



Antoine REICHA

COMPLETE PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME FIVE

VARIATIONS SUR L'AIR CHARMANTE GABRIELLE, OP. 85

FUGUE INSTRUMENTALE À 3 DANS LE STYLE MODERN

VARIATIONS SUR UN THÈME DE GLUCK, OP. 87

LA CHERCHEUSE D'ESPRIT

DEUX FANTASIES, OP. 31

UN POCO ANDANTE

VARIATIONS, OP. 83

MARCHE FUNÈBRE

1818 Dien. 507

Henrik Löwenmark

ANTOINE REICHA Complete Piano Music, Volume Five

Variations in E flat major, Op. 83 (c. 1815)

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Deux Fantaisies, Op. 31 (c. 1800)

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La Chercheuse d'esprit (c. 1800)

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Henrik Löwenmark, piano

TT 69:47

ALL EXCEPT * FIRST RECORDINGS

REICHA AND THE PIANO, VOLUME FIVE

by Henrik Löwenmark

The works that make up this fifth volume cover twenty years or so and display the stylistic diversity that characterises so much of Reicha's music. They range from the Viennese classical style of *Un poco andante* to the three variation sets composed in Paris around 1815, from the radicalism of Op. 31 and the *Marche funèbre* to the less audacious yet personal *Fugue* of the early 1820s. To these works one can add the highly individualistic arrangements of the thirteen ariettas of *La Chercheuse d'esprit*. Regardless of the intention and starting point for each work, they all testify to Reicha's desire to go beyond the commonplace, not yielding to the usual expectations of performers and listeners, but moving instead along less well-trodden paths.

Variations in E flat major, Op. 83 (c. 1815)

There are strong reasons to believe that the music preserved in an autograph clearly ready for publication is that of the Variations, Op. 83, announced in catalogues around 1814 but, for reasons unknown, withdrawn and of which no printed examples have survived. The style of the texture and the harmonic language, akin to the variation sets Opp. 85 and 87, make it likely that it was composed at about the same time.

Its theme 1 is Reicha's shortest and most unassuming by far, only eight bars long. It is not known whether the theme is original or not, although it certainly sounds like a ditty, a nursery rhyme perhaps, something he overheard, with its repeated motif (Reicha later arranged another very simple tune, the well-known French lullaby 'Do, do, l'enfant, do', only four bars long, for chorus and piano). The theme can be divided into two parts where bars 3–4 and 7–8 are almost identical with 1–2 and 5–6 respectively – it could hardly be simpler. There is no hint whatsoever of going towards the dominant, not even one single note outside the scale of E flat major. But this striking simplicity

seems to be the very impetus for Reicha to create something that is highly refined within its strict limitations. In contrast to his other published variation sets for piano (Opp. 57, 85, 87 and 102), the theme is repeated only in Vars. 2, 3, 4 and 16, each time as a bass line or in the left hand, whereas elsewhere it is the harmonic and periodic structure that are constant. So, by unpretentious, but never trite, means, and by refraining from any decorative virtuosity, Reicha can raise a smile at his economical ingenuity and by the little surprises he offers in these miniatures. For example, Var. 2 [3] contrasts the theme in the bass with gently dissonant part-writing in the right hand, Var. 10 [11] has a flavour of the salon or perhaps early Schumann, and Var. 11 [12] is nothing more than a line in unison octaves that are rhythmically displaced, except for the two last bars. Var. 14 [15] is a varied repeat of Var. 13 [14] and those two are the only ones in a minor key, E flat minor, the latter ending in the relative key of G flat minor. Var. 15 [16], with its broad and singing tone, is the only one breaking the pattern of eight bars and duple time, by being in triple time and stretching out to thirteen bars. It is with the Coda [18], covering about a third of the whole piece, that Reicha breaks loose from his own restrictions. The music is quickly removed from E flat major, passing to A major through a thematically related chain of transpositions. This use of a mode at the tritone, like the descending sequences at the very beginning of the Coda, is a favourite technique of Reicha's. Quite soon the harmony returns to E flat major, and the first bars of the theme reappear. After the climax on the dominant chord followed by running triplets, one now hears the second part of the theme (starting a kind of coda to the coda), followed by a glimpse of Var. 7 [8] before the very end.

Deux Fantaisies, Op. 31 (c. 1800)

The two fantasias were published in Paris in about 1800 by Imbault, together with four tables of modulations containing transitions from C major and C minor to all major and minor keys, that is, 44 modulations in all. They range from three to thirteen bars, many of them highly interesting, demonstrating Reicha's deep interest during this period in expanding the harmonic vocabulary. Some of the modulations are extremely condensed, as a kind of short-cut, illustrating the technique for reaching, within very few steps, keys

far away from the tonic. No. 2 of the Op. 31 fantasias is more illustrative in this sense, as it incessantly wanders through a multitude of keys, though the first fantasia, too, has some highly unusual transitions.

The pieces are quite different from each other, making for considerable contrast. No. 1, in C minor [19], is calm and introvert almost throughout, whereas No. 2, in G major [20], despite the unstable tonality, is fast, extrovert and playful.

The C minor piece was later incorporated into the famous *Trente-six fugues* (published in 1803–4, 1805 and a third time in 1828). That is to say, it is labelled as a fugue, not even with the addition of ‘Fantaisie’ (as No. 14 in that collection) – rather surprisingly, since no more than the first 33 bars would qualify it as a fugue, even considering Reicha’s highly idiosyncratic and unorthodox approach to the fugue genre at that time. After the presentation of the theme, three entries for the remaining voices follow: an unexpected F minor (replacing a more conventional G minor), C minor and G minor. The rest of the piece consists mostly of rising and falling harmonic sequences, though mainly written in four parts, and of sudden unprepared moments of utter calm and inwardness. All signs of thematic entrances have disappeared. The four-bar theme is intriguing in itself: a broken diminished-seventh chord repeated a semitone below, followed by a codetta played twice and ending on the same note as the beginning, a C, like a cadence, as if ruling out any forward movement, making it ‘unfit’ for fugal development. The fact that the theme is built on two diminished-seventh chords, ambiguous as they are, accounts for the almost mystic quality and brooding character of this dark-coloured piece. Its bold harmonic twists and resemblance to the main theme in Liszt’s *Faust* Symphony (with its own falling sequence of rising broken major thirds) makes it one of Reicha’s revolutionary and visionary pieces, even as it apostrophises Bach and late Mozart. Given the sombre character of the piece and the way it, so to speak, ‘restarts’ several times, it emerges more like a meditation than a fantasy on the theme and its countersubject.

The second fantasia, with its restless and driving force, could be described as a kind of equivalent to Beethoven’s *Alla ingharese quasi un capriccio* (the ‘Rage over a

Lost Penny'), Op. 129, though less boisterous and 'angry'.¹ The ascending main theme, heard at the beginning, rushes through many different keys, interchanged with the little Haydnesque descending second motif. The home key of G major is stable only in the first four bars, then briefly in the middle, and in the very last bars. Apart from its originality as a whole, a few interesting details should be pointed out. First, in the section having no motifs or fast notes but only plain and quite long chords, the main theme is nevertheless present: the pacing of the chords corresponds to the rhythm of the main theme prolonged in double augmentation, that is, twice as slow. Second, at the climax of the piece, in *fortissimo*, the main theme in the left hand is harmonised within a plain G minor scale in double augmentation without any 'correcting' chromatic alterations, giving it an archaic feeling as well as pointing forward into the future, towards Berlioz,² for instance. There follows a sudden suspended transition in *piano*, leading to cascades of descending sixteenth-notes, and then a cadence with a harmonic sequence of F major, B flat major, E flat major, pedal-point on D, and, finally, back to G major. As with No. 1, it starts *piano* and ends *pianissimo*.

***La Chercheuse d'esprit* (c. 1800)**

The subtitle of the collection is 'XIII Ariettes françaises du Seizième Siècle arrangées pour le piano et Accompagnées d'un [*sic*] Harmonie moderne' ('13 French ariettas of the sixteenth century arranged for piano and accompanied by modern harmonies'). The title is the same as a well-known popular French comic opera dating from 1741 by Charles-Simon Favart. Furthermore, seven of the ariettas correspond, more or less, to seven popular airs in the opera (Nos. 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10 and 12). But, as was common practice, the original texts of these ariettas were replaced by new texts in the libretto, though with an indication of the well-known melody to which these words were adapted. The origin of the six ariettas not matching any of Favart's airs is unknown, as is the reason that Reicha put all thirteen together and harmonised them according to his own taste, or, in his own

¹ Its late opus number notwithstanding, Op. 129 is generally thought to date from 1795–98, by which time Beethoven and Reicha had been close friends for a decade.

² Berlioz was a student of Reicha's at the Conservatoire de Paris from 1826 to 1828.

words, ‘with modern harmony.’ One reason may have been his interest in anonymous national tunes, advocated in his later treatises as something worth investigating, an idea that was to be an integral part of the national Romanticism in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The collection is dedicated to ‘Mr Lachnith’ – almost certainly the Bohemian composer Ludwig Wenzel Lachnith,³ also referred to in Reicha’s preface to his *Études ou Exercices*, Op. 30,⁴ and the dedicatee of *Fantaisie sur un thème de Girolamo Frescobaldi*.⁵ Since these works originated from around 1800, it seems most likely that *La Chercheuse* was conceived and put together at about the same time.

Reicha’s arrangements of these ariettas are a personal mixture of the very simple and the quite advanced, harmonically and pianistically, as well as of mood and tempo. In some, such as Nos. 2 [22] and 4 [24], the harmonies are kept very plain and do not add much to what is implied in the tune. Others, like Nos. 9 [29], 10 [30] and 12 [32], go far beyond the harmonic implications of the original tunes, adding a distinct flavour of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries, and with a much richer pianistic texture. In several of the numbers, the harmonies are quite expressive, showing what Reicha considered ‘modern’. The numbers corresponding to the Favart airs were all transposed and underwent minor changes in the melodic line, although it cannot be ruled out that Reicha collected them, and the others, from another source and in slightly different versions. The ninth arietta, the first seven notes of which are identical to the first seven of No. 7 [27] and in the same key, calls for special comment. The tempo marking of *Largo di molto* is unusual in such a context, and the gently arpeggiated *pianissimo* accompaniment is rather suggestive. Above all, the unexpected harmonic turns, not least the recurring lowered seventh, in D flat (by no means implied in the melody, though not infrequent in other works by Reicha during this period), creates a very special atmosphere, like a

³ Lachnith (1746–1820), born in Prague, had settled in Paris by 1783. He is best remembered for an 1801 adaptation of Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* (as *Les Mystères d’Isis*), which was roundly excoriated by Berlioz in his autobiography.

⁴ Antoine Reicha, *Complete Piano Music*, Volume Three, Toccata Classics TOCC 0243.

⁵ *Ibid.*

combination of the archaic and what Berlioz would later do. Perhaps this is the number where the difference between ‘original’ and ‘arrangement’ is at its most pronounced.

The order of the ariettas, as far as the sequence of keys, characters, contrasts, tempos and modes are concerned, seems organised to create a complete cycle, every arietta connecting smoothly to the preceding and following ones.

Fugue instrumentale à 3 dans le style moderne (c. 1822)

This little fugue [34] was published in Book 4 of the *Traité du haute composition* (1824–26), though there exists a manuscript that says ‘von A. Reicha, Paris 1822’. In the treatise it is presented as an example of what a modern fugue might be, that is, more instrumental and less constrained by all sorts of old rules, as opposed to the more conservative vocal fugue (‘le style rigoureux’), which was the ideal and final goal of the teaching of counterpoint at the Paris Conservatoire. Reicha adhered to this strictness in his teaching with a number of examples in his treatise, but he also criticised the way students could be hampered by these regulations, pointing instead to the possibility of using a freer counterpoint much more in instrumental music as a vehicle for expression, something by which Berlioz no doubt must have been influenced. In terms of style, the fugue has much more in common with the fugues and fugatos in *34 Études dans le genre fugué*, Op. 97, than the earlier and very radical *Trente-six fugues*, and yet it still sounds modern. Though the Baroque fugue is still its foundation, some of the voice-leading and sequences of harmonies are clearly early Romantic. Interestingly enough, it has a certain affinity with the fugato parts in the Overture to the ‘Flight to Egypt’ (Part 2) in Berlioz’s *L’Enfance du Christ* from 1852. Not only do they share the same key and time-signature, but they also have something of the same withdrawn and elegiac mood. To connect them further, Berlioz described Part 2 as written ‘*en style ancien*’ (‘in the ancient style’).

Un poco andante (c. 1797?–1803?)

This piece [35] is a slightly different version of No. 11 (out of 24) in the collection *Practische Beispiele*, where it has *Allegretto* as the tempo marking. Most of the pieces in that collection, as well as the preparation of the accompanying and very extensive text,

were, in all probability, composed in Hamburg before 1799. Furthermore, four of the pieces were included in *Études ou Exercices*, Op. 30, published in Paris around 1800. The version presented here was written on French paper, which might indicate that Reicha had planned to publish it, together with other pieces from *Practische Beispiele*, in Op. 30 or in another collection.

Its smooth and unassuming character should not obscure its quality and serene charm. The seamless way in which Reicha gently leads the line forward through all the half- and full cadences, without ever stopping, is ingeniously worked out, and can be ascribed to the suppleness of the dissonances and the suspensions, and to the manner in which the second motif, consisting of an ascending triad, is transposed both to minor and major. Finally, the last fourteen bars, as a kind of coda, form a long descending line down to the very last, long full cadence. The overall character and the motifs owe much to Haydn and Mozart but there is nevertheless a certain stamp of Reicha to it.

Variations sur l'air Charmante Gabrielle, Op. 85 (c. 1815)

The theme for these variations is a song composed to a text accompanying a letter from the French King Henri IV (1553–1610; *r.* 1589–1610) to the young noblewoman Gabrielle D'Estrées, one of his many mistresses. The words were probably not written by the king, and the composer's name remains obscure. It has similarities in its phrase-structure and cadences with the sixteenth-century ariettes in *La Chercheuse d'esprit*. The melody must have been very popular for a long time, since it exists in a version for piano in manuscript by Gossec and was also used in his third Mass. It was used as the basis for variations by Fernando Paër, by George Onslow, one of Reicha's earliest students during his second stay in Paris, and by several others during the nineteenth century, and it occurs even in the twentieth. Reicha himself used it for four variations in No. 7 of his 24 Trios for horns, Op. 82. He also quoted it in his *Traité de mélodie* (1814) as an example of how to combine two equal uneven phrases in a sequence of ten bars. In Book 3 of his *Traité de haute composition musicale*, it is presented as a canon for three voices with an optional piano accompaniment.

The melody is more or less present in most of the ten variations but with minor alterations here and there, as in Var. 3 [39] and Var. 6 [42] (in the minor key). The structure of the theme, with bars 1–6 repeated and bars 7–16 without repeats, the two halves of the latter being almost identical, is maintained in Vars. 2, 4, 6, 8 and 9, whereas the others vary the repeat. Within this narrow frame Reicha manages to create swift changes in character: the calmness of Var. 2 [38], the boisterous Var. 3 [39], the serenity and inwardness of Var. 4 [40], the somewhat nostalgic mood in Var. 7 [43], the quasi-Baroque structure of Var. 5 [41] (pointing to *Intermezzo I* in Schumann's *Kreisleriana*) and the energetic semiquaver (sixteenth-note) triplets in Var. 9 [45] (where the insistent displaced melody is likewise reminiscent of Schumann). Variation 10 [46] moves seamlessly into the Coda, quickly departing from C major but soon returning to the tonic through surprising modulations. After an extremely short fugato the theme is chopped up into smaller bits where breaks in the flow and lingering fermatas create a kind of stand-still. Then, 21 bars of figured pedal-point, murmuring during the repeated first phrase of the song, conclude this charming and effective work.

Marche funèbre (c. 1800)

This piece [47] is similar in its rather restrained mood and character to the *Marche funèbre* that is the second movement of the D major Sonata.⁶ But whereas the sonata movement is gentle, almost elegiac, here there is a certain austerity, as if it were written for a ritual or procession, emphasised by the almost constant dotted march rhythm in combination with unexpected harmonic twists and abrupt changes of dynamics. It is also unusually irregular, despite its brevity, not as regards phrase lengths but in its overall form. There is only a vague sense of ABA, and several motifs are transposed in a surprising way. For instance, bars 3–4, in F major, turn up next in E flat major and, for a final time, in D major. The opening motif is found in D minor as early as in bars 5–6. Interestingly enough, these same two bars were used much later in Reicha's *Traité* (1824–26) in a *Marche funèbre* in D minor for string quartet, though in that case as an example of double counterpoint.

⁶ Antoine Reicha, *Complete Piano Music*, Volume Four, Toccata Classics TOCC 0273.

The Trio corresponds with the Trio in the D major Sonata in three respects: it is written in $\frac{3}{8}$, the texture is mainly contrapuntal, and the main motifs share some common traits, all in contrast to the march section. But here the polyphonic writing dominates even more and the whole section is subdued and highly chromatic, sometimes reminiscent of late Mozart – in his *Kleine Gigue* for piano, K574, for instance. The constant use of the tritone interval in the main motif and the ever-shifting descending harmonic progressions make the implied home key of A minor (the parallel key to C major) almost non-existent. In fact, there are hardly any tonic chords at all.

The march section was later used as the fourth and last movement in the *Musique pour célébrer la mémoire des grands hommes et des grands événements/Musik des Andenken grosser Männer und grosser Begebenheiten zu feiern*, written for a huge wind orchestra, timpani and canon for an outdoor event in Vienna some time before 1808. In the second manuscript of the same work, the title is in French only: *Musique pour célébrer la mémoire des grands hommes qui sont illustrés au service de la Nation française*, implying that Reicha wanted to place the work in a purely French context. That particular work has its obvious roots in French revolutionary music for outdoor wind ensembles, and it comes as no surprise that the Trio in the piano version was not used, since its withdrawn character and polyphonic writing would fit less well in an outdoor concert.

It is not possible to ascertain when the piano piece was written but it was most probably before the orchestral version. The manuscript is numbered ‘No. 13’, which, as is the case with a number of the unpublished individual piano pieces, indicates that it may have been intended for the *Études ou Exercices*, Op. 30, or *Practische Beispiele*. If an orchestral version of the march was already being considered at that point, it seems probable that its inspiration was the French wind orchestra, and that the piece was composed during Reicha’s first stay in Paris in 1799–1801.

Variations sur un thème de Gluck, Op. 87 (c. 1815)

The third variation set from the 1810s is based on a tune taken from a ballet piece, a Musette in Act IV of Gluck’s opera *Armide* (1777), that is, rather than an aria from an opera, as was the more common practice. It is similar, then, to Reicha’s *Étude de piano*,

Op. 102,⁷ the theme of which is based on a ballet tune from an opera by Grétry. The Gluck melody must have been quite popular at the time, being the basis for several other sets of variations. There also happen to exist at least two song versions with texts in Swedish. The earlier one was written in 1797 by a well-known female poet from the late eighteenth century, Anna Maria Lenngren, and the other, anonymous, tells an amusing tale of a sailor travelling around the world and seems to date from the latter part of the nineteenth century. These examples suggest that there may be French-text versions as well, though no examples have yet been found.

Op. 87 is slightly longer and more ambitious than the other two variation works presented here, though still very far from Reicha's large-scale works, *L'Art de varier*, Op. 57, and *Étude de piano*, Op. 102, each with 57 variations. Although it has nothing of the didactic or all-encompassing character and ambition of those two imposing works, it is still more technically demanding than Opp. 83 and 85, as well as having more variety of character, harmonic vocabulary and texture. As often with Reicha, the textures change swiftly from variation to variation, but, since the repeats in the theme are maintained, except for Vars. 13 [61] and 14 [62], the character of the variation stays for longer. A few words on some of the variations may suffice to point out some interesting features. The imitative and playful Var. 4 [52], with a light taste of Bach and Mozart, turns into Var. 5 [53], in which the theme is mainly harmonised in the parallel key of D minor, with a hint of A minor in the second repeat; Var. 6 [54] sounds like a musical box, whereas in Var. 8 [56] the melody of the theme is reduced to a constantly trilled upbeat over the monotony of the accompaniment. Var. 9 [57] shows another pattern of monotony with its incessant drum figure in the left hand. The beautiful Var. 13, *Adagio* [61], the emotional centre of the work, gives way to Var. 14, *Allegretto* [62], with its limping theme, like a caricature of Var. 9, functioning simply as a transition to the high-spirited Coda, *Allegro assai* [63], full of sequences and harmonic surprises.

Around the same time, 1815, Hummel published ten variations on the same theme, his Op. 57. They show some illuminating differences in the approach to the theme,

⁷ Antoine Reicha, *Complete Piano Music*, Volume Two, Toccata Classics TOCC 0017.

compared with Reicha's personal and more exploratory treatment. The two works offer an illustration, not only of the difference between these two composers but also of the contrast between Reicha's conception of variation form and the one prevalent at that period. The harmonisation in Hummel's work stays most often very close to the theme and the contrasts in character are much less pronounced than with Reicha. The pianistic texture is slightly more flamboyant (hardly surprising, considering Hummel's capacity as a virtuoso) but at the same time more superficial, that is, highly typical of the period. Interestingly enough, the only variations in which Hummel rises a little above the commonplace are two where he treads into Beethoven territory....

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 began in the 1980s and in 1999 he started to collect all the piano music 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.

On the website MusicWeb.com, Jonathan Woolf wrote of Volume Two (TOCC 0017) of this series: 'The music is charming, full of musical panache and key interrelations and alternations. The performances make the best case possible for the music with sympathetic playing throughout'. Reviewing Volume Three (TOCC 0243), Philip Buttall went further: 'this exceedingly well-played and faithfully recorded new issue from the seemingly indefatigable Toccata Classics label will further enhance Antoine Reicha's burgeoning reputation as a composer of innovative piano music often well beyond its time. But it also considerably reinforces the ongoing need for this musical exhumation, so that his true historical importance and worth eventually afford him the standing he most surely deserves'.

Volume Four (TOCC 0273) was reviewed by Daniel Morrison in the November 2020 issue of *Fanfare*: 'Löwenmark's performances are fluent, spirited, committed, and for the most part



Photo: Emelie Kroon

technically admirable, with precise, even runs and excellent balance and coordination of the hands. His playing is sensitive to nuance but also has reserves of power for the climaxes. [...] This release confirms the impression that Reicha is an interesting and original composer. His music is often idiosyncratic and requires careful listening to appreciate its subtleties.'



Reicha's Piano Music in New Editions from Symétrie

The *Grande Sonate* in E flat and the Sonata in D on this disc are published by Symétrie, Lyon, in editions by Michael Bulley. They are part of a series, begun in 2014, devoted to Reicha's piano music. Currently, twenty works have been published. They include nine of the thirteen sonatas, four experimental pieces from the collection *Practische Beispiele*, the *Variations sur un thème de Gluck*, the *57 Variations sur un thème de Grétry* and *La Chercheuse d'esprit*, a collection of thirteen short pieces based on popular tunes. The latest editions are the first three of four volumes of the *34 Études dans le genre fugué*, Op. 97.

Read more at <https://symetrie.com/en/authors/antoine.reicha>

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