

NOT A NOTE CHANGED, OR YOUR MONEY BACK!!— As opposed to ‘arrangements’ in the popular music world, tonight’s offerings are transcriptions, maintaining all the notes of their sources in their original order but having different instruments play them. The rhythms and the chords don’t change. These are not ‘covers.’

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Our first offering tonight leapfrogs across the history of Western music from its earliest notated form to the living present. Gregorian chant has been adjoined to the rituals of the Roman Catholic Church since the 9th century. One such chant, “Salve Regina” (“Hail Queen”), appealing to the Virgin Mary, is sung at complines (the last mass of the day) in that part of the Church calendar extending from the first Sunday after Pentecost to Advent. John Bull composed the interludes we hear tonight to be interpolated between the seven verses of the mass. Each begins with a quote from the chant, fragments of which are immediately imitated or countered by one or more successive voices. As other voices join, the counterpoint of individual fragments weaves a complex web. Each of the seven verses then both heightens in brilliance and loosens formally as keyboard virtuosity replaces contrapuntal austerity.

Biographical information on John Bull would be as entertaining as irrelevant. Within a period of a very few years he was appointed to a university position by Queen Elizabeth, sent on an espionage mission by her majesty, and fled her kingdom to avoid charges of debauchery. The Archbishop of Canterbury said of him "the man hath more music than honesty and is as famous for marring of virginity as he is for fingering of [organs](#) and [virginals](#)." (!)

In arranging Bull’s anthem variations for fourteen different instruments, Charles Wuorinen, winner of the Pulitzer and the MacArthur among many major prizes for his own original compositions (which include three concerti for Peter Serkin), has seized on the coloristic potential of the organ, with its many registrations, and gone beyond them in assigning specific lines, or fragments thereof, to each instrument. For instance, the chant quote with which the French Horn-then cello-then back to Horn opens the composition is seamlessly continued by the viola, while an answering voice is passed from English Horn to violin; a third, simultaneous contrapuntal melody in the bass clarinet is punctuated by the trombone. The timbre (‘color’) of each continuous line keeps changing.

That's where we hop-skip back a century in this historical panoply. Arnold Schoenberg first composed such a piece in 1909, namely the third movement of his "Five Orchestral Pieces," Op. 16, in which a web of successive identical chords changes colors in a kaleidoscopic manner. Schoenberg's concept of "Klangfarbenmelodie" — "melody of tone colors" — was taken up by his acolytes, Alban Berg and Anton Webern. (Espressivo performed such a piece, Webern's "Five Pieces for Orchestra," Op. 10 two seasons ago.)

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The most prolific musical recycler of all was Johann Sebastian Bach, who regularly re-wrote his compositions for re-use when new performance opportunities presented themselves with a different combination of instruments. Thus, musicologists of the past two centuries generally concluded, based on the nature of the writing for the right hand of the keyboard instrument, that tonight's concerto was an adaptation of a lost violin concerto. More recently, the consensus has tended to be that the original solo instrument was the organ. But the first performance we seem to be relatively certain of was with the Collegium Musicum in Leipzig in the mid-1740s, probably with J.S.B.'s eldest son, Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach, as harpsichord soloist. However, that in no way resolves the question of original inspiration. In the second half of the 1720s, Bach had already written versions — perhaps themselves adaptations — of what was to become tonight's concerto for two of his church *cantatas*, with *organ* as solo instrument: the first two movements as the instrumental *sinfonia* and first choral movement of *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal in das Reich Gottes eingehen, BWV 146*; and the last movement as the opening *sinfonia* of *Ich habe meine Zuversicht, BWV 188*. In these cantata versions the orchestra was expanded by the addition of *oboes* and oboe da caccia, or oboes and 'taille', a term lingering from the Renaissance to indicate the alto voice, which logically would be the English Horn. — The manuscript to the introductory *sinfonia* of the latter cantata, corresponding to the last movement of the concerto, was for whatever shameful reasons cut up into snippets by a collector, for distribution as such; fragments are stored in libraries across the world; much credit for the transcription used tonight goes to the Harvard musicologist and pianist Robert Levin. Otherwise, Peter Serkin has merely grafted the richer instrumentation from the cantatas onto the concerto.

Whatever its genealogy, this is a work of high drama, inexorably driven in the first and last movements, elegiacally lyrical over an unrelenting repeated bass pattern in the second. We do not know that Mozart would have been acquainted with it when composing his equally demonic concerto in the same key of d-minor (or, for that matter, Don Giovanni); but Brahms unquestionably was when he composed his turbulent first piano concerto in the same key.

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Mozart composed the D-major sonata for four hands, K.381, in Salzburg in 1772, around the time of his sixteenth birthday. It was surely intended for performance with his sister Marianne ("Annerl), five years older, on one of their 'prodigy' tours across Europe, as she retained the manuscript after her brother's early death. Piano duets were something of a novelty, perhaps originated by Johann Christian Bach, Johann Sebastian's youngest son. It is plausible that the eight-year-old Mozart played some with J.C.B. during the eight weeks he was studying composition with him in London.

Throughout his life dependent on the support of aristocrats, Mozart regularly composed music for winds, and for winds and string bass, as background music for the nobility's parties—Divertimenti, Serenades, Cassations. Peter Serkin has recast one genre as the other.

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In 1918 the prominent, prophetic Viennese composer Arnold Schoenberg founded the *Verein für private Musikaufführungen*, the *Society for Private Musical Performances*. Before the easy availability of recorded music, the intention of the Society was to enable its performers and its restricted audience (clapping and critics Verboten!) to experience in live sound the music of their time. Twenty-seven composers were represented in weekly concerts the first season alone, including Max Reger, Claude Debussy, Richard Strauss and Igor Stravinsky.

Given financial and logistical constraints, many if not most of these works were presented in transcriptions for reduced personnel, with a heavy reliance on piano, or two pianos, and harmonium, in addition to a chamber music complement of winds and strings. (Espressivo fed on these reductions for its two Mahler concerts.)

The waltz chain performed tonight is from the 'wrong' Strauss, Johann, not Richard. It and other bonbons of the great master were arranged by A.S.

and his disciples Berg and Webern for what was, in effect, a fundraiser for the Society, the manuscripts to be auctioned off after the concert. Schoenberg and Webern switched off on violin and cello, with Berg 'on' harmonium. The latter reports marveling at the genius of Schoenberg's instrumentation, and also that (Eduard) "Steuermann, who grinned at a comment by Schoenberg that each performer was to peruse his score at home, received a wildly difficult piano part, which of course sounded magnificent."

The "Lagoon Waltz" is a potpourri of tunes from the operetta *Eine Nacht in Venedig (A Night in Venice)* (1883).