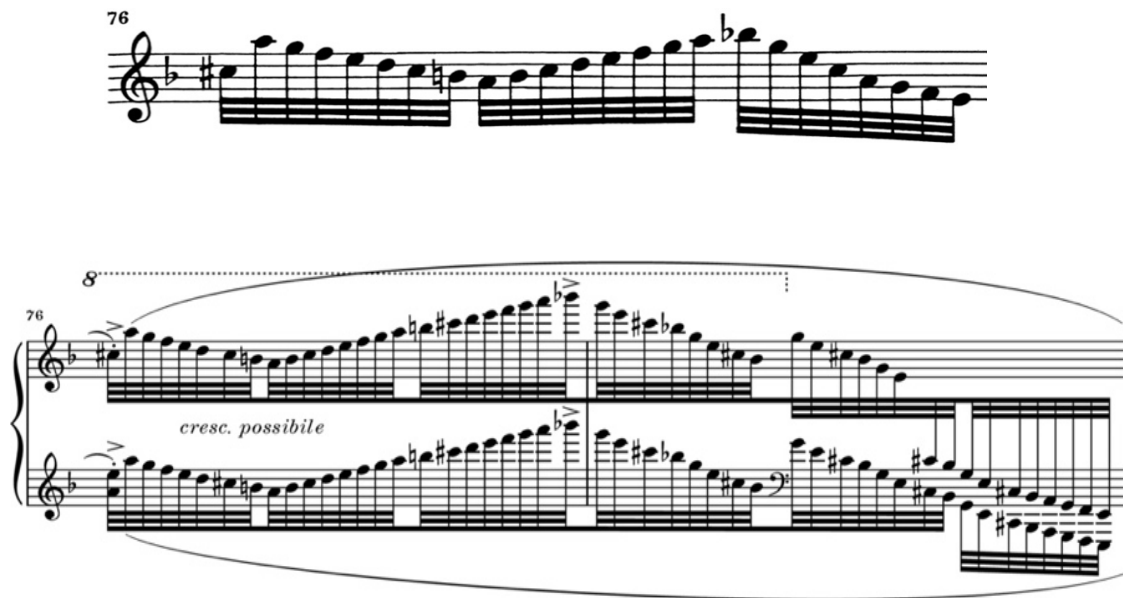


Figure 3.6 Bach, Chaconne(top), mm 76; Busoni, Chaconne(bottom), mm.76-77.

Just as Bach composed masterfully for the violin with a full understanding of the instrument's capabilities and limitations, Busoni is a master of the keyboard. In the case of the Chaconne, the original and the transcription both showcase the possibilities of their instruments. On the violin, Bach often has to imply polyphonic lines within a single line, sometimes by indicating articulations that are in dialogue with each other like two voices taking turns. For example, in mm.78-79, Bach used slurred and non-slurred notes to show the polyphony, and the single-line passage sounds like a conversation between two voices (see Figure 3.7).



Figure 3.7 Bach, Chaconne, mm.78-79.

In the keyboard arrangement of the Chaconne, Busoni has many different options to show polyphony. Of course, keyboard music is capable of sustaining multiple simultaneous voices. Still, sometimes, Busoni imitates and exaggerates the kind of conversational polyphony found in the violin work but augmented through the piano's greater capabilities for dynamics and register. For example, in mm. 33-34 of Busoni's version (see Figure 3.8), he uses register contrast and significant dynamic contrast (*piano* in the high register and *quasi forte* in the low register) to show a musical conversation similar to the one Bach created in the violin version.



Figure 3.8 Busoni, Chaconne, mm. 33-34.

In addition to the conversational, consecutive style of polyphony, Busoni also adds two or three more layers of different musical materials vertically to intensify Bach's harmony. For example, in mm. 81-84 of the original version (Figure 3.9), Bach composed four measures featuring a descending sequence built on the diminished seventh chord.



Figure 3.9 Bach, Chaconne, mm.81-83 (top); Busoni, Chaconne, mm. 82-83 (bottom)

Busoni harmonizes this passage with two textural layers (see Figure 3.12): a middle layer that ascends in contrast to Bach's descending melody, while the bass line follows a chromatic scale with octave doubling. The three voices are expanded across four registers and appear together, creating intensified harmony displayed in a vertical structure. This results in a richer, fuller, and more vibrant sound. Compared to the violin version, Busoni's adaptation allows listeners to hear the polyphony more distinctly, adding a sense of weight and intensity to the sound.

This piece is not only technically challenging, but its complex polyphony also requires the performer to show it. The performer should know what kind of timbre to use for each layer of music and know which is the principal melody and which are the secondary voices, so that the audience can hear multi-layered music clearly. In addition to paying attention to the difficult techniques and polyphony, Busoni's dynamic signs should be closely observed. Busoni included numerous detailed expression markings in his transcription of Bach's Chaconne to convey its rich expressiveness and drama. He even noted the desired sound color in the piece, such as the sound of a trombone. The performers should strictly follow his expression terms and play it in an exaggerated way so that a grandiose, magnificent, and dramatic Chaconne can be presented.

Other transcribers of the same era adapted the Chaconne. One of them was Joachim Raff, who also used different textures for each variation, expanded the range of sound, and added ornamental flourishes and cadenza-like roulade.⁵⁰ However, his range of timbres was not as rich as Busoni's, he desired to create a virtuoso piece fraught with technical hurdles.⁵¹ No one

⁵⁰ Feder, *The Bach Chaconne for Solo Violin: A Collection of Views*, 49-55.

⁵¹ Carruthers, "Bach and the Piano: editions, arrangements, and Transcriptions from Czerny to Rachmaninoff," 100.

has equaled Busoni in transcribing the Chaconne, which explores the full capabilities of the modern piano while effectively imitating organ colors, maintains the polyphonic character of Bach's music, and is imbued with the expansive dramatic spirit of the Romantic period.

CHAPTER IV

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF AND HIS TRANSCRIPTIONS

Biography

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943) was a Russian composer, pianist, and conductor. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest musicians of the late Romantic period. Max Harrison points out that Rachmaninoff, much like Elgar and Sibelius, turned away from the modernist styles of his contemporaries, such as Bartók, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky, and remained deeply connected to the Romantic traditions of the nineteenth century.⁵² As a great composer, many of Rachmaninoff's original works remain popular and an important part of the standard concert repertoire, and scholars have also eagerly studied and explored these works. However, his virtuoso piano transcriptions have not yet received the same attention as his other works. In fact, his transcriptions occupy a special place in his output.

The vast majority of Rachmaninoff's works were composed before he left Russia in late 1917, following the Bolshevik Revolution.⁵³ After settling in the United States, he mainly devoted himself to his traveling concert career. During this period of exile, Rachmaninoff often expressed difficulty finding the time and energy to compose. Scholar Jonathan F Sokasits believes that transcriptions may have been Rachmaninoff's way of healing and returning to composition because the piano transcription was the main form Rachmaninoff used regularly

⁵² Max Harrison, "Introduction," Rachmaninoff: *Life, Works, Recordings* (London: Continuum, 2005), 1-2.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3.

during the last third of his life.⁵⁴ These transcriptions document a continued development of his style in his later years, including clarity of texture, “active inner counter melodies,”⁵⁵ greater rhythmic complexity and rich chromatic harmonies.⁵⁶ Subtle signs of innovation include elements of jazz heard in the transcription of Fritz Kreisler’s *Liebesleid*, although Rachmaninoff strongly criticized modernism in letters and interviews. Therefore, by exploring his later transcriptions, you can see different sides of Rachmaninoff.

Perhaps influenced by the general environment, Rachmaninoff showed great interest in adapted works as a performer as well. From 1918 onward, more and more transcriptions were added to his concert repertoire,⁵⁷ including Godowsky’s, Tausig’s, Busoni’s, and Liszt’s transcriptions, and others. Scholar Geoffrey Norris also points out that he continued to compose ‘new’ in the form of transcriptions from that time, which have a time-honored place in the art of any pianist-composer.⁵⁸ He created thirteen excellent transcriptions for piano throughout the last 20 years of his life. Scholar Sokasits divided them into three main categories: three transcriptions of solo string works from the Baroque era, four transcriptions of works for orchestra, and six transcriptions of works for solo voice and piano or violin.⁵⁹ The style ranges from Baroque to contemporary Romanticism. Among his many adaptations, the three transcriptions of Bach’s works, Prelude, Gavotte, and Gigue from Violin Partita, BWV1006 in E major, are particularly special because of the significant differences in period and style from the original composer. Rachmaninoff, like many other composers, held Bach in the greatest

⁵⁴ Jonathan F Sokasits, “The Keyboard Style of Sergei Rachmaninoff as seen through His Transcriptions for Piano Solo” (PhD Diss., The University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1993), 18-20.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 113-114.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 113-114.

⁵⁷ Geoffrey Norris, *Rachmaninoff Serge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 91.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 91.

⁵⁹ Sokasits, “The Keyboard Style of Sergei Rachmaninoff as seen through His Transcriptions for Piano Solo,” 1-2.

esteem, and it is interesting to see Rachmaninoff's method of being true to Bach's style, which is very different from Busoni's approach.

Rachmaninoff and Bach

Rachmaninoff's affinity with Bach can be traced back to his student days and is closely related to his early musical education. During his studies at the Moscow Conservatory, Rachmaninoff's teachers, Alexander Siloti and Sergei Taneyev, had a great interest in and admiration for Bach's work. Alexander Siloti, Rachmaninoff's piano teacher, was a pupil of Liszt and absorbed Liszt's virtuosic and expressive traditions. Like Liszt, Siloti was one of the great practitioners of the art of transcription and had a great passion for transcribing Bach's works. Comparing his transcriptions with Liszt's works, they have many things in common, such as a tendency to double the melodies and use heavy chords, brilliant technique, and a wide range of piano to make music more Romantic, as was typical of the era.⁶⁰ Sergei Taneyev, Rachmaninoff's counterpoint teacher, was one of the greatest contrapuntists and engrossed himself in the music of J. S. Bach.⁶¹ Under his instruction, Rachmaninoff excelled at using counterpoint and fugal writing in his works, which laid a solid foundation for Rachmaninoff's later transcriptions of Bach's works.⁶² Therefore, Rachmaninoff's interest in Bach not only stems from his personal aesthetic preference but is also deeply rooted in his educational background as a student and his teachers' admiration for Bach.

As a pianist, Rachmaninoff also showed his interest in Bach's music, especially during his later years spent as a touring performer. From 1918 on, he added more and more Bach's

⁶⁰ Carruthers, "Bach and the Piano: editions, arrangements, and Transcriptions from Czerny to Rachmaninoff," 86-96.

⁶¹ Richard Anthony and Leonard, *A History of Russian Music* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977), 206.

⁶² Barrie Martyn, "Rachmaninoff and Russian Musical History," *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (England: Scolar Press, 1990), 4-10.

music into his repertoire, whether in original or transcribed form. The following partial list of his concert tours shows that he frequently played Bach's music in America:⁶³

1918–1919 season: Bach-Busoni: Chaconne

1920–1921 season: Bach: Prelude

1923–1924 season: Bach: *English Suite No.2 in A minor*.

1924–1933 season: Bach: Prelude in D minor, Partita No.4, Bach-Liszt: Prelude and Fugue in A minor, Bach-Tausig: Organ Choral in A Major

In February 1933, Rachmaninoff completed and performed his first transcription of Prelude from Bach Violin Partita No.3 in Portland, Oregon, and he played the complete set (Prelude, Gavotte, and Gigue) in November during his next American tour.⁶⁴ Although there is no information that clearly indicates his writing process or motivations for this piece, we can get some clues from his friend Nathan Milstein in his memoirs:

“Once I was Performing in Lucerne and Riesemann brought Rachmaninoff, his wife, their daughter Tatyana.... At that concert I played the Bach E Major Partita for solo violin, and apparently my performance acts as an impulse for Rachmaninoff to do a wonderful piano transcription of some of the movements – The Prelude, the Gavotte, and the Gigue- which he subsequently published as a suite.”⁶⁵

It is known from this memoir that Rachmaninoff was concerned with being true to Bach in his transcription of this work, to the point that he was irritated when Nathan Milstein commented that it was not Bach-like enough.⁶⁶ Rachmaninoff's transcription is extremely polyphonic compared with the work of other arrangers, including Busoni, which is both a reflection of Rachmaninoff's admiration for Bach's contrapuntal style as well as a testament to

⁶³ This repertoire list is from the Book “Rachmaninoff: Composer, Conductor, Pianist, written by Barrie Martyn, pp.387-395.

⁶⁴ Norris Geoffrey, *Rachmaninoff, Serge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,2002), 91.

⁶⁵ Nathan Milstein and Solomon Volkov, *From Russia to the West*, translated by Antonina W. Bouis (Proscenium Inc., New York,1991), 109.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 109-110.

his own excellence in composing polyphonic textures.

Transcribing Bach in Russian Tradition: Other Composers and Their Contributions

In addition to Rachmaninoff, other early 20th-century Russian composers were also interested in Bach. Igor Stravinsky arranged Bach's Canonic Variations for Orchestra and mixed choir and four Preludes and Fugues from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.⁶⁷ Alexander Siloti transcribed numerous works, including the Chaconne, Prelude in E minor BWV 855a (as Prelude in B minor), Prelude from the Cello Suite No. 3, and others.⁶⁸ Samuil Feinberg, a great pianist renowned for his recordings of *The Well-tempered Clavier*, transcribed Bach's Chorale, Prelude, and Largo from the Trio Sonata No. 5 in C major,⁶⁹ and Alexander Goedicke transcribed the great Passacaglia in C minor, BWV 575, along with numerous Chorale Preludes.⁷⁰

Therefore, the revival of Johann Sebastian Bach's music was not limited to Italy; it also flourished in the Russian school, where many composers deeply admired and transcribed Bach's music. Rachmaninoff combined Bach's order and discipline with Romantic expressiveness, producing transcriptions that showcase both technical brilliance and emotional depth.

⁶⁷ Joseph N. Straus, "Decompositions by Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Webern," *The Musical Quarterly* 72, no. 3 (1986): 301–28, accessed October 24, 2024, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/948144>.

⁶⁸ "Bach-Siloti: Piano Transcriptions of Bach's Works - Works," *Bach Cantatas Website*, accessed September 5, 2024, https://www.bach-cantatas.com/NVD/PT-Siloti.htm#google_vignette.

⁶⁹ "Bach-Feinberg: Piano Transcriptions of Bach's Works - Discography," *Bach Cantatas Website*, accessed September 5, 2024, https://www.bach-cantatas.com/NVD/PT-Feinberg-Rec.htm#google_vignette.

⁷⁰ "Bach-Goedicke - Piano Transcriptions of Bach's Works - Works," *Bach Cantatas Website*, accessed September 5, 2024, https://www.bach-cantatas.com/NVD/PT-Goedicke.htm#google_vignette.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF RACHMANINOFF'S TRANSCRIPTION OF BACH'S WORKS:

PRELUDE AND GAVOTTE

We will see in the following discussion that, like Liszt and Busoni, Rachmaninoff also uses his compositional creativity to rework Bach's music in his own way, but the difference between them is the attitude towards the Baroque style. Unlike Liszt and Busoni, who exaggerated and dramatized Bach's music to fit with their Romantic aesthetic, Rachmaninoff's transcription adheres closer to the style of Bach's time, for example, the brilliant style of the Italian concerto, with its clear textures and characteristic rhythms, lightness, and effortless counterpoint.⁷¹ At the same time, in all his transcriptions, Rachmaninoff inserts an unmistakable impression of his own personality, and scholar Barry Martin asserts that this transcription also sounds very much like Rachmaninoff.⁷²

Rachmaninoff's Tribute to the Baroque Style

The first method by which Rachmaninoff structures his transcription in a nod to Baroque styles is his use and exaggeration of *forte-piano* contrasts, which are an unusual and distinguishing feature of the Prelude in Bach's original violin work, and the transformation of these echo effects into concerto-like dialogue. Interestingly, Bach himself had previously transcribed the Prelude of Violin Partita No.3 into the opening Sinfonia of his Cantata 29, *Wir*

⁷¹ Maggie Lu, "Johann Sebastian Bach and the Style Galant: progressive elements in the Italian concerto," *Inquiries Journal* 12 no. 12 (2020), accessed February 26, 2025, <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=1851>.

⁷² Barry Martin, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 295.

danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir (We thank you, God, we thank you), composed in 1731. In Bach's adaptation, he reworks the solo violin material for organ and orchestra, creating a grand ceremonial opening for the cantata. In the Sinfonia of Bach Cantata 29, the original violin melody line is shown in the manual part of the organ, and the orchestra tutti plays a countermelody. The most distinctive feature of this piece is how Bach uses different instruments with contrasting timbres to highlight the forte-piano contrast in the original violin piece, creating a dialogue in musical colors. Sometimes, those dialogues happen between instruments of the orchestra. At other times, the entire orchestra is in conversation with the solo organ.

In his transcription, Rachmaninoff uses similar methods of musical dialogue to create the impression of a concerto-like texture. As will be seen in the analysis, sometimes, he achieves this effect through register contrasts between “solo” and “tutti” passages. This process is a major departure from Busoni's approach: where Busoni imagined an organ, Rachmaninoff imagines an orchestra and a soloist. Figure 5.1 demonstrates how both composers use a similar method to create a musical dialogue. Rachmaninoff, in his transcription, keeps the forte-piano markings from the violin version but also mimics the color contrast of the orchestral version in Bach's Sinfonia. He alternates the countermelody between high and low registers—juxtaposing bright, high notes and deep, heavy, low notes—to create an echo effect, similar to the instrumental dialogue in Bach's Cantata 29. This technique appears throughout the piece and also in his other works, like Etude Op. 33, No. 7 and Symphonic Dances Op. 45.

Bach, Cantata 29

Figure 5.1 Bach, Cantata 29(top), mm. 9-11; Rachmaninoff, transcription of Prelude(bottom), mm. 22-27.

The second technique Rachmaninoff used, similar to Bach's approach, is his brilliant contrapuntal writing. As mentioned in the biography section, Rachmaninoff's natural talent and his studies with Siloti and Taneyev made him a composer who excelled in polyphonic textures. As Max Harrison points out, Rachmaninoff employs counterpoint to a great extent in his original works, for example, in both opuses of his Preludes.⁷³ Unlike Busoni, whose method of filling out the texture beyond the solo violin line in his transcription mainly involved a great

⁷³ Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: life, works, recordings*, 171.

variety of doubling, added chords, and a skillful choice of timbres and colors, Rachmaninoff adds countermelodies and imitative counterpoint to Bach's original violin line with an ease and transparency that is worthy of the Baroque composer.

One of the ways in which Rachmaninoff's contrapuntal writing resembles Bach's is his handling of fast sixteenth-note passages in his transcription of the Prelude. Unlike the Chaconne which has many sections featuring chords and arpeggios outlining chords, the original violin version of the E major Prelude, consists entirely of a fast-moving single line, predominantly in sixteenth notes. This writing is very suitable for a string instrument but would sound bare on the piano, even if the line were doubled or divided between the hands. Instead, Rachmaninoff composes at least one countermelody, which in itself often sounds like a dialogue between multiple lines (see first method above), and sometimes more than one simultaneous line, highlighting the piano's capabilities as a polyphonic instrument. In Bach's faster keyboard works, he often maintains a steady stream of sixteenth notes but alternates them between different voices in an imitative fashion. The overall effect is of great sustained energy but at the same time, each part maintains clear independence, showing the complexity of the counterpoint. In Rachmaninoff's transcription of Bach's Prelude, he uses the same methods as Bach.

Figure 5.2 (top) shows Bach's treatment of sixteenth notes in his Prelude and Fugue in E major (note the same key as the violin partita), BWV 878, from the first volume of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. In this passage, sixteenth notes alternate between the middle voice, bass, and top voice, first in imitation of the same material and then using new material. Overall, there is an uninterrupted stream of sixteenths but due to their distribution between the voices and

contrast to slower-moving notes, the counterpoint is very clear. Note that pianistically, the middle voice is distributed between two hands.



Bach's Prelude BWV 878



Rachmaninoff's Version

Figure 5.2 Bach, Prelude BWV 878 (top), mm. 14-16; Rachmaninoff, transcription of Prelude (bottom), mm. 55-58.

A similar texture is shown in Rachmaninoff's transcription of the violin Prelude (Figure 5.2, bottom). The original violin line in sixteenths is passed between two voices in the right hand, while the left hand adds an imitative line at the octave as well as a countermelody which uses the opening rhythm of the piece (two sixteenths and four eighth notes). The resulting music maintains the energy of the violin line while also sounding polyphonically intertwined and complex, as many of Bach's fugal works do. The Gavotte presents a different texture by the conventions attached to this type of dance in the suites. Bach's gavottes for keyboard, such as

found in the *French Suite*, BWV 816 or the *English Suite*, BWV 808 are usually in light chordal texture with simpler polyphony. A comparison of Bach's Gavotte from the *French Suite* in G major with Rachmaninoff's transcription of the violin Gavotte (Figure 5.3) shows that Rachmaninoff both does and does not follow the conventions of Bach's keyboard gavottes.

Gavotte

Bach, Gavotte from *French Suites BWV 816*

Gavotte

Transcribed by
SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Figure 5.3: Bach, Gavotte from BWV 816(Top), mm. 1-5; Rachmaninoff, transcription of

Gavotte (Bottom): (A) mm. 1-5; (B) mm. 25-29; (C) mm.49-54.

In some parts of his transcription, Rachmaninoff maintains the simpler style of Bach's keyboard gavottes, for example, in the opening phrase (Figure 5.3, A.). But at other times, he adds imitative counterpoint more typical of Italian-style movements, such as the Prelude. Figure 5.3 B shows canonic writing, in Figure 5.3 C, there are four layers of independent voices. At the same time, despite the complexity, Rachmaninoff manages to maintain the dance-like lightness of the character of the piece.

Rachmaninoff's methods of transcription differ markedly from other composers who have adapted the same Violin Partita in E major, and the comparison shows that Rachmaninoff's skill as a contrapuntist is closest to Bach. Alexander Siloti's transcription of the Prelude consists of a chordal harmonization of the violin line, which is kept in the top voice. Similarly, in Fritz Kreisler's version of the Gavotte for violin and piano, the piano acts as an accompanist to the violin line in frequent homorhythm lines and chordal harmonization. Joachim Raff's transcription of the Gavotte is closer to Busoni's aesthetic, with heavy doubling and added registers, which greatly alters the typical lightness of Gavottes as a Baroque dance (see Figure 5.4).

Moderato, tranquillo.

Piano.

f

sempre legato

p

mf

Siloti, transcription of Prelude

Allegro.

mf

pp

p

pp

poco mf

Figure 5.4 Siloti, transcription of Prelude(top), mm.1-9; Raff, transcription of Gavotte(bottom), mm. 1-26.

Rachmaninoff's Personal Compositional Aesthetic in His Transcriptions

Beyond Rachmaninoff's affinity with Bach in his contrapuntal abilities, he adds his personal imprints to these transcriptions. Whether looking at Rachmaninoff's transcriptions or his original works, some of the hallmarks of his style include chromaticism, dissonance, wide spacings and registral contrasts, and rich harmonic colors within a fast harmonic rhythm. Rachmaninoff is also concerned with effective build-up towards climactic moment, and there is usually a clear indication when the music approaches high points, often through noticeable thickening of the texture.⁷⁴ In the following discussion, I will demonstrate how these features are present in Rachmaninoff's transcription of Bach. Chromatic scales and chromatic decoration are very common in Rachmaninoff's works. In his transcription of Schubert's "Wohin," D. 757, No. 2 from *Die schöne Müllerin*, he adds a lot of chromatic elements in the accompaniment texture. In his transcriptions of Kreisler's *Liebesleid* and *Liebesfreud*, he arguably displays "the greatest freedom in making chromatic and harmonic alterations,"⁷⁵ perhaps to evoke a sense of improvisation. Chromaticism is also a prominent feature of his original works, including the Second Sonata, Variations on a Theme of Corelli, and others. Figure 5.5 shows the beginning of Rachmaninoff's transcription of *Liebesleid* with many chromatic elements.

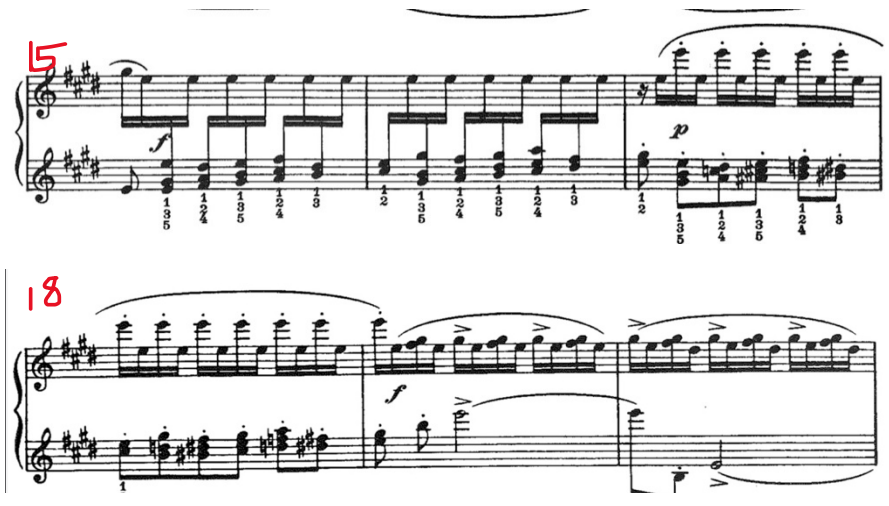
⁷⁴ Rachmaninoff said that every performance of a piece he plays "is shaped around its culminating point: the whole mass of sounds must be so measured, the depth and power of each sound must be given with such purity and gradation" and "the composition itself determines this culmination." Quoted in Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, p. 195.

⁷⁵ Sokasits, "The Keyboard Style of Sergei Rachmaninoff as seen through His Transcriptions for Piano Solo," 35.



Figure 5.5 Rachmaninoff, transcription of *Liebesleid*, mm. 1-10.

Unsurprisingly, Rachmaninoff also adds chromaticism to his adaptation of the Bach partita, particularly in the Prelude and more sparingly in the Gavotte (Figure 5.6).



Rachmaninoff's transcription of Prelude



Rachmaninoff's transcription of Gavotte

Figure 5.6 Rachmaninoff, transcription of Prelude (top), mm. 15-20; Gavotte (bottom), mm.19-22.

In mm. 15-16 and 65-66 of the Prelude, Rachmaninoff uses the E major scale as a bass line for the first sequence and a chromatic scale as a bass line for the second sequence, even though the broader harmonic progression remains within the diatonic major-minor system. As Blair Allen Johnston points out in his dissertation, “A compound melodic-harmonic syntax applies in Rachmaninoff’s mature works. The compound syntax is based on diatonic-functional tonal structures but incorporates distinct chromatic and modal components.”⁷⁶ The chromatic scale here seems to play a decorative role, making the second sequence different in color from the first segment for the sake of variety.

Anecdotally, the violinist Nathan Milstein recounts that Rachmaninoff invited him to provide feedback after hearing the premiere of his transcription of the Prelude. Milstein felt that Rachmaninoff had gone too far in his chromaticism and that the chromatic scale made the transcription not Bach-like enough.⁷⁷ Presumably Rachmaninoff was upset but it’s tempting to make the connection between this story and the fact that there is noticeably less chromaticism in the Gavotte aside from a few passing notes in a few measures, such as m. 20 and m. 96. Figure 5.7 illustrates another feature mentioned before: the preparation for the climax. The climax of the Prelude in Rachmaninoff’s version occurs on the last page, and Rachmaninoff uses several techniques to highlight it: the texture thickens, he adds a pedal point, broadens the range, raises the dynamic level to *fortissimo*, the strongest dynamic, accelerates the harmonic rhythm, and adds more contrapuntal voices. The climax of the Gavotte (also in Figure 5.7) shows similar compositional devices, and these can also be found in other transcriptions, such as Rachmaninoff’s version of Kreisler’s *Liebesfreud*.

⁷⁶ Blaire Allen Johnston, “Harmony and Climax in the Late Works of Sergei Rachmaninoff” (PhD diss. University of Michigan, 2009), 18.

⁷⁷ Milstein and Volkov, *From Russia to the West: the musical memoirs and reminiscences of Nathan Milstein*, 109-110.



Rachmaninoff, transcription of Prelude



Rachmaninoff, transcription of Gavotte

Figure 5.7 Rachmaninoff, transcription of Prelude(top), mm. 122-130; Gavotte(bottom), mm. 80-87.

Another feature worth mentioning in this transcription is the rich harmonies. As Hinson points out, “Rachmaninoff’s transcriptions are not only unique in sound and brilliance but also supremely expressive.”⁷⁸ Undoubtedly, some of this expressiveness is realized through Rachmaninoff’s own complex and personal harmonic language. The complexity can be

⁷⁸Maurice Hinson, *The Pianist’s Guide to Transcriptions, Arrangements, and Paraphrases* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 107.

appreciated when comparing Rachmaninoff's transcription with versions of the same Bach Partita in E major by Siloti, Saint-Saens, Schumann, and Kreisler, none of which display such intricate counterpoint, which also results in intricate harmonic combinations.

Lastly, just like Busoni, Rachmaninoff uses detailed expression markings to inform the interpretation of the transcription. Interestingly, when we compare Rachmaninoff's transcription with Nathan Milstein's performance of the original Bach Partita, we find striking overlaps between Milstein's expressive interpretation of the original Bach work and the markings in Rachmaninoff's transcription.⁷⁹ For instance, when Milstein slightly elongates a particular note for expressive effect, Rachmaninoff often indicates the same with a *tenuto* in the transcription. Similarly, when Milstein emphasizes certain notes, Rachmaninoff uses *accent* marks to highlight the same notes in the piano version. This alignment suggests that Rachmaninoff may have been influenced by Milstein's interpretations or similar violin performances, effectively translating the violinist's expressive nuances into the language of the piano. Through these thoughtful markings, Rachmaninoff preserved the violin's essence while enriching it with his pianistic imagination, combining the expressive capabilities of both instruments.

Rachmaninoff's transcriptions of Bach's works showcase his ability to seamlessly blend the clarity and structure of Bach's Baroque style with the rich expression and virtuosity of the Romantic era. By adding rich harmonies, expressive inner voices, and personal characteristics, Rachmaninoff respected Bach's original compositions while reimagining them for the piano.

⁷⁹ The subject of the comparison is not Milstein's 1932 recital, which Rachmaninoff attended, but Milstein's 1963 recording. If we believe Milstein's assertion that his performance prompted Rachmaninoff to transcribe the work, it is natural to draw parallels and assume that perhaps Milstein's interpretation did not change substantially in the intervening years.

CONCLUSION

The revival of Bach's music in the 19th century not only renewed interest in his works but also inspired generations of composers to reinterpret them for new contexts and new audiences. Transcriptions of Bach's works became an important part of this movement, allowing his compositions to reach beyond their original instrumentation and showcase their adaptability. The late Romantic period showcased contrasting approaches to Bach transcription through Busoni and Rachmaninoff, highlighting the interpretative diversity of the Bach revival. Both Busoni and Rachmaninoff are excellent transcribers, but they have different perspectives on Bach's works. Rachmaninoff mainly focuses on preserving Bach's elegance, clarity, and complicated polyphonic characteristics. This approach is closer to what we might view today as a historically informed interpretation because Rachmaninoff's choices resemble those made by Bach in his orchestral transcription. At the same time, Rachmaninoff's version also mirrors his own technique and preferences as a composer, including his love of intricate polyphony and sophisticated chromatic harmony. By contrast, Busoni embraces a bold, more dramatic style and tends to emphasize pianistic grandeur and explore the full potential of the modern piano, with thicker chordal structures and a focus on large-scale sonority, reflecting his goal to expand Bach's music into a romantic idiom. In this way, both composers are trying to get closer to their ideal way of hearing Bach's music but with their own formidable compositional powers in the background. Both transcriptions are extremely effective and fully deserve to be part of our repertoire.

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APPENDIX A

LECTURE RECITAL SCRIPT

Slide 1(Title)

Introduction: 1 min

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for being here today. I'm excited to talk to you about two fascinating pieces: transcriptions of J. S. Bach's violin works by two incredible composers—Ferruccio Busoni and Sergei Rachmaninoff. Both composers lived in the early 20th century, and they were deeply influenced by Bach's music. But, they transcribed Bach's works in very different ways, reflecting their unique styles and cultural backgrounds. Before we move on to the discussion of each piece, let's take a moment to explore a bit of the history of Bach transcriptions as a genre.

Slide 2(title: Why transcribe Bach's works?)

This brings us to an important question: Why transcribe Bach's works? The answer is closely connected to the so-called "Bach revival movement."

Bach Revival Movement: 2 mins

Slide 3(Bach Revival Movement)

In Bach's time, especially in his later years, his music was seen as old-fashioned. People gradually lost interest in his works during the late 18th century. The big turning point came in the early 19th century with the Romantic movement. Some musicians, especially in **Berlin**,

started studying Bach's music and performing it in public concerts. The most important moment happened in 1829 when Felix Mendelssohn conducted Bach's St. Matthew Passion (BWV 244).

Slide 4(Expanding the piano repertoire)

During this revival, the piano was also becoming more and more popular. People were eager to expand the repertoire for this new instrument, musicians began transcribing Bach's orchestral, organ, and violin works to fit the piano. This allowed Bach's music to reach a broader audience and become a major part of many pianists' repertoires. Many famous composers were inspired by the Bach revival and created their own versions of Bach's music, including Liszt, Schumann, Brahms, Busoni, Rachmaninoff, Alexander Siloti, and so on. So, This growing interest in Bach's music and the rising popularity of the piano set the stage for many transcriptions. Busoni's Chaconne is probably the most famous—almost every pianist knows it. It reflects the grand, dramatic style of transcription that Busoni and Liszt were famous for. In contrast, Rachmaninoff's transcriptions of Bach's music are less known and take a different approach. While Busoni's style is bold and dramatic, Rachmaninoff's is more elegant and refined.

Now, let's move on to the first composer. Busoni.

Busoni (Biography, background of Chaconne, and transcribing methods for Organ transcriptions):4 mins

Slide 5(Busoni)

Busoni was a central figure among composers of the Italian school who were interested

in Bach's works. He fell in love with Bach's music as a child while learning piano from his father. Many of his compositions were inspired by Bach, including transcriptions, editions, and original compositions. Busoni treats the process of transcribing not just as an arrangement but as a creative process. This explains his bold approach to Bach's music, adding greater drama to the original works.

Slide 6(Chaconne: Too Modern?)

Among many Busoni's transcriptions, the *Chaconne* is considered one of the greatest achievements in the history of piano transcriptions. Busoni dedicated it to the great Scottish pianist and Liszt student, Eugen d'Albert. However, D'Albert thought that Busoni's work was too modern. Busoni's response was that Bach's vision could not be fully expressed by the violin and that "modernization" doesn't violate the Bach style but rather brings it to full perfection. In fact, Busoni treated the *Chaconne* like an organ piece instead of a solo violin piece, adding rich colors and strong contrasts similar to the organ's sound.

Slide 7(words)

Busoni himself has explained his approach as follows: "In the *Chaconne*, the Editor [Busoni] has treated the tone effects from the standpoint of organ tone, like I said before, he thinks some important contexts cannot be fully expressed by the violin. Secondly, he based on the example set by Bach himself in the transcription for Organ of his own violin fugue in G minor."

He created his own way of imitating organ sounds on the piano, building on the work of Liszt and Tausig. Busoni aimed to improve and refine their method of transcribing Bach's organ pieces. But many of Busoni's methods that we will see later are already present in Liszt's work.

Let's briefly listen to a Liszt's transcription of an organ work by Bach alongside Busoni's: (play recording)

Slide 8(Busoni and Liszt transcription of Bach's organ works)

They are very similar. For example, you can see that both pieces use many octaves and rich chords.

Busoni's transcription of the Chaconne has a lot in common with these organ transcriptions we have just heard. Understanding that Busoni was inspired by organ sounds helps us better appreciate his transcription of the Chaconne.

Next, I will share several writing techniques Busoni used in this work, let's see how Busoni turned a single-line violin work into a piano work with an organ-like scope.

Analysis of Chaconne: 10 mins

Slide 9(simulating the continuity)

The organ is well-known for its strong, continuous sound, which can be sustained for several measures on the foot pedalboard while the melody played by the hands on the manual parts continues. However, the violin doesn't have the same ability to sustain multiple polyphonic levels. String crossings, rolls, and note repetition can be used to create the illusion of multiple voices on the violin, but in many places in the original Chaconne, the bass line is implied through context rather than explicitly heard. The theorist Heinrich Schenker called the analysis of such implied lines "imaginary basso continuo." In transcribing this piece, Busoni embraced the opportunity to make these imaginary lines a reality using the sound world of the organ and the capabilities of the modern piano. Let's look at an example.

Slide 10(Busoni Chaconne mm.78-82 and Bach Chaconne)

In this example from Bach's violin version, there are arguably two implied levels of sustained bass lines. There is a descending bass line D-C-B-flat that is only a 16th-note in the violin but implied to last the whole measure. Busoni goes further than that in his analysis of the passage through transcription. Busoni imagines a long pedal point D that is sustained for several measures even as the bass changes, similar to the long pedal points typical of the organ. In his transcription seen on the right, Busoni repeats this imaginary pedal point in octaves on every downbeat for four measures to create a continuous, extended organ pedal point effect.

Slide 11(title: Emulating Organ Registration Possibilities (Stops))

The next technique Busoni used is emulating Organ Registration Possibilities (Stops). One defining feature of the organ is the availability of stops. The organ has many stops, like 4-foot stops, 8-foot stops, 16-foot stops, and so on. Organ stops double the lines that are being played in additional registers. Listen to this organist demonstrate the technique:

Slide 12(Video)

The organist plays a d minor chord, and when she pulls a 4-foot stop, the chord sound is doubled in a higher register.

Go back to Slide 11(title: Emulating Organ Registration Possibilities (Stops))

If composers want to imitate the sound and volume of an organ on the piano, octave doublings are the best way. Whether in Liszt's transcriptions or in Reger's, Tausig's, or other composers, a large amount of octave doublings appear a lot.

Slide 13(Methods)

Busoni himself described his methods of transcribing organ works to the piano in his

edition of the Well-tempered Clavier. Busoni collected the following possibilities of doubling in Chaconne: simple doubling of Pedal-Part, simple doubling of Manual-Part, doubling in the Octave of all Pedal- and Manual-part, tripling in Octaves, and doubling of the one Manual-part.

Slide 14(mm. 54-55)

Beyond simple octave doubling, Busoni sometimes adds other consonant intervals within the harmony to create variety in doubled passages. Listen to this example from the violin version(I'll show it on the piano) Now look at the first measure of Busoni's version: for the first beat, he doubled the melody in the low register, for the second beat, he used other consonant intervals within the C major chord harmony to achieve the same sonority effect, for the third beat, he doubled the melody in the high register. The second measure is the same. This technique allows Busoni to play with the fullness of texture and shows his creativity as a composer.

Using a wide range of the keyboard and the techniques we have discussed so far is not merely an imitation of the organ's timbre and sound effects; it also serves as a way of creating a particularly dramatic musical expression, which aligned with Busoni's view of Bach's music.

Slide 15(Exaggerating and dramatizing musical writing techniques.)

Busoni also frequently shifts the registers of the original piece and incorporates numerous musical expression markings to enhance musical expression.

Slide 16(Examples)

When we look back at the original text, Bach opens the piece in a character of grave majesty in D minor. (Play on piano) When Busoni wants to further intensify and deepen this feeling, using the lower register could be a good way, now I play the theme in the low register,

did you feel any difference? The lower register makes the sound heavier and even more majestic. Besides lowering the theme by an octave, Busoni made a slight change to the upbeat. In Bach's original version, the upbeat is a single note but in the piano transcription, Busoni uses full chords instead and adds tenuto markings to add extra weight even to the shortest notes of the theme. Taken together, the lower register, a thicker texture, and added expression markings all work together to increase the music's dramatic effect. Busoni makes similar alterations throughout the piece to achieve a grandeur and majesty similar to that of the organ.

Slide 17(Busoni picture)

Now, I hope you will enjoy my performance of Bach's Chaconne. When you listen, notice how Busoni uses the full range of piano to amplify Bach's original character and make the music sound grand and dramatic.

Rachmaninoff (Biography, background of Prelude and Gavotte): 3 mins

Slide 18(Rachmaninoff)

Next, let's explore another violin transcription in a completely different style, Rachmaninoff's transcription of Bach's Violin partita No.3, Prelude and Gavotte.

First, let's take a minute to examine Rachmaninoff's relationship with Bach. Rachmaninoff's connection to Bach likely came from his teachers at the Moscow Conservatory, Alexander Siloti and Sergei Taneyev—both of whom were passionate about Bach's music and counterpoint. As a performing pianist, Rachmaninoff showed increasing interest in Bach's music during his later years. From 1918, he added more and more Bach's music into his recital repertoire.

In February 1933, Rachmaninoff completed and gave the first performance of his transcription of the Prelude from Bach Violin Partita No.3 in Portland, Oregon. In November of that same year, during his next American tour, he played his final arrangement of three movements from the Partita (Prelude, Gavotte, and Gigue)

Slide 19(Words)

Although there is no firsthand information from Rachmaninoff himself about his writing process or motivation for this transcription, his friend, famous violinist Nathan Milstein, wrote the following account in his memoirs: “ *Once I was Performing in Lucerne and Rieseemann brought Rachmaninoff, his wife, their daughter Tatyana.... At that concert I played the Bach E Major Partita for solo violin, and apparently my performance acted as an impulse for Rachmaninoff to do a wonderful piano transcription of some of the movements – The Prelude, the Gavotte, and the Gigue- which he subsequently published as a suite.*”

Now let's take a closer look at how Rachmaninoff transcribed this piece.

Analysis of Prelude and Gavotte: 10 mins

Slide 20(Baroque Style)

We will see in the following discussion that, like Liszt and Busoni, Rachmaninoff also uses his compositional creativity to rework Bach's music in his own way, but the difference between them is the attitude towards the Baroque style. Unlike Liszt and Busoni, who exaggerated and dramatized Bach's music to fit with their Romantic aesthetic, Rachmaninoff's transcription adheres closer to the style of Bach's time, for example, the “brilliant Italian Concerto style” with clear textures and characteristic rhythms, using some of Bach's

compositional techniques, such as alternating sixteenth-note passages in different voices to enhance the polyphony. Let's take a closer look at how Rachmaninoff used the same methods as Bach did in his works.

Slide 20(Forte-Piano Contrast)

Interestingly, Bach himself had previously transformed the *Prelude of Violin Partita No.3* into the opening *Sinfonia* for organ and orchestra of his *Cantata 29*. The most distinctive feature of this piece is how Bach uses different instruments with contrasting timbres to highlight the forte-piano contrast in the original violin piece, which means Bach forms a dialogue in musical colors. Sometimes, those dialogues happen between instruments of the orchestra. At other times, the entire orchestra is in conversation with the solo organ.

Slide 22(Recording)

Let's listen to the Bach Cantata for a moment.

Slide 23(Example)

Rachmaninoff approaches his piano transcription with a similar idea. He retains the unusual *forte-piano* dynamic markings from the original violin version, which show echoes in the music. Additionally, Rachmaninoff uses piano registers to juxtapose different colors and create dialogues similar to what we saw in the Bach Cantata. Listen to this example: (Play)

Slide 24(The arrangement of 16th notes)

In Bach's keyboard music, he often creates a continuous flow of sixteenth notes by switching them between different voices and hands. This makes the music sound flowing and energetic while keeping each voice independent, which is a key feature of polyphony.

Slide 25(Examples)

Look at this example from Bach's Prelude BWV 878. The different voices weave together naturally, creating a complex and rich texture. Rachmaninoff uses a similar approach in his transcription of Bach's Prelude. The melody often shifts from the top line to the bass line or bass line to the top line and is played alternately by both hands. This creates a feeling of lively yet transparent polyphony similar to Bach's style.

Slide 26(Gavotte)

Rachmaninoff's mastery of polyphony is also on display in the next movement of this transcription, the Gavotte. However, Rachmaninoff is careful not to overwhelm this piece with too much dialogue. He takes his cue from Bach's own keyboard gavottes, which tend to have a simpler chordal texture. Still, Rachmaninoff adds three extra voices to the original violin version, making it more complex. Bach's own gavottes for the keyboard usually use simpler chordal texture, and Rachmaninoff follows Bach's model. However, later in the piece, even when Rachmaninoff uses fuller chords and wide registers in some spots, the Gavotte never loses its lively and sparkly characteristics.

Slide 27(Examples)

It is revealing to compare Rachmaninoff's version with other transcriptions of the same Gavotte, for example, by Joachim Raff. As you can see in the example, Raff limits himself to parallel melody lines and accompaniment for the original melody. Compare measures 3-5 in Rachmaninoff's and Raff's versions. Where Raff merely adds parallel lines using chord tones, Rachmaninoff introduces imitation in the left hand and shows much more variety in the interaction between voices.

Slide 28(Personal imprints)

While effectively and excellently highlighting the complex polyphony in *Prelude and Gavotte*, Rachmaninoff adds his personal imprints to these transcriptions. Rachmaninoff's original works as well as other transcription are notable for chromaticism and rich use of harmonic color. Another prominent idea in his compositions is the focus on the climactic point and effective build-up to the climax through rich texture. All these features can be found in the transcription of the Bach Partita, even though he uses his personal compositional language in a particularly subtle way, perhaps out of respect for Bach. Let's look at a few examples.

Slide 29(example)

Take a look at mm. 15-18. You see that there is a sequence. In the original version, the pattern remains the same as it is sequenced, listen to this example. (Play the recording)

But Rachmaninoff changed it slightly. He added a chromatic scale as the bass line. While it does not affect the underlying harmony, it makes the repetition in the sequence different in color and adds chromatic interest. (play on the piano)Here is a fun story about the chromatic scale in this transcription of *Prelude*: Rachmaninoff invited his friend, Nathan Milstein to give some feedback after hearing the premiere of the transcription of *Prelude*. Nathan gave a bad review; he said the additional chromaticism made the music not Bach-like enough. We can imagine that Rachmaninoff was quite upset when he heard this comment. But later, he accepted it. He thought his friend was right. In the later transcription of the *Gavotte* and *Gigue*, he no longer uses a chromatic scale.

Slide 30(examples)

As mentioned before, in Rachmaninoff's works, the texture gradually thickens, and the music becomes more complex when the music is approaching the high point. To observe that,

compare the first page with the last page of *Prelude*. On the last page, Rachmaninoff explores the entire range of the piano by using heavy chords in the low register and keeping the top line in the high register. Meanwhile, the harmony frequently changes by adding additional contrapuntal melodies, and the dynamic indication goes from *f* to *ff*, which is the strongest dynamic in the whole piece.

Slide 31(Examples)

Similarly, towards the climax in the Gavotte, Rachmaninoff uses wide registers, doubles the melody, and adds chords into the texture.

Slide 32(Rachmaninoff pictures)

Now, I'm going to play the transcription of Prelude and Gavotte; you can notice how Rachmaninoff keeps some styles of Bach's music but adds rich harmonies underneath. It still sounds like Bach but with Rachmaninoff's personal style.

Slide 33(comparison)

By comparing Busoni and Rachmaninoff's transcriptions, we can find that Rachmaninoff mainly focuses on preserving Bach's elegance, clarity, and complicated polyphonic characteristics. This approach is closer to what we might view today as a historically informed interpretation because Rachmaninoff's choices resemble those made by Bach in his orchestral transcription. At the same time, Rachmaninoff's version also mirrors his own technique and preferences as a composer, including his love of intricate polyphony and sophisticated chromatic harmony.

By contrast, Busoni embraces a bold, more dramatic style and tends to emphasize pianistic grandeur and explore the full potential of the modern piano, with a focus on large-

scale sonority, reflecting his goal to expand Bach's music into a romantic idiom and perhaps also, in Busoni's view, to unlock the full grandeur he sees as inherent to Bach's music.

In this way, both composers are trying to get closer to their ideal way of hearing Bach's music but with their own formidable compositional powers in the background. Both transcriptions are extremely effective and fully deserve to be part of our repertoire.

Okay, thanks again for coming to my lecture recital, I'm so glad to share these views with you, do you have any questions? I would be happy to try to answer.


Thank you!

APPENDIX B

LECTURE RECITAL SLIDES




Slide 1



WHY
TRANSCRIBE
BACH'S WORKS
?

Slide 2



The Bach Revival Movement

The decline of interest in Bach's Music in the late 18th century

↓

A big turning point: Romantic Movement

Musicians begin studying and performing Bach's music again in the early 19th century

↓

An early high point of the Bach Revival Movement

Felix Mendelssohn conducts Bach's St. Matthew Passion in 1829

Slide 3

The Growing Demand for Piano Repertoire

- 1 The piano, as a new instrument, became more and more popular
- 2 Musicians began transcribing Bach's orchestral, organ, and violin works to fit the piano
- 3 Famous transcribers: Liszt, Schumann, Brahms, Busoni, Rachmaninoff, and Siloti

Slide 4



Busoni: The Modern Transcriber/Composer

Busoni was an important figure in the Italian School of composers who were interested in Bach's works.

His love for Bach influenced much of his creative output, including transcriptions, editions, and original compositions.

Busoni's approach to transcription sought to heighten the drama of the original composition.

Slide 5

Busoni's Chaconne: Too Modern ?

“Modernization doesn't violate the Bach style but rather brings it to full perfection.”

----- from Busoni's edition of *The Well-Tempered Klavier*,
“Introduction”

Slide 6

Busoni Envisions the Chaconne as an Organ Work


“In Chaconne, the Editor [Busoni] has treated the tone effects from the standpoint of organ tone. This procedure, which has been variously attacked, was justified by the significant context that is not fully displayed by the violin; secondly, by the example set by Bach himself in the transcription for organ of his own violin fugue in G minor.”

— from Busoni's edition of *The Well-Tempered Klavier*, 167


Slide 7

The Influence of Liszt in Busoni's Transcriptions



Liszt's Transcription of Bach's
Organ Prelude and Fugue,
BWV 543 



Busoni's Transcription of Bach's
Organ Prelude and Fugue,
BWV 532 

Slide 8

1. Realization of the "imaginary basso continuo" in the Chaconne through organ-like pedal points and added texture

Violin: single-line instrument, harmony and voice-leading expressed through arpeggiation. No sustained bass line.

Organ: strong, continuous sound with prominent long basses played with foot pedals (pedal points).

Busoni: emulates organ basses on the piano to make Bach's "imaginary" counterpoint and implied bass lines explicit.

Slide 9

D as the imaginary basso continuo in Busoni's transcription

Bach, Chaconne,
mm. 79-81

D

78

C

Bb

D

Bach-Busoni, Chaconne,
mm. 78- 81

mf dolce espress.

triquillo

Two Manual Parts

p

ff: -p

D: Imaginary Pedal Point (Pedal Part)

78

80

Slide 10



2. Emulating Organ Registration

Possibilities (Stops):
Octave Doublings in Busoni's Transcription

- Organ Stops: using organ stops creates doublings in different registers.
- Octave Doublings: Busoni used octave doublings to imitate the organ's sound and timbre.
- Many composers use the same methods to transcribe the organ works for piano.

Slide 11



Slide 12

Busoni
Methods of
Transcribing
Organ Works
for
Fortepiano

Simple doubling of Pedal-Part

Simple doubling of Manual-Part

Doubling in the Octave of all Pedal-
and Manual-part

Tripling in Octaves of any Part

Doubling of the one Manual-part,
the rest remaining unchanged

*These methods are from Busoni's essay in his edition of *Well-Tempered Clavier*

Slide 13

Strategically using chord inversions instead of simple doublings

Bach *Chaconne*, mm.54-55

Busoni *Chaconne*, mm.54-55



G
E
C
C Major Chord

F
D
Bb
Bb Major Chord

Slide 14

3. Exaggerating and dramatizing musical writing techniques

Shifting the register of the original piece

Expanding the range for greater contrast

Employing rich musical expression markings

Slide 15

Using different registers to enhance the expressiveness of the music



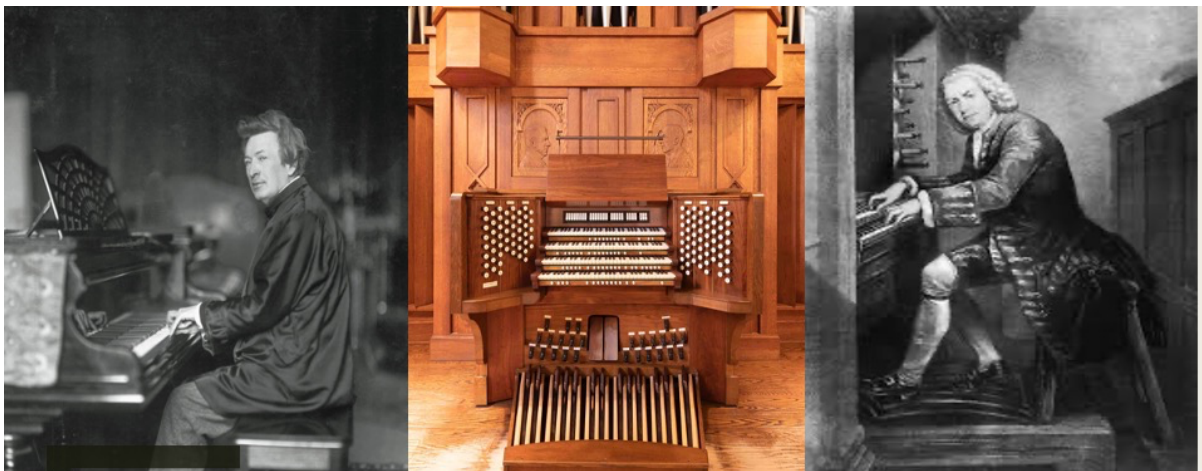
Bach *Chaconne*

Andante maestoso, ma non troppo lento
Feierlich gemessen, doch nicht schleppend



Busoni *Chaconne*

Slide 16



**BUSONI TRANSCRIPTION OF BACH'S VIOLIN PARTITA,
NO.2, IN D MINOR, BWV 1004,
CHACONNE**

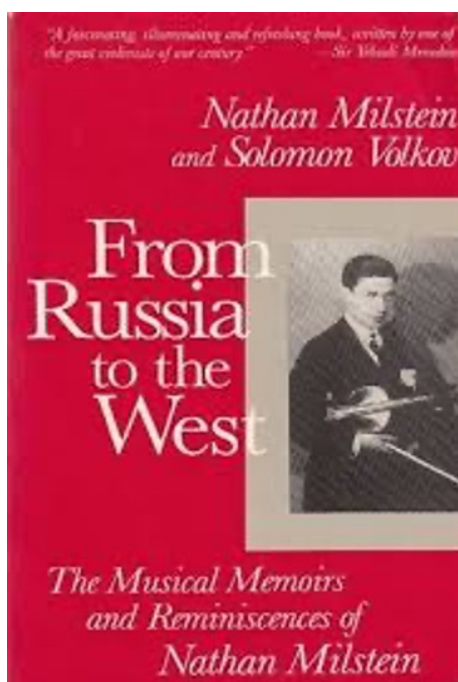
Slide 17



Rachmaninoff and Bach

Influences	Repertoires	Transcriptions
<p>Teachers Siloti and Taneyev inspired Rachmaninoff's interest in Bach.</p>	<p>Rachmaninoff added Bach's music to his repertoire after 1918.</p>	<p>Completed his first Bach transcription of <i>Prelude</i> in February 1933. In November, he performed the Suites (Prelude, Gavotte, and Gigue)</p>

Slide 18



"Once I was Performing in Lucerne. At that concert, I played the Bach E Major Partita for solo violin, and apparently my performance acted as an impulse for Rachmaninoff to do a wonderful piano transcription of some of the movements – The Prelude, the Gavotte, and the Gigue- which he subsequently published as a suite."

----From *Russia to the West* by Nathan Milstein

Slide 19

Rachmaninoff's Tribute for Baroque Style

Preserving the Brilliant "Italian Concerto Style" of Original work

Using the same method of alternating sixteenth-note running passages in different voices as Bach did

Highlighting complicated polyphony characteristics

Slide 20

"Forte-Piano" Contrast (Echo Effect) Comparison

Bach's Original Violin Version

- For Violin
- Using *forte-piano* markings to show the contrast

Bach Cantata 29, Sinfonia

- For organ and orchestra
- Alternating between different instruments creates a strong *forte-piano* contrast

Rachmaninoff's Version

- For piano
- Shifting the different registers to show *forte-piano* contrast

Slide 21

Presto.

Tromba I.
Tromba II.
Tromba III.
Timpani.
Oboe I.
Violino I.
Oboe II.
Violino II.
Viola.
Organo obbligato.
Continuo.

Bach Cantata 29, Sinfonia

Slide 22

“Forte-Piano” Contrast (Echo Effect) Comparison

Bach Violin Version,
mm. 46-51

46
f *p*
f *p* *f*

Rachmaninoff's
Version, mm.
46-51

f *m.d.* *m.f.* *p* *m.d.*
f *m.d.* *p* *m.f.*

Slide 23

Alternating sixteenth-note running passages in different voices: Enhance the Polyphony

The sixteenth notes shift between different voices and hands

create a smooth and connected sound while maintaining the independence of each part.

Slide 24

The Similarity in Sixteenth-Note Running Passages: Highlighting Polyphony

Musical score for Bach's Prelude BWV 878, showing sixteenth-note running passages in both hands. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a continuous sixteenth-note pattern in the right hand and a more rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand.

Bach's *Prelude* BWV 878

Musical score for Rachmaninoff's transcription of the Prelude, showing sixteenth-note running passages in both hands. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a continuous sixteenth-note pattern in the right hand and a more rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand.

Rachmaninoff *Transcription of Prelude*

Slide 25

Highlighting Polyphony: Gavotte

Keeping Bach *Gavotte for keyboard* style using simple texture and simple polyphony,

Adding three additional countermelody lines under the main melody to enrich the sound

Using the canonic writing to highlight the polyphony

Slide 26

Comparison of Raff's and Rachmaninoff's transcription of Gavotte



Raff Transcription of Gavotte



Rachmaninoff Transcription of Gavotte

Slide 27

Personal Imprints in Transcriptions

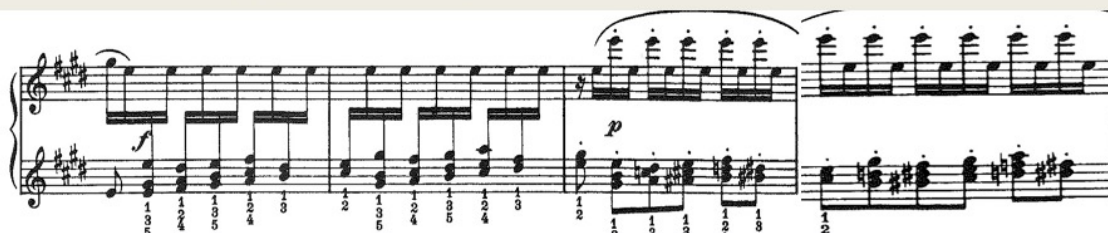
- Chromaticism
- Rich harmonic color by continuously changing the harmony
- An obvious indication when the music goes toward the high point

Slide 28

Exploring the Chromatic Scale in Rachmaninoff's Transcription



Bach's Original Version of Prelude



Rachmaninoff Transcription of Prelude

Slide 29

Gradual Intensification of Texture at the Climactic Point: *Prelude*

Suite from the Partita in E for Violin
J. S. BACH
Preludio
Non allegro
Transcribed by SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Slide 30

Gradual Intensification of Texture at the Climactic Point: *Gavotte*

Gavotte
Transcribed by SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Slide 31



**RACHMANINOFF TRANSCRIPTION OF BACH VIOLIN PARTITA,
NO. 3, IN E MAJOR, BWV 1006,
PRELUDE AND GAVOTTE**

Slide 32

Two Approaches Comparison

Busoni

- embraces a bold, more dramatic style and tends to emphasize pianistic grandeur and explore the full potential of the modern piano, with thicker chordal structures and a focus on large-scale sonority.

Rachmaninoff

- mainly focuses on preserving Bach's elegance, clarity, and complicated polyphonic characteristics. Rachmaninoff's approach aligns with historically informed interpretation, reflecting Bach's orchestral transcription.

Slide 33



Thank You!!

Slide 34