

A portrait of Marianna Prjevalskaya, a young woman with long, wavy, light brown hair, wearing a dark red, sleeveless dress. She is sitting on a dark wooden chair, resting her chin on her right hand and looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is dark and out of focus.

MARIANNA
PRJEVALSKAYA

PIANO

PLAYS RACHMANINOFF

Variations on Themes by
Chopin and Corelli

The logo for the Cincinnati World Piano Competition, featuring a stylized golden piano keyboard and the text "Cincinnati WORLD PIANO COMPETITION".

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Rachmaninoff's *oeuvre* represents an extraordinary legacy of Russian art. As a successor of Tchaikovsky, he remained faithful to the nineteenth-century Romantic tradition in Russia. A sensitive introvert, he fell under the pressures of modernistic trends of the period, often doubting his self-worth as a composer. Rachmaninoff combined his career as a composer with that of a concert pianist, and his output is extraordinary; the piano literature without his contribution would be unimaginable. The variation genre, however, occupies only a fraction of his work. Rachmaninoff's style of writing is, in itself, developmental. By varying the germ of an idea, Rachmaninoff created the most extensive and beautiful melodies, which were not intended to be subsequently developed. Perhaps Rachmaninoff initially felt that the genre's nature inhibited his composer's imagination, forcing him to follow a set scheme. His hesitation is evident in the title "quasi variazione" of the second movement of the *Trio Élégiaque*, Op. 9, one of the earliest examples of his efforts in the genre.

It was not until 1902 when Rachmaninoff finally completed a full set of variations, his *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, Op. 22. Thirty years would elapse before the composer returned to the genre, composing the *Variations on a Theme of Corelli*, Op. 42 in the summer of 1931, the first piano work he composed while in exile after leaving Russia in 1917. Both are presented here.

After his marriage in the spring of 1902, and a long honeymoon abroad, Rachmaninoff spent the summer months at his family estate at Ivanovka, where, surrounded by peaceful nature, he found inspiration and time to start working on his *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, Op. 22 and *Preludes*, Op. 23. The *Variations* were premiered by the composer in Moscow on February 10, 1903. Criticized for its excessive length, it received significantly less acclaim than the *Preludes*. It has rarely been performed, even today. Overshadowed by his most performed works, the *Second Sonata*, *Second Concerto*, and some of the *Preludes*, the *Chopin Variations* are an authentic gem of the piano literature that deserve special attention. The work exemplifies Rachmaninoff's finest writing where compositional skills give birth to a world of endless pianistic possibilities.

The Variations on a Theme of Chopin is a relatively early composition, where the composer is still exploring the potential of the instrument. His creativity and imagination have no boundaries, and though his idiomatic language is still under the romantic influence, he has no fear of experimenting with form, expanding it to the outermost limits. Rachmaninoff's ingenuity lets him step aside from the original melody, allowing him to present the theme in diverse disguises, often barely recognizable.

It is not known why Rachmaninoff chose Chopin's *Prelude in C Minor* from Op. 28 as the theme for his variations. The composer rarely revealed the sources of his inspiration, and one can only guess that the prelude's concise rendering and emotional depth are what most attracted him.

The 22 *Variations* can be grouped into three large sections, concealing a ternary form. The seriousness and linear movement in the first three variations suggest Bach's contrapuntal writing, and a feeling of restrained emotional discourse sets up the fascinating transformation that the theme will undergo throughout the composition. These three variations together with the fugue-like Variation XII reveal an introspective Rachmaninoff, who looks at the past through experimental polyphony.

The first ten variations are organically interconnected, unified by their commonly shared C minor tonality. Variation XI surprises us with its chromatic modulation to the relative major E-flat, where incessant movement between the voices creates a dreamy landscape. It is in this second group where other tonal areas are explored, creating greater variety of mood and deepening the darkness of despair and emotional confusion.

The mysterious character of Variation XIII casts a spell with its harmonic color and static quality. Its embellished reflections in the top register foretell the same echoing technique Rachmaninoff will return to in Variation IV in the *Corelli Variations*. Variation XIV disguises the theme in augmentation, hiding it under impressionistic harmonic layers, in contrast to the

capricious Variation XV in F minor. The following variation together with Variation V and VI are of singular beauty. Even greater exquisiteness is heard in Variation XXI, where a canonic exchange between the left and the right hands creates a continuous melodic flow. Its tonal area of D-flat major represents Rachmaninoff's ethereal world, where lyricism reaches its highest expressivity. The recurrence of this tonality in the Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini (1934) as well as in the Corelli Variations suggests that this key is of special significance for the composer. Variation XVII is one of the best representations of the bell sonority that haunts so much of Rachmaninoff's music. Its dark key of B-flat minor, weighty chordal writing and consistent dotted rhythm turn this variation into a funereal outcry.

As the work progresses, each variation grows in length and density. The group of the last four variations closes the ternary structure with a festive "bell" celebration in A major (Variation XIX), a whirling "snowflake" waltz (Variation XX), and a celestial variation in D-flat major with its orchestral transition (Variation XXI) leading into the final largest variation in C major. The individuality of each variation distinguishes them as concert pieces on their own. Rachmaninoff closes the set with an optional virtuosic coda that awakens the listener from the peaceful dissolution of C major.

Thirty years later, Rachmaninoff returned to the genre. In the meantime, his musical language underwent an organic development. Reluctant to embrace the experimental innovations of Prokofiev and Stravinsky, Rachmaninoff preferred to remain true to himself. His adverse attitude toward modern music is expressed in the following words, a statement that also underlines the importance of authenticity of the self: "I am organically incapable of understanding modern music, therefore I cannot possibly like it; just as I cannot like a language, let us say, whose meaning and structure are absolutely foreign to me."

Often considered as a conservative and unprogressive composer, Rachmaninoff proves the opposite in the works of his later period. **The Variations on the Theme of Corelli**, Op. 42 is his last solo piano composition. Written a few years earlier than the Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini and his Symphonic Dances, these variations exhibit a stylistic growth that is

revealed mainly in the harmonic language and structural compactness. As his style evolved, Rachmaninoff tended to express his ideas in a more concise way, resulting in tighter musical phrases often based on shorter contrasting segments. This becomes obvious in the revised, 1931 version of the Piano Sonata, Op. 36. His persistent self-doubt, deeply affected by earlier criticism, prompted him to add a note under Corelli Variations XI, XII and XIX. that these variations can be omitted. Sadly, Rachmaninoff rarely performed this set of variations in its entirety. He similarly leaves the decision up to the interpreter whether to perform them all or omit a few in the Chopin Variations as well.

Based on the Baroque tune *La Folia* that Arcangelo Corelli used in his Violin Sonata, Op. 5, No. 12, and dedicated to Kreisler, this set of variations was premiered by the composer in Montreal on October 12, 1931. If the Variations on a Theme of Chopin freely unfolded as a narration, the Variations on a Theme of Corelli fully rely on the theme. There is no longer a tendency to enlarge each variation as in the earlier set. Instead, a general intensification leads to an anticipated climax at the end of the composition. The overall structure of the variations points to a cyclical form, and reintroduction of the theme in Variation XIV and in the coda draw an arch over the piece.

The work can be subdivided into four groups. The first group can be viewed as a ternary form, where the theme and variations I and II work as an 'exposition', variations III and IV as the middle section, and variations V, VI and VII as 'recapitulation'. The second group includes variations VIII through XIII. Its dynamic plan ranges from *pp* to *ff* and parallels a significant increase of tempo from *adagio*, through *allegro vivace* and *agitato*. The Intermezzo stands out for its rhapsodic and improvisatory character as well as for its Oriental quality; it sets the beginning of a new group that includes variations XIV and XV in D-flat major, foreshadowing the famous variation XVIII in the Rhapsody. The fourth and final group returns to its original key, and encompasses the last four variations, XVI through XX. A closing coda works as a postlude, wrapping the cycle with an atmosphere of hopeless acceptance.

– Marianna Prjevalskaya



MARIANNA PRJEVALSKAYA

Praised by critics as “a grand pianist” (*Il Cittadino*, Italy) and a “master of piano” (*Music Magazine 'Auditorium'*, Korea), Marianna Prjevalskaya captivates audiences with emotional intensity, maturity, and richness and beauty of tone.

Since her solo debut with orchestra at age nine, Ms. Prjevalskaya has appeared with major orchestras such as the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, National Lithuanian Symphony Orchestra, Rzeszow Philharmonic Orchestra, Korean Symphony Orchestra, Granada Symphony Orchestra, Galicia Symphony Orchestra and Sendai Philharmonic Orchestra, and has collaborated with renowned conductors such as Ion Marin, Robert Treviño, Carlos Prieto, David Danzmayr, Stamatia Karampini and Tadeusz Wojciechowski.

As a recitalist, Marianna has performed in the US, Europe and Japan at prestigious venues such as the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Accademia Santa Cecilia in Rome, Teatro Goldoni of Florence, Minato Mirai Hall in Yokohama, Auditorio Manuel de Falla in Granada, Palau de la Música in Valencia, Orpheum Theatre in New Orleans, and at Weill Hall and Steinway Hall in New York. Her debut at Carnegie’s Weill Hall with Rachmaninoff’s Variations on a Theme of Chopin and the entire Book II of Préludes by Debussy was praised by musical critic Frank Daykin as “one of the major piano recitals of the season” and “a stunning display of mature pianism.” He also complimented “her sensitivity to harmonic color and her natural glorious romantic rubato” (*New York Concert Review*, New York). Praises for her refined tone as well as depth of musicianship continued echoing in subsequent reviews. Spanish critic Santi Riu complimented Marianna as a “virtuoso, impetuous, passionate and mature pianist of great musicality” and described her “rich sound range full of sensitivity that enabled her to create contrasting and attractive ambiances, as well as colors, shades, lights and shadows” (*Diario Segre*, Spain). Tim Smith was “consistently impressed by Prjevalskaya’s beauty of expression” and asserts that she is a “pianist who has moved well beyond the hone-the-technique phase and can concentrate entirely on making music” (*The Baltimore Sun*, Baltimore).

Marianna’s first victory at a piano competition was at the age of 14 at the Marisa Montiel Piano Competition in Linares, Spain, where, in addition to the first prize, she was awarded a special prize for musicality. Since then her performances have won her top prizes at over 20 competitions, including the 2014 New Orleans International Piano Competition, the 2013 World Piano Competition in Cincinnati, the 2013 European Piano Competition in Normandy, the 2012 Panama International Piano Competition, the 2011 Jaén International Piano Competition in Spain, and the 2007 Paderewski International Piano Competition, among many others.

Marianna also has appeared at important festivals in Europe and in the US, such as Norwich and Norfolk Festival in the UK, Salzburg Festival, Festival Russo in Rome, Bologna Festival, and Bearcat Piano Festival in Cincinnati. Her choice of repertoire goes through a deep internal gestation; avoiding merely flashy works, Marianna favors programs that show the depths of musical expression. Her performances have been broadcast by Lithuanian and Polish television, and Spanish Radio2 Clásica. Her previous recording, released by Naxos in 2012, featured works by Scarlatti, Haydn, Schumann and Zárate.

Born to a musical family, Marianna benefited from early lessons with her mother, who was her principal mentor for more than eleven years, starting when Marianna was age six. She continued her studies at the Royal College of Music in London with Irina Zaritskaya and Kevin Kenner. In 2003 Marianna moved to the United States where she joined the Toradze Piano Studio at Indiana University. She also holds an Artist Diploma and Master of Music degree from Yale School of Music, where she studied with Boris Berman, and a doctorate from Peabody Conservatory of Music under the guidance of Boris Slutsky. Marianna is thankful for the inspiration and support of all her mentors. She is also grateful to Elaine Martone and Chelsea Crutcher for giving birth to this long-awaited project.

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Variations on a Theme of Chopin, Op. 22

- 1 Theme: Largo [1:31]
- 2 I. Moderato [0:25]
- 3 II. Allegro [0:18]
- 4 III. L'istesso tempo [0:20]
- 5 IV. L'istesso tempo [0:54]
- 6 V. Meno mosso [0:40]
- 7 VI. Meno mosso [1:08]
- 8 VII. Allegro [0:18]
- 9 VIII. L'istesso tempo [0:23]
- 10 IX. L'istesso tempo [0:23]
- 11 X. Più vivo [0:36]
- 12 XI. Lento [1:36]
- 13 XII. Moderato [2:18]
- 14 XIII. Largo [1:36]
- 15 XIV. Moderato [1:55]
- 16 XV. Allegro scherzando [1:44]
- 17 XVI. Lento [1:15]
- 18 XVII. Grave [1:16]
- 19 XVIII. Più mosso [1:09]
- 20 XIX. Allegro vivace [01:31]
- 21 XX. Presto [1:37]
- 22 XXI. Andante – Più vivo [3:37]
- 23 XXII. Maestoso – Meno mosso
– Presto [6:07]

Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op. 42

- 24 Theme: Andante [0:51]
 - 25 I. Poco più mosso [0:30]
 - 26 II. L'istesso tempo [0:34]
 - 27 III. Tempo di menuetto [0:37]
 - 28 IV. Andante [1:05]
 - 29 V. Allegro [0:20]
 - 30 VI. L'istesso tempo [0:20]
 - 31 VII. Vivace [0:26]
 - 32 VIII. Adagio misterioso [0:55]
 - 33 IX. Un poco più mosso [0:59]
 - 34 X. Allegro scherzando [0:36]
 - 35 XI. Allegro vivace [0:25]
 - 36 XII. L'istesso tempo [0:38]
 - 37 XIII. Agitato [0:34]
 - 38 Intermezzo: A tempo rubato [1:28]
 - 39 XIV. Andante [1:07]
 - 40 XV. L'istesso tempo [1:50]
 - 41 XVI. Allegro vivace [0:38]
 - 42 XVII. Meno mosso [1:07]
 - 43 XVIII. Allegro con brío [0:36]
 - 44 XIX. Più mosso – Agitato [0:33]
 - 45 XX. Più mosso [1:09]
 - 46 Coda: Andante [1:26]
- Total playing time 51:30

Technical Information

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Microphone Pre-amplifier: Millennia HV-3D 8-Channel

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Recording Producer: Elaine Martone, Sonarc Music

Recording Engineer, Editor, Mixing and Mastering Engineer: Chelsea Crutcher

Piano Technician: Eric Wolfley

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