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Website Context and Research

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Variations and Distorted Reflections

(After Stradella)

For solo violin

(2014/17)

Thoughts, Process and Theory

Research, planning and initial sketches for this multiple movement work for solo violin started in July 2013, but the composer had been studying the music of Alessandro Stradella [1639/1642-1682] since (in his alter-ego as a studio producer) he recorded the collection of Stradella Two-Part Sinfonias for a collaborative research project with violinist-musicologist (and friend) Alberto Sanna in 2012.

Stradella Ground Bass (Primary material):

This collection of twenty-five movements is conceived and composed around the repeating ground bass of Stradella's 12th Sonata:

Example 1a: 13 bars in 4/4: A – E – B – E – F – G – A – F – E – C – D – E – A

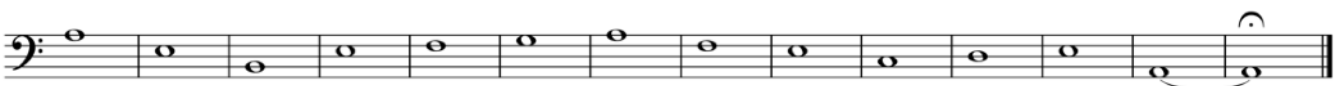
1-10 **12-16** **18** 13 bars (4/4) with 'final' double bar-line and fermata on last note (except for variation 5)



The ground bass has four more slight variations (five in total):

Example 1b: 14 bars in 4/4 – Pitch content is unaffected by the additional bar ...

11 14 bars (4/4) with 'final' double bar-line and fermata on last note. Pitch content is not affected by extra bar...



Example 1c: 10 bars in 4/4: A – E – B – E – F – G – A – F – E – A

17 10 bars (4/4) with 'final' double bar-line and fermata on last note (Unique!)



Example 1d: 13 bars in 3/4: A – E – B – E – F – G – A – F – E – C – D – E – A

19-21 **23** 13 bars (3/4) with 'final' double bar-line and fermata on last note



Example 1e: 14 bars in 3/4 – Pitch content is unaffected by the additional bar ...

22, 24-25 14 bars (3/4) with 'final' double bar-line and fermata on last note. Pitch content is not affected by extra bar...



Original Variations – Essential Rhythms

Variation 1-18 = 4/4

Variation 19-25 = 3/4

Variations 1 and 2 are melancholy and lyrical. The upper line can be said to remain in A minor throughout (melodic and harmonic minor scales included), but there are also hints and false modulations to E minor via the dominant 7th (B7). The rhythmic texture looks like simple species counterpoint with dominance of the minim and suspensions. Final bar has a fermata and a 'final' double bar-line; this is true for all variations (unless stated).

Variation 3 uses crotchets throughout (ending on a minim with fermata).

Having started on the first upbeat, Variation 4 passes through a constant stream of quavers (ending on a semi-breve with fermata).

Variation 5 starts on the first upbeat and uses the following rhythm throughout (ending on a minim, but with **NO** fermata):

5 13 bars



Variation 6 ends on a semi-breve with fermata:

6 13 bars



Variation 7 ends on a minim with fermata:

7 13 bars



Variation 8 ends on a crotchet with fermata:

8 13 bars



Variation 9 ends on a quaver with fermata (turns):

9 13 bars: first written embellishment (turn)



Variation 10 uses semi-quavers throughout and ends on a minim with fermata. Variations 10, 14, 17 and 22 all use semi-quavers.

Variation 11 has an extra beat of semi-quavers and a three-beat rest (ends with a fermata minim):

11 14 bars



Variation 12 ends on a crotchet rest with fermata:

12 13 bars



Variation 13 ends on a quaver with fermata:

13 13 bars: some variation in rhythm



Variation 14 uses semi-quavers throughout (Variations 10, 14, 17 and 22 all use semi-quavers) and ends on a semi-quaver with fermata. Variation 14 is an important formal landmark within the original manuscript, as it serves as a textural and dynamic crescendo to the first half of the original variations.

Variation 15 uses double-stops, varying rhythm and ends on a semi-breve with fermata (Variations 15, 16 and 24 all use double-stops):

15 13 bars: double-stops simple texture



Variation 16 also uses double-stops and varying rhythm, but ends on a crotchet rest with fermata (Variations 15, 16 and 24 all use double-stops):

16 13 bars: double-stops more complex texture and variation in rhythm



Variation 17 is only ten bars long, which makes it unique within the original manuscript. The original variation starts with a semi-tone rest, uses semi-quavers throughout and ends on a semi-quaver with fermata (Variations 10, 14, 17 and 22 all use semi-quavers).

Variation 18 ends on a quaver rest with fermata (acts as crescendo for 4/4 section):

18 13 bars: first written articulation and slurs



Variation 19 ends on a minim with fermata:

19 13 bars: change of time signature and some variation in rhythm



Variation 20 ends on a dotted-minim with fermata:

20 13 bars



Variation 21 ends on a crotchet with fermata:

21 13 bars



Variation 22 uses semi-quavers throughout and ends on a dotted-minim with fermata.
Variations 10, 14, 17 and 22 all use semi-quavers.

Variation 23 ends on a quaver with fermata:

23 13 bars: some variation in rhythm



Variation 24 uses double-stops and ends on a dotted-minim with fermata (Variations 15, 16 and 24 all use double-stops):

24 14 bars with double-stops and variant rhythm

Variation 25 uses slurred triplets throughout and ends on a crotchet rest with fermata:

25 14 bars: slurred triplets

The Turn Ornament: Variation 9

The turn is an ornament consisting of a group of four notes: Note above, principle, note below and the principle to end. If the length of the note is dotted e.g. dotted crotchet, one would need to use a triplet:

use 4 semiquavers (16th notes)

written	played

If the note is 'Dotted' you will need a *triplet*

written	played

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Pitch Organisation

The primary pitch material for this work is Stradella's original ground-bass sequence:

A – E – B – E – F – G – A – F – E – C – D – E – A

This could be used conventionally as tonality and/or modality, or as a tone row (all) in a manner similar to Arvo Pärt and remain fairly close to A minor throughout?

Absolute Labels: Ground-bass primary material (pitch names)

	I9	I4	I11	I4	I5	I7	I9	I5	I4	I0	I2	I4	I9	
P9	A	E	B	E	F	G	A	F	E	C	D	E	A	R9
P2	D	A	E	A	B ^b	C	D	B ^b	A	F	G	A	D	R2
P7	G	D	A	D	E ^b	F	G	E ^b	D	B ^b	C	D	G	R7
P2	D	A	E	A	B ^b	C	D	B ^b	A	F	G	A	D	R2
P1	C [#]	G [#]	D [#]	G [#]	A	B	C [#]	A	G [#]	E	F [#]	G [#]	C [#]	R1
P11	B	F [#]	C [#]	F [#]	G	A	B	G	F [#]	D	E	F [#]	B	R11
P9	A	E	B	E	F	G	A	F	E	C	D	E	A	R9
P1	C [#]	G [#]	D [#]	G [#]	A	B	C [#]	A	G [#]	E	F [#]	G [#]	C [#]	R1
P2	D	A	E	A	B ^b	C	D	B ^b	A	F	G	A	D	R2
P6	F [#]	C [#]	G [#]	C [#]	D	E	F [#]	D	C [#]	A	B	C [#]	F [#]	R6
P4	E	B	F [#]	B	C	D	E	C	B	G	A	B	E	R4
P2	D	A	E	A	B ^b	C	D	B ^b	A	F	G	A	D	R2
P9	A	E	B	E	F	G	A	F	E	C	D	E	A	R9
	RI9	RI4	RI11	RI4	RI5	RI7	RI9	RI5	RI4	RI0	RI2	RI4	RI9	

Using the complete ground bass as a pitch-row produces multiple internal pitch repetitions, although clearly in a mode of C Major/A minor, the dominant pitch is actually E, therefore influencing the soundworld with a Phrygian Mode.

Perhaps (with its obvious association with tonality and modality) references to the complete row should be saved for 'special' occasions?

Absolute Labels: Ground-bass primary material (numerical 0 – 11)

	I9	I4	I11	I4	I5	I7	I9	I5	I4	I0	I2	I4	I9	
P9	9	4	11	4	5	7	9	5	4	0	2	4	9	R9
P2	2	9	4	9	10	0	2	10	9	5	7	9	2	R2
P7	7	2	9	2	3	5	7	3	2	10	0	2	7	R7
P2	2	9	4	9	10	0	2	10	9	5	7	9	2	R2
P1	1	8	3	8	9	11	1	9	8	4	6	8	1	R1
P11	11	6	1	6	7	9	11	7	6	2	4	6	11	R11
P9	9	4	11	4	5	7	9	5	4	0	2	4	9	R9
P1	1	8	3	8	9	11	1	9	8	4	6	8	1	R1
P2	2	9	4	9	10	0	2	10	9	5	7	9	2	R2
P6	6	1	8	1	2	4	6	2	1	9	11	1	6	R6
P4	4	11	6	11	0	2	4	0	11	7	9	11	4	R4
P2	2	9	4	9	10	0	2	10	9	5	7	9	2	R2
P9	9	4	11	4	5	7	9	5	4	0	2	4	9	R9
	RI9	RI4	RI11	RI4	RI5	RI7	RI9	RI5	RI4	RI0	RI2	RI4	RI9	

Dividing the original material in the following manner interested the composer:

[A – E] B – E – F – G – A – F – E – C – D [E – A]

One could use the perfect fifth interval [A – E] and inversion perfect fourth [E – A] as an opening and closing motif for each of the Variations?

This would ensure a tonal reference to the original score throughout. One would need to be inventive so that the signifier does not become too blatant (avoiding cadence).

Bracketing these intervals (A-E and E-A) eliminates some of the repetition from the original pitch sequence. The remaining pitch-row seems to pivot on A:

B – E – F – G – **A** – F – E – C – D

Absolute Labels: To be framed by the A-E/E-A motif/intervals?

	I11	I4	I5	I7	I9	I5	I4	I0	I2	
P11	B	E	F	G	A	F	E	C	D	R11
P6	F#	B	C	D	E	C	B	G	A	R6
P5	F	A#	B	C#	D#	B	A#	F#	G#	R5
P3	D#	G#	A	B	C#	A	G#	E	F#	R3
P1	C#	F#	G	A	B	G	F#	D	E	R1
P5	F	A#	B	C#	D#	B	A#	F#	G#	R5
P6	F#	B	C	D	E	C	B	G	A	R6
P10	A#	D#	E	F#	G#	E	D#	B	C#	R10
P8	G#	C#	D	E	F#	D	C#	A	B	R8
	RI11	RI4	RI5	RI7	RI9	RI5	RI4	RI0	RI2	

	I11	I4	I5	I7	I9	I5	I4	I0	I2	
P11	11	4	5	7	9	5	4	0	2	R11
P6	6	11	0	2	4	0	11	7	9	R6
P5	5	10	11	1	3	11	10	6	8	R5
P3	3	8	9	11	1	9	8	4	6	R3
P1	1	6	7	9	11	7	6	2	4	R1
P5	5	10	11	1	3	11	10	6	8	R5
P6	6	11	0	2	4	0	11	7	9	R6
P10	10	3	4	6	8	4	3	11	1	R10
P8	8	1	2	4	6	2	1	9	11	R8
	RI11	RI4	RI5	RI7	RI9	RI5	RI4	RI0	RI2	

This row (paired with the inverted intervals) eliminates half of the repetition, but E and F (Phrygian and Lydian) are now more influential in the soundworld than A (Aeolian).

B – E – F – G – A – F – E – C – D

The composer split this into two separate units, including the A in both so that the repetition can emphasise its relevance to the overall pitch-scheme with more authority. Although F and E (Lydian and Phrygian) are also repeated, the opening and closing intervals would help to reassert the influence of A Aeolian/C Major over the soundworld:

[A – E] [B – E – F – G – A] [A – F – E – C – D] [E – A]

This process produced two individual tone rows to work with, framed by the inverted intervals (motivic gestures):

Interval/Motif 1: A – E
 Pitch-Row 1: B – E – F – G – A
 Pitch-Row 2: A – F – E – C – D
 Interval/Motif 2: E - A

Pitch Matrices:

P = Prime
 I = Inversion

R = Retrograde
 RI = Retrograde Inversion

Traditional Labels reference the rows using the transposed 0-11 system (prime becomes row 0). Absolute Labels reference the rows using non-transposed 0-11 system (prime built on 11 remains 11). The composer thought that perhaps this would be less confusing in this piece, which needs to stay fairly loyal to the quoted Stradella ground bass?

Absolute Labels: Row 1 (pitches: B – E – F – G – A)

	I11	I4	I5	I7	I9	
P11	B	E	F	G	A	R11
P6	F#	B	C	D	E	R6
P5	F	A#	B	C#	D#	R5
P3	D#	G#	A	B	C#	R3
P1	C#	F#	G	A	B	R1
	RI11	RI4	RI5	RI7	RI9	

Absolute Labels: Row 1 (numbers: 11 – 4 – 5 – 7 – 9)

	I11	I4	I5	I7	I9	
P11	11	4	5	7	9	R11
P6	6	11	0	2	4	R6
P5	5	10	11	1	3	R5
P3	3	8	9	11	2	R3
P1	1	6	7	9	11	R1
	RI11	RI4	RI5	RI7	RI9	

Absolute Labels: Row 2 (pitches: A – F – E – C – D)

	I9	I5	I4	I0	I2	
P9	A	F	E	C	D	R9
P1	C#	A	G#	E	F#	R1
P2	D	A#	A	F	G	R2
P6	F#	D	C#	A	B	R6
P4	E	C	B	G	A	R4
	RI9	RI5	RI4	RI0	RI2	

Absolute Labels: Row 2 (numbers: 9 – 5 – 4 – 0 – 2)

	I9	I5	I4	I0	I2	
P9	9	5	4	0	2	R9
P1	1	9	8	4	6	R1
P2	2	10	9	5	7	R2
P6	6	2	1	9	11	R6
P4	4	0	11	7	9	R4
	RI9	RI5	RI4	RI0	RI2	

Variation 17 is a unique ten-bar variation, which omits three notes from the ground bass, but apart from this, the ground bass remains the same throughout the original manuscript. As Variation 17 is unique, perhaps this would be a good time to state the original ground-bass sequence clearly and in its true form?

[A – E] B – E – F – G – A – F [E – A]

Contact:

For further information and resources contact the composer at: contact@ianpercy.me.uk

Repertoire and Recommended Listening

Bacewicz, Grażyna: Sonata 1 (1941) Sonata 2 for solo violin (1944)
Bach: Sonatas & Partitas for solo violin BWV 1001-1006 (1720)
Bartók: Sonata for solo violin BB 124(1944)
Berio: Sequenza No.VIII for solo violin (1977)
Cage: Freeman Etudes
Enescu, George: Sarabande (after JS Bach)
Geraedts, Jaap 1924-2003: La Folia perpetua
Henze, Hans Werner: Sonata for solo violin (1977)
Henze, Hans Werner: Serenade for solo violin (1986)
Hindemith, Paul: 2 Sonatas for solo violin Op.31 (1924)
Honegger, Arthur: Sonata for solo violin (1940)
Krenek, Ernst: Sonata for solo violin No.1 Op.33 (1925)
Krenek, Ernst: Sonata for solo violin No.2 Op.115 (1948)
Milhaud, Darius: Sonatina Pastorale Op.383 (1960)
Paganini, Nicolo: 24 Caprices Op.1 (1805)
Prokofiev, Sergey: Sonata for solo violin (D major) Op.115 (1947)
Rozsa, Miklos: Sonata for violin solo Op.40 (1985-86)
Schnittke: A Paganini
Sessions, Roger: Violin Sonata (1953)
Stravinsky: Elegie for solo violin (1944)
Taira, Yoshihisha: Convergence III for solo violin
Telemann, Georg Philipp: 12 Fantasias for solo violin (1735)
Wolpe, Stefan: Second Piece for violin alone (1966)
Wuorinen, Charles: The Long and the Short (1969)
Wuorinen, Charles: Violin Variations (1972)
Xenakis: Mikka for solo violin (1971)
Ysaÿe, Eugene: 6 Sonatas for solo violin Op.27 (1924)
Zimmerman, Bernd Alois: Sonata for solo violin (1951)