

# Programme

ICH RUF' ZU DIR, HERR  
NUN KOMM DER HEIDEN HEILAND  
J. S. BACH (1685 – 1750)  
*Transcribed for piano by*  
FERRUCCIO BUSONI (1866-1924)

In recent years, original instrument performances and a striving for authenticity, have led to far fewer performance of transcriptions and arrangements. If anything they are a rarity, but tonight's programme opens with two transcriptions for piano of Choral Preludes written originally for the organ.

Busoni was a great lover of Bach's music, and, as a homage to Bach, as well as a way of making his works more accessible, made his own, personal transcriptions of various works for piano.

Busoni was born in Empoli in Italy, the only child of two professional musicians. They often toured during his childhood, and Busoni was a child prodigy making his debut at the age of seven. Within a short time he was playing his own compositions in Vienna where he heard Franz Liszt play, and met Liszt, Johannes Brahms and Anton Rubinstein.

Busoni left a few recordings of his playing as well as a number of piano rolls. His compositions were largely neglected for many years after his death, but he was remembered as a great virtuoso and arranger of Bach for the piano.

Some idea of Busoni's mature attitude to composition can be gained from his 1907 manifesto, *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music*, a publication somewhat controversial in its time. As well as discussing then little-explored areas such as electronic music and microtonal music (both techniques he never employed), he asserted that music should distill the essence of music of the past to make

something new.

In many ways his own transcription of Bach do just this, bringing a romantic and pianistic approach to baroque compositions.

*Ich ruf' zu dir, herr* is made into a beautifully romantic nocturne. *Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland* is probably Busoni's most popular Bach transcription, the melody being taken from Walther's *Gesangbuch*. It includes a spirited fugue and a subtle combination of the subject with both its own inversion and the melody from the last line of the choral.

RHAPSODY IN B MINOR Op. 79  
NO. 1 IN B MINOR

*Agitato*

RHAPSODY IN G MINOR Op. 79  
NO. 2 IN G MINOR

*Molto passionato, ma non troppo allegro*

VARIATIONS ON A THEME  
BY HANDEL Op.24

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833 - 1897)

By the time Brahms came to write the Op 79 Rhapsodies he was a fully mature composer. They were inscribed to his friend, the musician and composer Elisabet von Herzogenberg, and it was his suggestion that the pieces were renamed as Rhapsodies, though the composer himself was at first reluctant to call them anything other than piano pieces.

Each of the two Rhapsodies is structured like a miniature sonata and consists of a slow central section enclosed between two faster outer sections.

Rhapsody in B minor, Op. 79, No. 1 is an astonishing work, filled with conflict and passion. Its highly formal style is that of a rondo-sonata. By

turns passionate and tender, the Rhapsody has moments of genuine introspection as well as allowing for a more bravura approach.

No 2 in G minor has a more moderate tempo, with harmonic tensions in its apparent wanderings before finding its inevitable destination.

The Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op. 24, are a highly imaginative, classically polished composition composed in September 1861 as a birthday present for Clara Schumann, who was the widow of Brahms' musical and personal mentor, Robert Schumann. Shortly after Brahms gave the premiere in Vienna on November 29, 1861, Clara herself played the Handel Variations in a recital in Hamburg.

Brahms borrowed the theme from Handel's Harpsichord Suite in B flat, HWV 434 written in 1733. In the Handel, the original theme is transformed into five variations. To explore the new chromatic possibilities that were possible in moving the work from harpsichord to piano, Brahms enlarged the scope of his opus to 25 variations concluding with an extended fugue.

## INTERVAL

SONATA NO 8 IN C MINOR Op 13  
"PATHÉTIQUE"

1. *Grave; allegro di molto e con brio*
2. *Adagio cantabile*
3. *Rondo: allegro*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770 – 1827)

Ludwig van Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 8 in C Minor, op. 13 was titled "Pathétique" by Beethoven himself. It was published in 1799,

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