TOCCATA CLASSICS

# Antoine REICHA

## COMPLETE PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME TWO

ÉTUDE DE PIANO OU 57 VARIATIONS SUR UN MÊME THÈME, OP. 102
SIX FUGUES, OP. 81

**Henrik Löwenmark**

FIRST RECORDINGS

# ANTOINE REICHA Complete Piano Music, Volume Two

**Six Fugues, Op. 81**
(publ. c. 1810) **25:38**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | No. 1 in C minor: *Allegro* | 3:46 |
| 2 | No. 2 in E major: *Allegro* | 4:22 |
| 3 | No. 3 in C major: *Allegro moderato* | 5:26 |
| 4 | No. 4 in E flat major: *Allegro assai* | 3:01 |
| 5 | No. 5 in E minor: *Allegro* | 3:37 |
| 6 | No. 6 in F minor: *Allegro* | 5:26 |

***Étude de Piano ou 57 Variations sur un même thème,suivies d'un Rondeau,* Op. 102** (publ. c. 1824) **42:28**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 7 | Theme – Gavotte française: *Allegretto poco andante* | 0:33 |
| 8 | Variation 1 | 0:32 |
| 9 | Variation 2 | 0:34 |
| 10 | Variation 3 | 0:33 |
| 11 | Variation 4 | 0:32 |
| 12 | Variation 5 | 0:28 |
| 13 | Variation 6 | 0:33 |
| 14 | Variation 7 | 0:35 |
| 15 | Variation 8 | 0:33 |
| 16 | Variation 9 | 0:37 |
| 17 | Variation 10 | 0:35 |
| 18 | Variation 11 | 0:35 |
| 19 | Variation 12 | 0:29 |
| 20 | Variation 13 | 0:33 |
| 21 | Variation 12: Reprise | 0:34 |
| 22 | Variation 14 | 0:34 |
| 23 | Variation 15 | 0:34 |
| 24 | Variation 16 | 0:36 |
| 25 | Variation 17 | 0:34 |
| 26 | Variation 18 | 0:35 |
| 27 | Variation 19 | 1:32 |
| 28 | Variation 20 | 0:34 |
| 29 | Variation 21, Marcia | 0:37 |
| 30 | Variation 22 | 0:31 |
| 31 | Variation 23 | 0:32 |
| 32 | Variation 24 | 0:39 |
| 33 | Variation 25, La Bizarre | 0:30 |
| 34 | Variation 26 | 0:40 |
| 35 | Variation 27 | 0:38 |
| 36 | Variation 28 | 0:45 |
| 37 | Variation 29, Folies d'Espagne | 0:55 |
| 38 | Variation 30 | 0:35 |
| 39 | Variation 31 | 0:38 |
| 40 | Variation 32 | 0:38 |
| 41 | Variation 33 | 0:38 |
| 42 | Variation 34 | 0:39 |
| 43 | Variation 35 | 0:34 |
| 44 | Variation 36 | 0:37 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 45 | Variation 37 | 0:55 |
| 46 | Variation 38, Pastorale | 1:03 |
| 47 | Variation 39, La Tempête | 0:39 |
| 48 | Variation 40, Le Calme | 0:50 |
| 49 | Variation 41 | 0:33 |
| 50 | Variation 42 | 0:33 |
| 51 | Variation 43 | 0:38 |
| 52 | Variation 44 | 0:35 |
| 53 | Variation 45 | 0:43 |
| 54 | Variation 46 | 0:31 |
| 55 | Variation 47 | 0:43 |
| 56 | Variation 48 | 0:32 |
| 57 | Variation 49 | 0:32 |
| 58 | Variation 50 | 0:35 |
| 59 | Variation 51, Le Badinage | 0:41 |
| 60 | Variation 52 | 0:21 |
| 61 | Variation 53 | 0:18 |
| 62 | Variation 54, Le Désespoir | 0:35 |
| 63 | Variation 55, La Chasse | 0:35 |
| 64 | Variation 56 | 0:34 |
| 65 | Variation 54: Reprise | 0:37 |
| 66 | Variation 57 | 0:53 |
| 67 | Rondo: *Allegretto* | 5:04 |

**Henrik Löwenmark, piano**

TT **68:06**

FIRST RECORDINGS

# REICHA AND THE PIANO, VOLUME TWO

by Henrik Löwenmark

History has not dealt even-handedly with the composer Antoine Reicha (1770–1836): some of his many achievements have been emphasised at the expense of other, equally important, activities. Most unfairly of all, his role as a highly influential pedagogue, theorist and innovator has overshadowed his music. The runaway success of his wind quintets has obscured the fact that he wrote many works, often much more interesting ones, in other genres; and his reputation as a composer mainly of chamber music has resulted in surprisingly little interest being shown in his rich and extensive output for piano. Although important steps have been taken during the last decades – recordings above all, but new editions of, and academic research into, his works are slowly but steadily making their mark – the picture that posterity holds of him remains incomplete. In his large and admittedly uneven production, there is a wide spectrum of artistic attitudes and approaches, often contradictory. Within this *œuvre*, one finds dry academic exercises, highly original experiments and works of enormous spirit and playfulness, as well as pieces of considerable depth and weight. Music for piano forms a substantial part of that output – surprisingly, since he was never active as a professional pianist, in contrast to so many of his contemporaries who started their careers as virtuosos performing their own music on the most fashionable instrument of the day.

Born in Prague on 26 February 1770, Antonín Rejcha was only ten months old at the death of his father (who had been released from serfdom only six years earlier), leaving him in the care of a mother and stepfather who did nothing about his education. The thirst for knowledge that marked his adult career was already a potent element in his make-up and so, at age eleven, he took care of his own destiny and fled to his paternal grandfather in Klatovy, a village near the Bavarian border, and then continued towards Wallerstein, in Swabia, to his uncle Josef, composer and principal

cellist in the private orchestra of the local count. Josef took the boy in and taught him to play the flute, violin and piano; his French wife taught her nephew French and German. In 1785, Josef was appointed principal *Kapellmeister* to the court in Bonn. Anton,[1] of course, moved with his adoptive family and before long was playing flute in the electoral orchestra, alongside a fifteen-year-old violist by the name of Ludwig van Beethoven.

Reicha soon began studying composition. In his brief autobiography, *Notes sur Antoine Reicha* (c. 1824), he writes that, when he moved to Hamburg in 1794, he had abandoned all plans of being a musician, although that did not prevent him from giving piano-lessons. In other words, he must have developed a somewhat different relationship with the instrument: it never became a vehicle for virtuosic display, nor for obtaining employment from some nobleman or for finding new pupils. Rather, it became a very important vessel for experiment and pedagogical ideas as well as for purely 'artful' music. Indeed, the chief distinguishing feature of Reicha's piano music is its innocent mixture of experimental, advanced, didactic and simple characteristics. There is an almost complete absence of the operatic fantasias, flashy variations, commonplace rondos and other pieces that at the time were flooding a growing market – Reicha seems to have refused to depend on them. And even when he is at his most entertaining, he never flirts with the listener – or the performer.

Reicha may not have had the same thorough training in piano-playing as, for example, Beethoven and Clementi; and in the years when he remained a practising musician, his main instrument was the flute, and so he did not have to keep up his pianism. This background may explain some of the 'flaws' (strange part-writing, odd doublings, 'hollow' sounds and so on) in his piano compositions – his textures are often not as full and rich as those of his more illustrious pianist-colleagues. He also recurrently employed unusual pianistic textures, ranging in extremes from advanced solutions and figurations to a degree of unidiomatic clumsiness. But these characteristics can be partly explained as the conscious, deliberate endeavour of his searching mind to go beyond

[1] His germanicised name became 'Antoine' in 1799 when he first moved to Paris and he retained this spelling for the rest of his life, even during the period (1802–8) he spent in Vienna. Similarly, the Czech 'Rejcha' became, and remained, 'Reicha', although pronounced differently in German and French.

the self-evident and conventionally euphonious – it was simply a matter of a very personal style, as with Janáček or Satie, for example. Be that as it may, one moves here in a territory with many rather strange and odd ways of writing, to which the ear takes its time to become accustomed, let alone accept. The same goes for phrasing, form, pauses and harmony, where all sorts of surprises and peculiarities can be found. They may seem a mark of eccentricity, but that would be to misinterpret his aims, and they are certainly not typical of all his piano pieces.

Another trait is his sparing use of performing instructions, in contrast with a trend that was on a marked increase among his contemporaries, not least Beethoven. He never indicates more than two *ff* or *pp*; there are not many markings of *forte* and *piano* nor for *crescendo* and *diminuendo* (signs or words); and indications such as *ritenuto*, *calando*, *rinforzando*, *dolce*, *agitato*, *con espressione*, *smorzando*, *poco*, *sempre* and so on are few and far between. Reicha's view, perhaps influenced by tradition (which, of course, he accepted or rejected as he wished), can be found in the last sentence of the preface to the six piano trios published as his Op. 101: 'Le grand mérite de l'exécution consiste en ce qu'on sente et devine les intentions de l'auteur, pour l'indication desquelles il n'existe pas de signes' ('The great merit in performance consists of how to feel and divine the intentions of the composer, for the indication of which there are no signs').

How well, then, did Reicha play the piano? To judge from the music itself he must have been quite accomplished, but that does not prove much; it simply isn't known, even if he writes in his autobiography that he was often asked at informal gatherings to play some of the *Trente-six fugues* – published by Reicha himself in Vienna in 1804 and 1805 – which had gained something of a reputation.

In spite of these considerations, Reicha's piano music as a whole has a higher musical density, so to speak, than that of Clementi, Dussek and Hummel, since their considerably larger output contains so many works of more or less routine character and/or in popular style. Here Reicha is much closer to his friend Beethoven in his seriousness of purpose and rejection of the demands of the market.

In preparing this project to record all of Reicha's piano music (except, naturally enough, for a small number of works that still have to be found), I have divided it into

three groups, corresponding as far as possible to the period of origin of each work but more often according to when and where they were published. The problems with dating many of these works are, first, that those manuscripts that still exist have no date of composition and, second, that many, demonstrably or at least probably, were written several years before they were published, by which time he had moved to another city. In a letter to the publisher Artaria in Vienna dated October 1797, Reicha offers a long list of compositions for publication, including solo-piano and chamber works, some of which in all probability are identical to several pieces printed by Breitkopf & Härtel during his years in Vienna. But since it is hard to date works without any informative indication or comment, my guiding principle has been a combination of the periods in Reicha's life, the opus numbering and different publishers: Hamburg/Paris, 1794–1802; Vienna, 1802–8; and Paris, 1808–36. When it comes to works in manuscript, stylistic, graphological and in some cases linguistic considerations have determined the placing of individual works in each group. Another complicating factor is that many of the small pieces that Reicha included in various collections also exist in alternative autograph versions, which can be slightly different. Several of them were probably written in Hamburg in 1794–99 but not published until he had settled in Paris, in 1799–1802, or even during the Vienna period.

**Six Fugues, Op. 81**

The Six Fugues, Op. 81, published by Pleyel, was the very first work by Reicha to be printed in Paris after his return, in 1808, to the city since his first stay there in 1799–1802. Although it seems reasonable to assume that this collection was published around 1810, the year of composition is more uncertain; it is known that Reicha wrote much music in Vienna that was not published at all, and there is a huge gap in the opus numbering between the Violin Sonata in A major, Op. 62, and this Op. 81 – no works bearing the numbers 63 to 80 ever appeared in print, as far as is known. In his autobiography, though, Reicha writes that whenever there was a break in composing, he got back on the track through writing fugues – which could indicate that these fugues may already have been composed in Vienna.

Reicha's interest in fugue-writing was lifelong. Four works containing fugues had been published during his first stay in Paris: *Douze fugues* (without opus number, six of them probably written in Hamburg since they are mentioned in the Artaria letter); No. 9 in Livre 2 of his *Études ou excercises*, Op. 30; one of the fantasies in his *Étude des Transitions et deux Fantaisies*, Op. 31 (a fugue based on the theme of the so-called 'Cat fugue' by Domenico Scarlatti); and the second of the *Deux fantaisies*, Op. 32, which is a very free type of fugue. All these pieces except the first fantasy in Op. 32 were incorporated in the *Trente-six fugues* (reprinted in 1828 – one of the very few republications of Reicha's music during his lifetime). The *Douze fugues* had aroused some interest in Paris, and the regard of important figures like Cherubini, Méhul, Gossec and others may very well have influenced Reicha's decision to stay there for the rest of his life. Although he was very ambitious, trained as he was in the Austro-German contrapuntal tradition represented, by Bach, Fux, Haydn, Albrechtsberger, Salieri, Mozart and Beethoven, among others, he would have been aware that the taste for instrumental fugues wasn't particularly strong in Paris, certainly not as separate pieces for piano solo. Even so, it seems likely that he wanted to present himself by showing his contrapuntal skills – after all, in 1818 he was to succeed Méhul as professor of fugue and counterpoint at the Paris Conservatoire after giving private lessons in composition and counterpoint for several years, not only to younger students but to colleagues as well.

His fascination for fugal writing is clearly demonstrated by the sheer number of self-contained fugues and fugatos for solo piano he wrote compared with his contemporaries: Clementi wrote eleven, Mozart one (not counting those that are incomplete), Dussek one (as the second part of a fantasy), Weber six, Hummel three, and Beethoven four (all being part of larger structures). Including the collection *Études dans le genre fugué*, Op. 97, 1820, Reicha wrote more than 60 fugues/fugatos, out of which about two-thirds are more or less fugues proper – even if some of the pieces in the *Trente-six fugues* can hardly be described as fugues, whatever flexible standards one may use. Not until August Klengel's *Kanons und Fugen in allen Dur- und Molltonarten* (published in 1854) can anything comparable be found in the literature for piano.

If Reicha had a specific reason to write yet another set of fugues in Op. 81, it is not stated anywhere; the edition has neither dedication nor preface. Op. 81 is a much less revolutionary and more 'academic' work than the *Trente-six fugues*, more akin to the fugues in Op. 97, and resembling some of the choral fugues in Reicha's *Der Neue Psalm*, Requiem and *Lenore*, all written in Vienna and unpublished. The aim to demonstrate some sort of bold procedure or experiment is kept on a tighter rein here. On the other hand, the full compass of the piano register is used to a much higher degree than in the earlier fugues, and there are long stretches with full-bodied chords and octaves, giving them a bigger sound; one could even describe the pieces in Op. 81 as a sort of 'concert fugue' pointing to Mendelssohn's *6 Praeludien und Fugen*, Op. 35 (1832–37), perhaps as a kind of Neo-Baroque endeavour. The themes and rhythmic patterns of Op. 81 are more Baroque-oriented, and there are few really 'harsh' chord progressions – that is, an extensive use of major-third mediant modulations, tritone polarisation, chromatic boldness, so abundant in the *Trente-six fugues* – and most entries of the themes are placed according to a more conservative approach. Bach and Handel are the obvious models, but at the same time all six fugues are tinted with a somewhat different harmonic, and more Romantic, expressive language, at times with surprisingly open and almost naked voice-leading – partly caused by Reicha's frequent octave and third doublings – making them into something quite original and contemporary. It's not pastiche or reverent adherence to the past, and not just anyone writing fugues in the early nineteenth century – it's Reicha. These fugues are not as bold as Beethoven's greatest achievements and Reicha's own *Trente-six fugues*, but they nonetheless constitute a work of personal stature and integrity.

Half of the fugues are in the minor, a rare proportion in Reicha's *œuvre*, since he tends to favour major keys, and their organisation is unique, too: each new fugue has one tone in common with the key – or the closing chord – of the preceding fugue. No. 1 [1] is in C minor (ending in the major), No. 2 [2] in E major, No. 3 [3] in C major, No. 4 [4] in E flat major, No. 5 [5] in E minor (ending in major) and finally No. 6 [6] is in F minor. The six fugues thus build a kind of chain, not guided by a regularly chromatic pattern of ascending major and minor keys as in Bach's *Well Tempered Clavier*, nor in a

circle of fifths or alternating closely related minor and major mediant keys, for instance, C major/A minor, D major/B minor and so on, as in Schumann's *Vier Fugen*, Op. 72 (1845), and *7 Stücken in Fughettenform*, Op. 126 (1853), but with irregularly ascending keys where certain tones function as pivots. The chromatic rise in Nos. 4–6 from E flat major to E minor and eventually to F major shows Reicha's penchant for unusual juxtapositions, as well as the fact that the collection starts and ends in the minor.

There are obvious relationships between the themes of the fugues, which reinforces the probability that they were written at the same time and are meant to form a unified whole. No. 1 and No. 5 are more or less two versions of the same shape; No. 3 has figuration common to Nos. 1 and 5; the shapes of Nos. 2 and 4 are similar; Nos. 4 and 6 fit thematically well together; Nos. 3 and 6 both have octave leaps. Furthermore, Nos. 3, 5 and 6 have sequences with strong similarities; Nos. 1, 3, 4 and 5 all have sequences of parallel thirds in contrary motion; Nos. 1, 3 and 5 have almost identical endings, as have Nos. 2 and 6. The slowing of the tempo in all the fugues except No. 4, in combination with a more subdued expression in the last bars, gives them a more Romantic and reflective touch. Some of the sequences in thirds at a large distance between the hands sound surprisingly modern and, in spite of a more conservative harmonic language, there are nevertheless several sudden harmonic or chromatic shifts that go beyond the neat and academic. The abundant use of chains of sequences moving by steps in major/minor thirds is one interesting feature pointing to Berlioz.

No. 1 [1] is vigorous and energetic. Motifs from the theme and the countersubject (although the latter is not very sharply defined) are frequently used. No. 2 [2], offering a contrast with its lyrical and song-like theme, gentle syncopations and lightly rocking character, is perhaps the most 'Romantic' (or least Baroque) of all six, pointing to Schumann and Mendelssohn. No. 3 [3] is harmonically, rhythmically and sequentially more Baroque-influenced, though a more homophonic and pompous character dominates the ending. No. 4 [4] – fast and jolly, and clearly Baroque-oriented – has a well-defined countersubject in the falling scale figure against the energetic shape of the main subject, a fugue that seems to be inspired by the instructions in Fux's monumental and highly influential *Gradus ad Parnassum*. No. 5 [5] has a withdrawn and melancholy

character – as a laid-back version of No. 1 – that permeates the whole piece in spite of a short powerful outburst near the end. No. 6 [6] is likewise a rather subdued and resigned piece with a sharp countersubject introduced early on after the octave leap of the main theme.

Nos. 1 , 2, 4 and 6 are four-voice fugues, Nos. 3 and 5 are three-voice but occasionally spill into sections in four voices. The classic advanced contrapuntal devices such as inversion, retrograde, retrograde inversion, augmentation and diminution of the themes are used only occasionally. Indeed, Reicha never seems to have been very interested in using them frequently, although he writes quite extensively on different contrapuntal techniques in his *Traité de haute composition musicale* (1824–26), illustrating his discussion with many examples.

***Étude de Piano ou 57 Variations sur un même thème, suivies d'un Rondeau*, Op. 102**

In almost every article on Reicha's music in general or on the piano works in particular, the variation set *L'Art de Varier ou 57 Variations pour le Piano-Forte*, Op. 57, published in 1804, is discussed or at least referred to. Yet in almost none of these articles is there any mention of another big set of variations by Reicha, published during his lifetime (c. 1824), which has a similar combination of didactic and artistic ambitions. What makes this omission especially strange is that the title itself is an obvious reference to the earlier work.

One reason for this neglect is undoubtedly the fact that, until recently, only four of the solo piano works were available in modern editions: the *Trente-six fugues*, the Sonata in E flat, Op. 43, *L'Art de Varier* and the *Fantaisie*, Op. 61. The rest seem to have been *terra incognita* for the commentators. In 2014, however, the French publishing house Symétrie began a series, still ongoing, of editions of Reicha's music for solo piano, and it is to be hoped that this undertaking will promote a wider awareness of the full range of these works. Another reason for the focus on Op. 57 at the expense of Op. 102 might be the vicinity of Beethoven during Reicha's Vienna years. Their friendship and frequent discussions, and the fact that Beethoven wrote three large variation-sets during this same period – the Six Variations, Op. 34, the 'Eroica' Variations, Op. 35,

and the 32 Variations in C minor, WoO80 – have prompted musicologists to try to identify reciprocal influences between the two composers in the ambitious works they were working on at that time. Whatever the reason for the ignorance of Op. 102 – it is – together with Reicha's Op. 57, Beethoven's three sets and, of course, his 'Diabelli' Variations, Op. 120, one of the few large-scale and far-reaching variation cycles between Bach's 'Goldberg' Variations (1741) and Schumann's *Sinfonische Etüden*, Op. 13, composed in 1834–35 and published in 1837. No other contemporary composer of any stature wrote anything as ambitious in that genre.

There is one intriguing detail about the opus number itself, 102. It is probably mere coincidence but just might have been intended by Reicha, who was fascinated by mathematics and playing with figures (and was good at backgammon). Not only does Op. 102 clearly refer to its predecessor, Op. 57, by having the same number of variations, but it also contains the figures 1 and 2, or 10 and 2. Added together, respectively, they make 12, just like 5+7. This is also the number of the tones in the chromatic scale, which consists of 7 diatonic plus 5 chromatic tones – the white and black keys on the keyboard. Furthermore, the theme of Op. 57 has twelve bars; Op. 102 has ten. Given that Reicha and Beethoven discussed their music in Vienna, and supposing that Reicha later in Paris might have had some knowledge of the 'Diabelli' Variations, begun in 1819 but not finished or published until 1823, it can easily be imagined that Op. 102 is a kind of reference or greeting to Beethoven and his huge work, using the same three figures as its opus number of 120. There may also be a more prosaic reason for such a long work: that Reicha wanted to write a variation-set to illustrate his thoughts in the *Traité de haute composition musicale*. In the admittedly very short section dealing with variation techniques, he lists six ways of changing/combining the three basic parameters: theme, accompaniment and harmony, all of which are to be found in Op. 102. In his comment on writing longer variation-sets, preferably in slow tempos, he warns against making them too long for the listeners. In many ways, though, Op. 102 goes far beyond his own recommendations. But already in *Kunst der Practischen Harmonie* (written in Vienna, and published only recently) he had offered a list of possibilities of how to change the parameters of a variation theme, some of them obviously more connected to the

procedures in Op. 57 but others clearly reflected in Op. 102, among them change of tempo or key different cadential endings, upward or downward transpositions.

Reicha's interest in variation was not confined to these two big sets. There are three smaller but interesting sets written in the years between them: *Variations sur l'air Charmante Gabrielle pour le Piano*, Op. 85, *Variations pour le Piano sur un Thème de Gluck*, Op. 87, and a set of Variations in E flat major.[2] There are also examples of different variation techniques in some of his collections of smaller piano pieces. Five sets in all, though two of them unusually long, do not seem much compared with all the commonplace and lightweight trifles of his contemporaries, but that is precisely the point: for a man of Reicha's intellectual capacity and curiosity, the variation genre was a challenge that had to be dealt with in a very different way. In this respect, he was like Beethoven. No. 22 of the *Practische Beispiele* (c. 1803, and also published only recently) is a short and highly interesting variation set, *'Fantaisie sur l'Harmonie précédente'*, which elicits the following comment from the composer:

> This type of repetition offers a new form of composition that is, at the least, more admirable, more important, and more suitable for the intellect, which is more greatly engaged by it, than the trite, mostly dull, so-called variations, whose modern and often affected style can appeal only to the small-minded.

The *Étude de Piano* of the title is to be interpreted in a wide sense. Here there are studies in technique, character, harmonic variety, melodic transformation and so on. It is, as so often with Reicha, a kind of compendium of composition. The term 'étude' was well established in the piano literature by then, but not, as far as I am aware, in connection with variations, at least until Schumann's *Etüden in freier Form über ein Beethoven'sches Thema* of 1831–34, which was not published until 1976, and of course his *Symphonic Studies*, Op. 13.

The theme [7] is taken from an opera by André Grétry, *Panurge dans l'île des Lanternes* (1785). It is not from an aria, as was the most common practice, but from a

[2] There may also be a fourth set: it has yet to be established whether a set of variations listed as Op. 83 in Reicha's worklist is or is not the same as the E flat variations.

ballet piece in the second act. Grétry's name, however, is nowhere to be found in Reicha's Op. 102. The theme is simply inscribed 'Gavotte française'. Yet it is hardly likely that Reicha did not know that the piece was from Grétry's opera: he had been acquainted with the popular composer since his first stay in Paris, and, after Grétry's death in 1813, he even wrote a cantata, *Hommage à Grétry*, for solo voices, chorus and orchestra, in which he used several tunes from Grétry's operas, set to new words. The explanation, then, might be that the melody was so well known that it was unnecessary to mention Grétry's name – or perhaps that it was an anonymous gavotte that Grétry had chosen for his ballet section. Either way, the theme of Op. 102 is fairly simple, perhaps even bland, but here it is significantly more sophisticated than its source. Grétry's original is dance-like and in the form of a short variation-set, alternating between B flat and E flat major. Its harmonies are only tonic/dominant, the bass line stays in root position and, unlike Reicha's reworking, there are no semiquavers (sixteenth notes) in the melodic line. The most important of Reicha's modifications – a variation in itself – is the upward shift of the bass line via a C sharp to D, which functions as a contrary motion through four bars against the falling motif (C to F sharp and A to D) and gives the harmonic scheme a wider feeling.

The way in which Reicha uses all the small motifs and details of the theme is ingenious and often highly original: the upbeat notes right at the beginning, returning at the end like a snake biting its own tail; the falling filled-in fifths; the rising bass line; the alternation between D major and G major; the D–E–D movement in the right hand, mirrored by D–C sharp–D in the left:, the important tone of C sharp; the contrary motion on the dominant-seventh chord towards the end; the descending thirds in the left hand at the very end – everything is done with care, multiplied, transformed, inverted, reduced, sometimes obscured, but still there, developed, radically changed. At the same time, the basic structure of the theme and its melodic shape are almost invariably present, though not always audibly, making it possible to sing the tune to nearly half the variations, minor ones included, whereas others require chromatic and melodic adjustments, some quite far-reaching. Occasionally one encounters what seems to be a more conventional figured variation, although a comparison with the works of many

of his contemporaries shows Reicha going beyond that, creating different characters within each variation. There are, however, several variations where it is impossible to discern the theme: the metamorphosis has gone too far, even if the structure is still there. One original treatment in quite a few variations is the alternation between the closely related keys of G major and E minor, the two being versions of each other; and there are even some modulations from the initial key to a more remote one. Many of the variations shift from G major to G minor in the middle part before ending in the major, giving them a sombre touch. The simple threefold alternation between D and G major in the theme is mirrored in many different ways through the whole work. Some variations continue the preceding one through a closely connected motif or figure, and in two cases – 19 20 21 and 62 63 64 65 – a variation returns to form a little group of variations with itself as the beginning and end.

An incomplete list of the major features of the work might point to:

- variations where the theme serves as bass line, completely or partly: 3 10, 4 11, 17 25, 28 36, 32 40, 41 49;
- variations in the minor: 12 19 29 37, 32 40, 34 42, 37 45, 39 47, 48 56, 49 57 (all in G minor) and 54 (E minor) 62;
- variations in G major/E minor: 14 22, 21 29, 24 32, 36 44, 44 52 and 46 54;
- variations where the key is changed: 16 (G minor > E flat major) 24, 25 (E minor > E flat major) 33, 26 (G minor > C major) 34, 50 (E flat major > G minor) 58;
- variations in other keys than the G major/E minor: 13 (E major) 20, 33 (E flat major) 41, 55 and 56 (E major) 63 64;
- variations with titles: 21 29, 25 33, 29 37, 38 46, 39 47, 40 48, 51 59, 55 63.

Variation 57 66, starting on C major in a most touching way, continues as if about to present an almost identical repetition of the theme but soon moves along a more improvisational path with reminiscences of earlier variations, then stops on the dominant, hence functioning, in a more traditional fashion, as a prelude to the lively, sparkling concluding Rondo 67. Here, the melody, only the first four bars of which are used, is transformed into a $\frac{6}{8}$ dance and the three repeated Gs have become ten repeated triplets. The rondo theme returns twice. In between, there are episodes

of more advanced harmonic progressions, starting with a *forte* outburst in E minor. This passage is followed by surprising and bold sequences in D minor and C minor, continuing to a B flat dominant-seventh chord but with A flat, the seventh, as its bass tone; that is, the bass line goes E–D–C–(via an implied B flat)–A flat, with only the G flat missing to make a full whole-tone scale. Instead, the bass goes to G, being the third of an E flat major chord, thus making the transition from E minor to E flat major in this section a reminiscence of Variation 25, 'La Bizarre' 33, which starts in E minor but ends in E flat major with a G as bass note. But, soon after, a full whole-tone scale circle is finally completed with very fast changes in dominant-seventh chords, leading to an ingenious transition to the fermata before the return of the rondo theme. The next episode is in F major, alternating between tonic and dominant (a 'memory' of the theme), then rushing into fast passage-work in G major. When this section eventually comes to an end on the dominant in G major, preparing for the expected return of the theme, there comes the real surprise: the D major dominant-seventh chord is reinterpreted as a G sharp major dominant-seventh chord with a minor ninth and a diminished fifth but lacking the tonic, which functions as the dominant to – yes, C sharp major! The bass C sharp from the theme can finally have its moment in the limelight during a fifteen-bar parenthesis in the key that is the most remote to G major. But soon, after another fermata, a new dominant in G follows, allowing the theme to be heard. The sections with passage-work return, but an octave higher, and all the rest is coda/stretta. Apart from the rondo theme, the whole rondo is permeated with fragments of the original theme, above all the falling-fifth figure and the minor-second motif.

As frequently with Reicha, the melody of the theme is quite often heard in its original form, like a *cantus firmus*. The importance of a return to the point of departure seems very clear, often in a startling simplicity – something to be found in all his variation works. As the theme is brief and there are no repeats, which is in itself highly unusual, the changes in character from one variation to another are sometimes swift and abrupt, one of many typical traits. The texture is often characteristically open, at times even sparse, and the use of conventional counterpoint is restricted. Several variations are basically in two voices, although sometimes obscured by fast figuration. In contrast to

Op. 57, the texture in Op. 102 is more linear, despite the full exploitation of the resources of the piano, including the extremes of the keyboard. There are plenty of sections with wide spacing between the hands, thus creating an open sound; and the pianistic solutions are often inventive. The harmonic language is sparing of chromatic alterations, the chromatic colouring being mostly due to the use of the D–C sharp–D move (D–E flat–D in inversion) and the frequent change from B natural to B flat in the melody – but none the less bold at times.

Being in many respects a highly typical Reicha creation, Op. 102 also shows his dependence on Bach, especially the 'Goldberg' Variations, and much less on the Haydn/Mozart heritage. It is as if Reicha has distilled his knowledge of piano-writing, counterpoint, harmonic abstraction and so on, making Op. 102 a counterpart to Beethoven's Op. 120, and also very different from it. Furthermore, adding to the parallel with the 'Diabelli' Variations, Op. 102 is Reicha's last major work for piano and the very last one to be published; after this achievement there are only a few minor pieces in manuscript. At the same time, it has little to do with contemporary variation-sets, for it eschews all decorated sentimentality, shallow ornamentation and technical virtuosity for its own sake, those being the fashionable reasons for writing variations during this period, in favour of a search for the inherent possibilities of a very simple, even banal theme. One may look at it as a patchwork quilt where all the pieces are based on the same simple structure and have a number of significant details in common. Sometimes the structures are more obscure; sometimes variations are clustered together to form a larger picture within the whole framework. Reicha's objective is to go beyond what the listener already knows, or thinks he knows, about the theme, to show the many possibilities there are for using differing, imaginative ways of drawing out and developing details even from such a trivial starting-point.

**Henrik Löwenmark** was born in Gothenburg and educated at the university there but has long since lived in Stockholm. Since his graduation he has been active as a freelance musician in a multitude of contexts: solo, chamber music, accompaniment and song-coaching, orchestral piano, choir, opera and so on. His interest in Reicha started in the 1980s and in 1999 he began to collect all the piano music that that had not been published in modern editions – almost all the extant music. In 2006 he finished his master's thesis, *The Piano Music of Anton Reicha*, at the University of Gothenburg.

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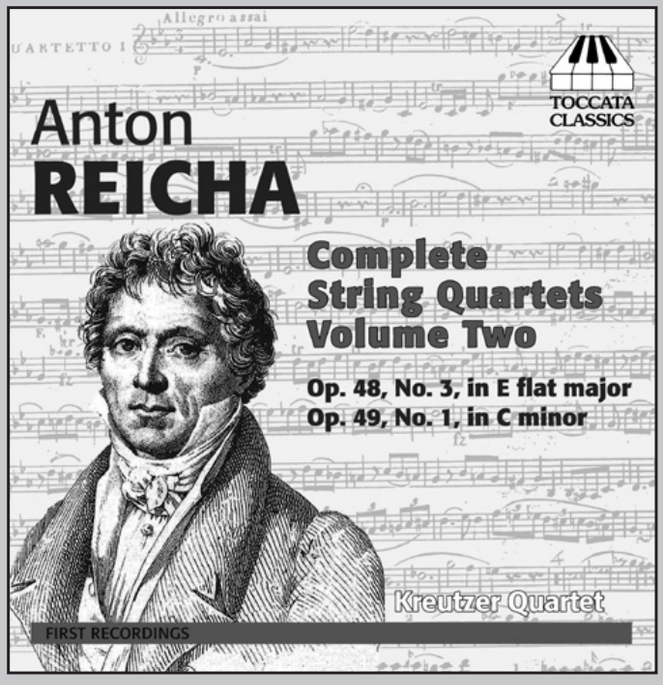


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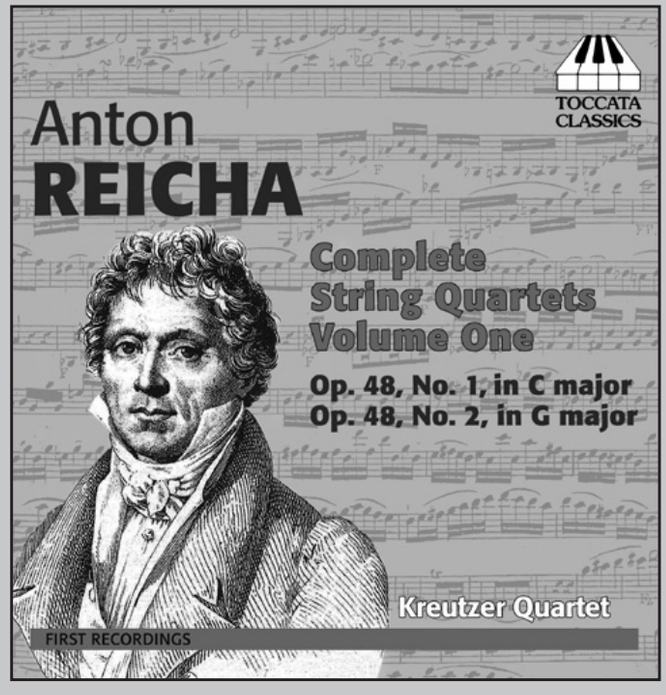


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