

Ferruccio Busoni – The Six Sonatinas:

An Artist's Journey 1909-1920 – his language and his world

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Part I of an in-depth appreciation of these greatly significant piano works

The Six Sonatinas, written between 1910 and 1921, are Busoni's finest and most compelling collection of compositions. Although they are not programmatic in any aspect, the set tells a cohesive story of an artist's journey. These are deeply personal, quasi-autobiographical compositions: each Sonatina serves as chronicle, and marks a gathering and culmination of Busoni's spiritual searchings and growth. Fluid and timeless, the Sonatinas also encompass Busoni's temporal world. Beginnings and departures are marked. They are a diary of contentment, of aggressive experimentation, of the war and chaos, and peace and reconciliation. The Sonatinas are contemplative works, and although all end softly, they are unreservedly expressive, with abundant contrasts and highly developed instrumental writing. The Sonatinas are also premonitory; they foretell Busoni's orchestral and operatic language as it expands, evolves, and crystalizes.

Busoni writes to his wife, Gerda, from Color-

ado Springs: "No year in my life has been so full up as this one which is just over: the richest in work, experiences and achievements – and I feel that I am still going upwards. Everything good, my Gerda, is with us." The date is 1 April, 1910, and the composer marks his 44th birthday surveying a year of fertile and extravagant artistic discovery.

In December 1908, Busoni composes the sparkling miniature for piano, *Nuit de Noël*, as a musical offering to the New Year. He often acknowledges Christmases, New Years, and other important dates with musical works. *Nuit de Noël* is a masterpiece of colour and style, an auspicious beginning for the New Year. After completing his concert tours in 1909, Busoni begins one of his most prolific and intense periods of artistic achievement.

From June until October 1909, his efforts appear impossible:

Berceuse, for piano. June 1909

Fantasia nach Johann Sebastian Bach, for piano. June 1909

Preludietto, Fughetta ed Esercizio Book 1 An die Jugend, for piano. June 1909

Preludio, Fuga e Fuga figurata Book 2 An die Jugend, for piano. July 1909

Giga, Bolero e Variazione Book 3 An die Jugend, for piano. July 1909

Concertante transcription of Schoenberg's Klavierstück, op. 11 no. 2. July 1909

Introduzione e Capriccio (Paganinesco) & Epilogo Book 4 An die Jugend, for piano. August 1909

Berceuse élégiaque, for orchestra. October 1909

The summer's accomplishments also include several transcriptions of Bach's *Chorale Preludes* and a musical comedy libretto titled *Frau Potiphar*. In addition, Busoni writes his explorative treatise, *Attempt at an Organic Notation for the Pianoforte*, and prepares new material for an anticipated second edition of his *Outline of a New Aesthetic of Music*. He begins orchestration on his important opera, *Die Brautwahl* and in July, completes Act 1 part 1.

The *Berceuse élégiaque* is inscribed in memory of Anna Busoni, and *Fantasia nach Johann Sebastian Bach* is composed for Ferdinando Busoni. Both parents died a few months apart in 1909, and these pieces are personal eulogies, musical gestures of bereavement and mourning. The remaining compositions are dedicated to the young generation of composers.

Sonatina, 1910, is born from *An die Jungen*. The composer, Bernard van Dieren, offers to clarify the misleading title, *An die Jugend*. He writes, "Busoni intended them as visionary sketches of aspects which, in his belief, music was to assume and dedicated them to Youth which would see the full growth. On Youth all his hopes centered." Van Dieren adroitly concludes:



“He did not resist the temptation to leave possibilities of confusion. It points to a didactic strain in his mind which avoided the danger of pedantry by an impish sense of humour, and by a romantic delight in erudite, poetic complexities.” Busoni explains the title to Schoenberg in 1909, *An die Jugend* is intended to signify that the publications are conceived for the new generation,” and as with his Elegies, Busoni dedicates the pieces to promising young musicians: Josef Turczinski, Louis Theodor Gruenberg, Leo Sirota, Louis Closson, and Emile R. Blanchet. Busoni writes, in his forward to *An die Jugend*: “My love belongs to the young and shall always belong to them. Their impossible plans, their open-minded questions, disarming criticisms, defiant contradictions and fast-beating hearts ... Very fine, but unfortunately optimistic. Youth is mostly conservative and its promise is often deceptive ... the ‘best’ stand alone in every generation.” Busoni speaks as both the eternal optimist and the worldly cynic. The opposing forces of Faust, the seeker of knowledge, and Mephistophiles, the incessant doubter, become more pronounced as the composer matures. This duality forged opportunistic energy and balance, giving shape to his operas and mature works.

Busoni writes, “Composing only deserves the name when it busies itself ever with new problems.” He hopes a new generation will further explore and develop the musical aspects he foresees as significant in the development of 20th century music. Busoni is forever Janus-faced, and the gift for future generations is also homage and memorial to generations past. Early on, Ferdinando Busoni introduces his wonder child to Bach, and during adolescence, Busoni completes a 15-month course of study with his only formal composition teacher, Wilhelm Mayer-Rémy. This teacher fortifies an already marvellous gift of counterpoint, and instills the 14-year-old with a lifelong dedication to Mozart. As Busoni grows, he initiates himself into the world of Liszt, gaining complete mastery over his technique. Ultimately, this discovery of Liszt serves as a primary model for his piano writing. Although the title *An die*

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Jugend has lighthearted connotations, the mature composer is on consecrated ground, with Bach, Mozart, and Liszt standing guard.

The four books are a devotional collage of the composer’s love of form, and polyphonic explorations, or ‘free polyphony’.

The volumes contain his original music, as well as transcribed material. Musical puzzle-games of dazzling complexity are interspersed with creative gestures, acknowledging the great masters. References to various compositions suggest musical and philosophical subtexts. ‘Free polyphony’ reigns as unrelated and related themes combine contrapuntally with breathtaking facility. Uncanny harmonies are an important side effect of these explorations.

The pieces in *An die Jugend* have a complex and cohesive relationship. For instance, Book 2 is an exercise based on the D major Prelude and Fugue from Bach’s *Well-Tempered Klavier*, Book 1. Busoni writes, in his edition of the 48 Preludes and Fugues: “The thematic relations between the Prelude and Fugue are closer than may generally be assumed; their common harmonic basis would render it possible to superimpose the one piece on the other.” The *Fuga figurata*, a contrapuntal combination of both the Prelude and Fugue, is proof of his concept. Although slight modifications occur, the work is not a technical prank, it is Busoni’s concrete demonstration in the underlying unity of Bach’s music. Another example is in Book 3, the ‘Mozart’ volume of *An die Jugend*. Busoni freely transcribes Mozart’s *Kleine Gigue*, K574. The historian Alfred Einstein relates that Mozart was in Leipzig in 1789 and inscribed this brilliant 3-voice gigue in the Court Organist Engel’s notebook as a creative homage to Bach. In the same volume, Busoni follows *Gigue* with *Bolero*, drawn from Act III of Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro*. Busoni transposes, transcribes, and re-visions Mozart’s fandango as a piano composition. The *Variatione* pushes

Mozart’s peculiar rhythms and harmonies further afield in a celebration of ‘free tonality’.

In his essay, *Value of the Transcription*, 1910, Busoni discusses the borrowing, quoting and passing on of musical themes. He asks, “But where does the transcription begin?” Busoni examines two of Liszt’s compositions, *Spanish Rhapsody*, and *Great Fantasy on Spanish Airs*. They share the same themes, and Busoni poses the question, “Which of them is the transcription? The one which was written later? But is not the first one already an arrangement of a Spanish folk-song? That Spanish Fantasy commences with a theme which tallies with the dance motive in Mozart’s *Figaro* and Mozart took this from someone else too. It is not his, it is transcribed. Moreover the same theme appears again in Gluck’s ballet *Don Juan*.” After more investigations, he reveals, “We have been able to bring the motive material of both Spanish Fantasies by Liszt in conjunction with the names of Mozart, Gluck, Corelli, Glinka, Mahler. My humble name too, is now added.” *An die Jugend* is the realisation of Busoni’s ‘Eternal Calendar of Music’, and by extending the musical language of Bach and Mozart, he furthers ‘free polyphony’ and ‘free tonality’.

Antony Beaumont notes an entry in Busoni’s diary, 5 October, 1909, “*An die Jugend!* The source of the palimpsest.” Busoni often references Thomas De Quincey’s *Suspira de Profundis*. An essay from this collection, *The Palimpsest of the Human Brain*, is a meditation on consciousness and memory. De Quincey explains the term Palimpsest: “Hence it arose in the middle ages, as a considerable object for chemistry, to discharge the writing from the roll, and thus to make it available for a new succession of thoughts. The Greek tragedy, the monkish

legend, the knightly romance, each has ruled its own period.” Readings of obscured texts were made possible by chemists in the early 1800s. De Quincey comments, “They are not dead, but sleeping ... the Grecian tragedy had seemed to be displaced, but was not displaced, by the monkish legend; and the monkish legend had

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seemed to be displaced, but was not displaced, by the knightly romance." He examines the phenomenon whereby unrelated texts intermingle, invade and compete. He poses the paradox: "What would you think, fair reader, of a problem such as this — to write a book which should be sense for your own generation, nonsense for the next, should revive into sense for the next after that, but again become nonsense for the fourth; and so on by alternate successions, sinking into night or blazing into day...But really it is a problem not harder apparently than to bid a generation kill, but so that a subsequent generation may call back into life; bury, but so that posterity may command to rise again."

De Quincey links the palimpsest to human memory and consciousness: "What else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain ...Everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings, have fallen upon your brain softly as light. Each succession has seemed to bury all that went before. And yet, in reality, not one has been extinguished." These texts align with Busoni's aesthetics, and in 1916, Carl Jung will define his theory of the 'Collective Unconscious', evoking De Quincey's writings, as well as Busoni's 'Eternal Calendar of Music'. Musical references in the *An die Jugend* volumes existed throughout the ages, simultaneously credited or linked to composers from many different generations. Busoni is the time traveller, unearthing past treasures, revealing hidden mysteries, and teaching their value. By extending the language, he becomes a beginner, adding another dimension to the parchment, and passing the torch forward.

In 1910, at the time Busoni posts the letter to Gerda, he is touring America. Seeds for the *Indian Fantasy* and *Red Indian Diary* are planted, the *Grosse Fuga* is complete and the *Fantasia Contrapuntistica* will be finished within a few months. He lists tours of England, Switzerland and Austria along with his American tour, where he performs 35 times. In August of that year, he reworks sections of *An die Jugend* to form his first *Sonatina*.

The Six Sonatinas are Busoni's greatest series of compositions and contain his very personnel and uniquely identifiable voice. This title, however, creates confusion and a predilection for misunderstanding.



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ing. The general assumption connotes works of diminutive form; 'Sonatina' usually describes 'studies' for young musicians, or small scale Sonatas. With these youthful implications, it is easy to comprehend the humorous, yet meaningful segue, from *An die Jugend* to *Sonatina*.

Busoni does not intend to confuse or alienate amateurs and students with a misleading title; selling music is already challenging. Allegorically, a beginner

would be a journeyman, an explorer and artist. In his unrelenting push for growth and discovery, he questions as a way of life. Busoni has a personal horror of looking back and thrills to imagine himself a novice. A critic, writing for *Musical America* in 1910, understands Busoni's meaning: "Certainly this description has not been selected without real justification, but probably also not without a slightly ironical undercurrent of thought. A 'Sonatina' means a piece for beginners, and in ►

this *Sonatina*, the composer may have regarded himself as the beginner or founder of a new system of harmonies."

Busoni writes, "The *Sonatina* is merely a re-working of the *Preludietto*, *Fughetta*, *Esercizio* and *Epilogo* from *An die Jugend*, organically condensed. Perhaps the maturest of my piano pieces." Throughout the composer's life, he is compelled to revisit and search particular material until finally, its creative potential is depleted. *Sonatina* is from Books 1 and 4 of *An die Jugend* and is all thematically related. Although Busoni never programmes all four Books, he performs *Sonatina*. His refined chiselling of the larger work produces a sensational concert piece. Busoni gives the first performance at the Musikhochschule, Basle, on 30 September, 1910. Dedicated to Rudolf Ganz, *Sonatina* has striking economy of form and succinct use of thematic material. Every note is vital. As with many Busoni compositions, a listener experiences a journey; questions and solutions are worked out from the end backward. With the final move in mind, the grand master solves a chess game. Busoni masterfully secretes his methods of thematic transformation. Gestures lead in deceptively effortless fashion towards a transfiguration. A stunning improvisatory language rises out of a carefully articulated journey. Busoni never subjugates form and lyrical beauty; yet, he is not pouring 'old wine into new bottles'. The *Sonatina* integrates a complex harmonic language, derived from Busoni's 'free polyphony'. This is his style being spun. It is not abstract expressionism, impressionism, serialism, futurism or post-Wagnerianism.

Sonatina is in one-movement form, with five sections. The opening is marked *Semplice, commovente*. A fughetta follows, *Più tranquillo*, and the third section is *Allegretto elegante*. The fourth section, marked *Teneramente, come da principio*, has a brief return and disintegration of the opening theme. This leads to a mystical and unearthly section, the complete *Epilogo* from *An die Jugend*.

Although the initial melodic material is marked *semplice*, the punctilious phrase markings and ensuing harmonic improvisations are not easy. The theme, in the

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treble, evokes a pulse: two repeating tones follow in *diminuendo*, while the left hand keeps a gentle, flowing pace with a two-note slur – the pulse of an artist walking serenely through his world, quietly observing, commenting and taking stock. A harmonic

journey is undertaken. Many of Busoni's interesting scale patterns are planted beneath the theme and shimmer below the surface. The simple melodic material and supple accompaniment are perfect foils for a calm but deliberate stroll off the well-worn path. Secure ground begins to shift. There is a restlessness beneath the heartbeat. After a climax incorporates and pre-states the fughetta subject, the pulse sounds alone with pedal, suspending and extending the contemplative atmosphere.

In the fughetta *Più tranquillo*, the subject is plainly stated, intimate and un-sentimental. As Busoni explores familiar territory, traditional harmony recedes when small chromatic scales in 4-note groupings enter. Patterns of shifting whole-tone and half-tone combinations, extending to broken major and minor thirds, crawl under and above the subject. The music leaves sure-footed earth bound harmony with dizzying embroidery and certain flight. The fughetta theme remains a *cantus firmus*, the voice of reason. Foundation combines with flight, and the two elements of earth and air are magically blended. The section ends with a sumptuous small cadenza recalling the improvisatory finale of an ornamental Baroque cadenza, passages Busoni cherished. In an autobiographical moment, the fughetta subject returns chorale-like, sonorously chiming an unambiguous, traditional cadence.

This transitional cadence into the third section is Busoni's prayerful acknowledgment following intense explorations. He respectfully nods to past Masters, tips his hat, and salutes the key of C major. The beginners' key accentuates how far he has traveled and serves to remind younger generations that much discovery remains. His first *Elegy*, *Nach der Wendung*, symbolically begins in C and spins a mystical and spiritual harmonic journey outward. Similarly, the *Sonatina* returns to C major, his mantra for other explorers:

build upon your ancestral foundations.

The *Allegretto elegante* rises from the final, resonating C major chord of the cadence. The right hand is in 4, the left hand is *quasi-Valse* 3 metre. The right hand explores the whole-tone scale, the left hand stays rooted to defined key centres, all the while transforming the colour and direction of the right hand. The fughetta subject remains in the middle voice, rhythmically and harmonically freed from the outer voices. The Lisztian figurations are marvellously designed. The *Allegretto elegante* is marked *leggiero* throughout, even when *forte*, and presents an exhilarating invention of the waltz. This style of *scherzo-waltz* is one of Busoni's trademarks. The printed music appears sparse, yet these spectral waltzes are never straightforward. Some examples of his fantastical original waltzes are the fleeting *Die Nächtlichen* (the ghost waltz from the *Elegies*) and the early op.20, op.30a and op.33a. Other undiscovered miniature jewels can be found among the short pieces of Busoni's *Klavierübung*. The *Allegretto elegante* is homage to Chopin, but the debt to Liszt is unquestionable. Busoni's waltzes are the children of Liszt's *Forgotten Waltzes* as well as *Mephisto*. They are certainly the predecessors of Ravel's *La Valse*.

In the final section, the theme returns briefly, followed by the *Epilogo* from *An die Jugend*. Here the composer speaks entirely in his own language. The fughetta subject is present, lyrical and intact, even as Busoni opens the gate to his secret subterranean world. Colours, pedalling effects, and harmonies entice the listener into a realm of magic. The alchemist spins the whole-tone scale, spilling a trace of liquid silver, trills float disembodied, and glistening modulations stretch and pull. With each statement of the theme, he shows a different path – wonders await. Throughout, bell-tones echo C major. Born within this framework, Busoni defines his creativity and imagination. In the closing moments of *Sonatina*, the noble simplicity of a cadence acts as reminder that past and future are one.

Busoni posts a letter to his wife from Dayton, Ohio, on 3 March, 1910. He encloses his essay, *The Realm of Music*, intended as an epilogue to *Outline of a New Aesthetic of Music*. The essay is undoubtedly a companion piece for *Sonatina*. "Come, follow me into the realm of

music. Here is the iron fence which separates the earthly from the eternal... Here there is no end to the astonishment, and yet from the beginning we feel it is homelike ... Unthought-of scales extend like bands from one world to another... Now you realise how planets and hearts are one, that nowhere can there be an end or an obstacle; that infinity lives completely and indivisibly in the spirit of all beings."

Busoni writes to Gerda, March 1911, "I think *with serious joy* of the journey home and I have the feeling that my most important period is beginning and that it is, I suppose, the *definitive* one. The joy is not less because it is serious; on the contrary, it is deeper. It is deep and beautiful, but it has lost all its youthfulness, like Rembrandt's later self-portraits."

Sonatina seconda, dedicated to the pianist Mark Hambourg, is composed in the summer of 1912, and heralds a period of energetic experimentation. For the 46-year-old composer, this signals the end of a nearly two year compositional silence. A period of rigorous concert tours allows him time to complete his opera *Die Brautwahl*. He debates a form for the Indian melodies, reads voraciously, and anticipates his future path after the dynamic explorations of 1909 and 1910.

The first *Sonatina* is lyrical and transparent, sensual in its flowing lines. By comparison, *Sonatina seconda* is a powerful, kinetic work. The contrast of light to dark is also useful here. *Sonatina seconda* is a tour de force, decidedly experimental for its time. This composition contains much of what is new and rarely tried, in a compelling form. Generations remain captivated by its spell, and the piece is a treasured masterwork for instrumentalists and composers. Known commonly as 'the occult', the word appears for the first time in a Busoni score, the composer later admits the piano piece is a *Dr Faust* study. *Sonatina seconda* enters the senses as tableau in contemplation of worlds beyond our own.

The printed page forcefully announces daring changes within the composer. There is no key signature or time signature. A postscript at the bottom of the first page instructs the interpreter that accidentals apply only once, natural signs (cancellations of sharps and flats) never occur. Bar lines are used rarely and serve to mark the ends of phrases or sections.

The music is written in a virtuosic style: demanding, volatile and liquid rich. The visual score is splendid, the aural is revelatory, and the markings, *Lento occulto*, *flebile* and *lamentoso*, beckon from another dimension.

The first performance has Busoni as soloist at the Verdi Conservatoire in Milan, on 12 May, 1913. His programme notes describe the piece as 'senza tonalità'. The opening is a single line stretching two octaves, a free-tone row. Schoenberg, the Futurist movement, and Busoni's personal conjuring of his ultimate autobiographical hero, are varying influences. Busoni's relationship with Schoenberg, who returns to Berlin in the autumn of 1911, is recorded in hundreds of letters. For a time, they share rule of the Berlin avant-garde and cautiously admire each other. Their letters tell a captivating story of two artistic giants. While attempting to understand each other, the relationship is riddled with apprehension, mutual respect and a general philosophical agreement notwithstanding. The futurist movement is also reaching a broad audience at this time. Busoni shows mild interest, but remains wary of any movement proselytising an absolute manifesto. He writes, "Unfortunately I can see that these people are already becoming old-fashioned."

Sonatina seconda is published at a time when séances are in fashion and occultism is a popular topic. Busoni is an extremely charismatic, larger-than-life virtuoso, surrounded by an aura of mystery. As with Paganini and Liszt, he attracts fantastical tales. He is, in most ways, a practical man, although his artistic and spiritual temperament leaves him sensitive to nightmares and emotionally suggestive. The walking dead and gypsy-robed conjurers are not the characters Busoni gravitates towards. His letters, diaries and essays are a truer measure of the man than the myths built around him. A list of his favorite authors will include, Edgar Allen Poe, H. G. Wells, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Cervantes, and De Quincey. He believes, under special circumstances, telepathy and clairvoyance might occur, and

has already begun to write about his metaphysical concept of the 'omnipresence of Time'. In *Sonatina seconda*, Busoni's supernatural obsessions find their truest expressions as an extension of his artistic quest for perfection and fulfillment. The forces of good and evil, Mozart's *Magic Flute* and the 'Trial by Fire and Water', better exemplify his marking *occulto*. He is searching for the ideal mythical-mystical protagonist that will be his voice. This quest begins many years before *Sonatina seconda*.

Busoni endlessly deliberates the choice of his protagonist before settling on *Dr. Faust*. He is fascinated with puppet plays and loves the ambiguity of beings that possess both human and superhuman characteristics. Early on, Aladdin is explored, and he also considers the mythical magician Merlin as subject for a musical work. When Busoni is a young man, Carl Goldmark's opera *Merlin* is premiered. Busoni writes a piano fantasy on themes from the opera and is hired to produce the vocal score. Busoni often incorporates a variant on melodic material from Goldmark's opera as a motif. This motto becomes a personal musical signature in many of his compositions. The Magicians-Alchemists Leonhard and Manasse duel as opposing forces of good and evil in Busoni's musical comedy opera, *Die Brautwahl*. Leonardo and Dante are debated in a search for a truly Italian opera. Mephistopheles, the Wandering Jew, Don Juan, and Don Giovanni appear, as he tries to grasp the essence of these beings. His library holds beautiful rare books and prints depicting the superhuman mythological beings. Who best embodies the opposing forces of good and evil, and is consumed with the struggle for their soul? Who personifies the crusade for truth,

creativity, and wisdom, while in danger of dissolution, falsification and failure? These are the supernatural forces that enter the arena with *Sonatina seconda*. Ten years after publication, Busoni acknowledges that this is his first published study for *Dr. Faust*. In 1912, with years of searching behind him, *Sonatina seconda* is conjuring the soul of his hero, and serves as an incantation for the process to begin. ▶

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Busoni's music is not programmatic, however, his writing is atmospherically suggestive and produces unforgettable feeling states. *Sonatina seconda* must be considered separate from *Dr Faust*. Only hindsight reveals that musical material for the opera is developed here. That being said, the autobiographical references, attached to certain musical passages that make their way into the opera, are haunting. It is a vision of both past and future. Some material explored in the *Sonatina seconda* is later used in the opera as the 'Students' Theme'. In the opera, the students from Krakow enter Faust's study, accompanied by the 'Students' Theme'. Faust speaks, "Ah Krakow, memories of my youth!" Edward J. Dent, Busoni's biographer (published 1933), relates an incident in 1912 that mirrors these words. Busoni is at Hamburg for rehearsals of his opera *Die Brautwahl*. According to Dent, Busoni and some friends are dining in a restaurant following a rehearsal. Busoni is sitting with his head in his hands, lost in meditation. One guest begins speaking about Klagenfurt and Busoni looks up as if stricken. Trance-like, he shocks his companions, exclaiming, "Klagenfurt! Klagenfurt! Who spoke of Klagenfurt?" Everyone falls silent and later they report that Busoni painfully enunciated the word several times and said — "The ford of wailing." When asked if he ever played there, he replies, "Did I ever play there?"

Klagenfurt! It brings back all my childhood!" Busoni explains, "I was there with my parents; I was twelve years old; I was a wonder-child, and everything turned on me. We were in a hotel there and had to stay for three months, because we had no money and could not pay the bill."

Busoni is haunted by memories of an unhappy childhood. The sensitive and gifted prodigy long understood his fiduciary responsibility to his parents. Busoni's father is an abusive pedant with a furious temper and cruel demands. The child is exploited as a Tom Thumb of the piano, and exhaustive concert tours negated any serious course of education. Ferdinando Busoni incurs egregious debt and makes enemies wherever he goes, precipitating many disappointments in the young artist's life.

As a child, he longs for a future, free of his parents. From his first professional concerts, at the age of seven-and-a-half, until the death of both parents 35 years later, he is their sole means of support. His mother, Anna Wiess, is an exceptional pianist, and his father, Ferdinando, is a traveling clarinet virtuoso of natural, but unrefined gifts. Anna Busoni is in charge of her son's education until Ferdinando Busoni, after lengthy absences, gives up work when he sees that the boy has enough talent to support them all. He knows little about the piano, and Busoni describes him as being erratic in rhythm.

His father sits beside him and scrutinises every finger and note for hours; the only break is an explosive temper, which Busoni describes as, "violent in the extreme. A box on the ears would be followed by copious tears, accompanied by reproaches, threats and terrifying prophesies." Anton Rubenstein's testimonial for Ferruccio is a blunt letter of advice to Ferdinando, written in 1878 while the family was in Vienna: "The young Ferruccio Busoni has a very remarkable talent both for performance and for composition. In my opinion he ought to work seriously at music and not be forced to play in public to earn a living." Busoni's unfinished autobiography of 1909 relates how debt follows them everywhere: "The state of the exchequer was then, and always was, the weak point of my father's administration... All through my childhood and all through my youth I had to suffer... and as far as my father was concerned it never ended." As to Ferdinando's insistence that the boy study Bach in great detail, Busoni recalls that at the time of his youth in Italy, Bach is rated little higher than Carl Czerny: "How did such a man in his ambition for his son's career come to hit on the very thing that was right?"

In Vorspiel I of *Dr Faust*, the students from Krakow enter Faust's study, welcomed with warmth and generosity. This is a common posture for the recognisable figure of Busoni. Ernst Krenek recalls, "Musicians were in a minority and painters, writers, poets, architects, scientists, and a large number of miscellaneous intellectuals were all attracted by the fireworks of his fascinating soliloquy which would go on for an hour or more, before he retired ceremoniously... to attend to his creative work proper." From his book, *Music History and Ideas*, 1932, Hugo Leichtentritt writes, "In Berlin, Ferruccio Busoni was for twenty years the advocate of all ideas that aimed seriously at creating something vitally new. As an incomparable master of the piano, as a composer, conductor, teacher, essayist, and philosopher of art, Busoni was an outstanding personality of the highest artistic and intellectual type... Almost every night there was a gathering of young artists from many countries at his hospitable residence... there were heated controversies on the artistic problems of the day in which everyone spoke freely and which were given great distinction by Busoni's own *esprit* and wit,

superior understanding, mature judgment, and illuminating criticism."

By 1912, this powerful artist dominates the Berlin avant-garde and his circle of students surrounds him. He is a towering virtuoso, welcomed onto stages as a living legend. Guests and students fill his home. In this *Dr. Faust* scene, Busoni is both *grand seigneur* and young student. He is the present and the past, the disillusioned and optimistic youth, the dissolute and fulfilled adult.

Sonatina seconda's popularity rests on free-fantasy bravura, overtly emotional writing, and Busoni's intoxicating lyricism. There are confounding harmonic explorations, contrapuntal writing, and economy of material. Small cells are hidden within Busoni's long Italianate cantilena style. The canons are complex, in reverence to Bach, and the sparse perfect form confides a devotion to Mozart, all characteristics of Busoni's mature style. From Lisztian bravado, to the disquieting beginnings of *Dr Faust*, the dreamscape stream-of-conscious style of the *Elegies* implodes in full concentrated perfection. No other Busoni piano work will sound so adventurous.

Robert Freund, the composer and pianist, writes to Busoni: "The *Sonatina* took me captive at once. The very unusual harmony just suits the fantastic, mystic character of the piece, and gives the impression of a natural, spontaneous intuitiveness. I ask myself why it is I cannot get in touch with Schoenberg whilst even the most daring things you do seem quite natural to me."

The incantation begins: *Il tutto vivace, fantastico, con energia, capriccio e sentimento. Sostenuto, a mezza voce parlando.* Under this sign post and low in the bass, glowing coals and a smoldering of elements rise in a single melodic strand, leaving a trail of molten gold across two octaves: The alchemist speaks. The pianist's hands weave underneath and on top of each other, crossing from treble and bass on three staves, mixing ethers, tossing and blending elements of fire, air and water. A two-note motif is drawn from the opening incantation. The mysterious undulating broken-chord accompaniment is now more pronounced, and serves as a primary source for melodic material. Nervously, the flames begin to erupt. A fragment of the 'Students' Theme' appears in a scornful unison octave passage.

The texture becomes ruthless. Falling sevenths recall a motif from Goldmark's opera *Merlin*, announcing the arrival of the magician. A fire spout funnels upward to a full statement of the 'Students' Theme'.

The spell is cast. Marked *Opaco*, thick ominous chords enter as severe contrast to texture and color. The Merlin motif echoes in the falling sevenths of the 'Students' Theme'. The theme repeats, marked *triste*, accompanied by lamenting murmurs. The two-note 'incantation' motif is always present. Conjuring a ghost from another past, a Neapolitan-like song enters, marked *pallido*, a chilling, subconscious quote from Busoni's *Elegy, 'All' Italia! In modo napolitano.* The harmonic underpinning is slightly broken and stuttering, assisting the vocal line. This undulating harmony, drawn from the opening of the piece, is an uneasy terra firma. The texture transforms as aural *deja vu*, a faded background of a half-remembered song, from a world long past.

A cadenza pours into the *Con fuoco, energicissimo*, where the 'Students' Theme' and the Merlin fragment entwine in Mephistophelean fury. The texture recalls Liszt's *Dante Sonata*, with metric opposition of duple and triple rhythms. The music is driven with frenzied, erratic pacing, to a crashing silence. *Lento occulto* heads a chord passage cloaked in low bass tones, derived from the opening two-note motif of the 'incantation' tone row. These chords pivot to and from E flat major. Busoni's sketches for this passage are marked '3-mal. Akkord'. This is the description Mozart uses for his Masonic music in *Die Zauberflöte*, and Mozart's opera begins and ends in the key of E flat major, the Masonic key. There follows a three-voice canon of remarkable harmonic effect, formed from the top three notes of the undulating broken-chord accompaniment. Mirror image inversions twist through strettos and severely stress the contrast between lyricism and dissonance. The music is calm, yet the overall effect is unnerving. A canon follows with a regular dotted-rhythm pattern, and this quasi-ostinato is momentarily grounding, even though the complex inclusion of theme, mirror image, and melodic extensions are never harmonically at rest. The outer voices cross through the middle dotted-rhythm voice with exquisite serpentine style.

In striking contrast, the next section

enters the water world of a long descending chromatic line. Marked *flebile*, this haunted wail is texturally and rhythmically reminiscent of a Neapolitan song. It is actually an extension of the original melodic material. The canonic texture liquefies, returning seamlessly into a recapitulation of the opening harmony. Here, the *parlando* theme is marked *Sostenuto quasi Violoncello* and *calando*. The accompaniment figure bleeds into waves of A flat minor and F major. These keys recall the composer's *Berceuse*. The A flat minor and F major chords are repeated again and again, an insistent echo, until the material begins to break off. Long lines shift to short fragments. The spell weakens.

The contrasting *Calmissimo* follows, and has the Mozart Masonic chords laced bell-like in canon, in Mozart's original E flat key center. The theme is in the middle; chords float throughout the 3-stave passage. The atmosphere is transcendental. Dent relates that *Die Zauberflöte* was one of Busoni's most treasured scores. Writing about the Overture of the opera, the historian Alfred Einstein states: "[Mozart] compressed the struggle and victory of mankind, using the symbolic means of polyphony: working out, laborious working out in the development section; struggle and triumph." Busoni's inclusions of the Masonic elements symbolise his appeal to the higher ideals of humanity, and subtly foretell the eventual triumph of Faust over the devil.

The canon returns truncated and inverted, falling into the descending chromatic line. Reverberations of the lowest strings prompt the descent. The treble climbs slightly upward, exhausted, to a full solemn restatement of the 'Students' Theme', *un poco marziale*. As the tableau disintegrates, the theme marches into shadow, fading behind the curtain. The revenants return to their world. The Past or the Future. The last instruction of the piano piece is *estinto*, extinguished. The falling sevenths, reminiscent of the Merlin fragment, are now a personal motif for Busoni, a musical *nom de plume*. The sevenths fall to C and the C repeats twice, hushed and extinguished. The candlewick sizzles, and all is black. Busoni ends on C, a muffled heartbeat, a profound pulse. ■

Concluded in the next issue