

EXTENDED ESSAY

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Music

The Extent of the Effectiveness of Joachim Raff's and Johannes
Brahms' Piano Transcriptions of Bach's Chaconne from the Partita
No. 2 in D minor for Solo Violin

Abstract

J.S. Bach's Chaconne in D minor has long since established itself as a cornerstone of the solo violin repertoire. During the Romantic period numerous transcriptions of it to other instruments by various composers have been made. In this essay we will turn to two of them, investigating the research question, **"The Extent of the Effectiveness of Joachim Raff's and Johannes Brahms' Piano Transcriptions of Bach's Chaconne from the Partita No. 2 in D minor for Solo Violin."**

In analyzing the scores of these transcriptions, we compare them to the original Bach Chaconne, taking into account Brahms' and Raff's perceived intentions in writing their transcriptions and paying attention to melody, texture, and characteristic instrumental transcription issues.

The research has found that Brahms' transcription was based on a paradigm of being as faithful as possible to the original violin sound. In this respect it was largely successful, transcribing literally as much as possible while adding slight modifications when appropriate, exploiting the piano's capabilities.

On the other hand, the transcription by Raff, despite indubitably having many appropriately transcribed and expanded passages, often contains dubious additional voices and too many over-virtuosic effects. While these may make sense in the context of Raff's perception of the music, overall it does not stay faithful to Bach's intentions and this results in a work which is merely partially effective.

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Introduction

The position of Bach's Chaconne within the Partita No. 2 in D minor for Solo Violin is a unique one, as it is longer than all the preceding movements combined. An emotionally significant work,¹ the Chaconne also embodied everything of what was known of violin technique at that time, and it has been mentioned as having "worked its spell on musicians everywhere over the last two and a half centuries."²

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) was a major Romantic composer who is famous for his symphonies, chamber works, the *Requiem*, and certainly piano pieces as well. He was well acquainted with the Chaconne as it was his close friend, the legendary violinist Joseph Joachim, who introduced it to the standard violin repertoire. In a letter to Clara Schumann, he describes his sentiments about the Chaconne: "On a single staff, for a small instrument, the man writes a whole world of the deepest thoughts and the most powerful feelings."³ Despite eventually being published as part of a set of five studies all based on Bach works (1869), the transcription is often considered one of the best.⁴

Joachim Raff (1822-1882) was a Romantic Swiss composer. He was unique in the sense that he was neither conservative nor progressive, at times combining Classical form and program music elements in his works. Transcriptions were a regular part of his musical output: the complete catalogue of his works at the Joachim Raff society website lists 44 arrangements of other composers' works and 69

¹ Helga Thouene has extensively argued that the Chaconne was intended as an elegy for the death of Bach's wife, Maria Barbara in 1720, although some have rejected the claims as either too speculative (Silbeger, Alexander. *Bach and The Chaconne*. *The Journal of Musicology* (Vol. 17, No. 3, 1999), 374. Accessed from JSTOR, date: 21 April 2010).

² Bromberger, Eric. Program notes for *Chaconne from the Violin Partita No. 2 in D Minor, BWV 1004 (arr. for piano left-hand by Brahms)*, La Jolla Music Society. <http://www.ljms.org/Performances-and-Tickets/Program-Notes/JOHANN-SEBASTIAN-BACH-Chaconne-from-the-Violin-Partita-No.-2-in-D-Minor-arr.-Brahms.html>. Accessed 13 July 2010.

³ Avins, Styra, ed.. *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 515.

⁴ Fabrikant, Marina. *Bach-Busoni Chaconne: A Piano Transcription Analysis*. Diss. University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2006. Print. 143

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arrangements of works of his own.⁵ As with many other people during his time, Raff believed that the Chaconne was a "reduction" from a lost orchestral original.⁶ In 1873 he would eventually arrange the Chaconne for full orchestra as well as piano four hands. This transcription (1865) is a typical example of the Romantic art of virtuosic transcription, and stands starkly in contrast to the more conservative Brahms transcription.

The issue of the effectiveness of Brahms' and Raff's transcriptions needs to be clearly defined: it is one which effectively exploits the advantages and compensates for the disadvantages of the new instrument it is transcribed for. This means the transcription need not be completely literal: Bach himself took great freedom in transcribing his own works and that of others. However, his modifications were musically on a par with, if not higher than the original work.⁷ Since the Chaconne is already established as a work of such high musical quality, transcribers have indeed a high standard to attain if they are to make major changes.

A brief description of the typical musical features a Bach Chaconne has is contained in Appendix A, if needed to clarify the terms used in this analysis.

⁵ Joachim Raff Society. *Catalogue of Raff's Works*. <http://www.raff.org/music/catalog/intro.htm>. Accessed on 7 November 2009.

⁶ Joachim Raff Society. *Music arranged by Raff*. <http://www.raff.org/music/brief/arranged.htm>. Accessed on 7 November 2009.

⁷ Paul, Leslie D. *Bach as Transcriber*. *Music & Letters* (Vol. 34, No. 4, 1953), 308. Accessed from JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/731061>, date: 1 January 2010.

1. Analysis of Brahms' Transcription

A quick glance at Brahms' transcription of the Chaconne would immediately bring into attention its conservatism, being the most literal transcription compared to any of the others.

1.1. Choice of Register

1.1.1. Use of the Left Hand

The explanation of Brahms' curious decision to create a piano transcription for only a single hand seems to be that it is in line with his intent to make a literal transcription. As he said to Clara Schumann:

"In only one way...can I devise for myself a greatly diminished but comparable and absolutely pure enjoyment of [the Chaconne] – when I play it with the left hand alone!...The similar difficulties, the type of technique, the arpeggios, they all combine – to make me feel like a violinist!"⁸

By using a single hand, Brahms limited the piano's inherent advantage over the violin in being able to hold a greater number of notes as well as draw out a full, sonorous sound from playing spread-out chords. The feel of a solo piece is still tightly there, compared to full two-handed piano transcriptions which transform the Chaconne's scale and scope significantly to an orchestral-like sound, rather than keeping to its soloistic intent.

Secondly, the choice of the left hand can be explained very straightforwardly: It simply is better built for single hand playing.⁹ The most important advantage is the thumb would be used to play the melody instead of the weaker little finger. This is evident since the beginning:



Figure 1a: Brahms, bars 1-3

Here the melody would be more easily voiced out by using the thumb. With the melody heard resonantly, the soloistic effect of Bach's partita is effectively transcribed. Similarly, example 1b, with the ring and little fingers holding the circled bass notes, the melody is effectively voiced out by the thumb:



Figure 1b: Brahms, bars 136-140

⁸ Styra, 516.

⁹ Brofeldt, Hans. *Piano Music for the Left Hand Alone: Introduction*. <http://www.left-hand-brofeldt.dk/index.htm>. Accessed on 6 November 2009.

Leaps between the bass and treble registers of the piano are also easier to execute using the left hand. In figure 1c the thumb is also effective in voicing out the melody in the uppermost notes:

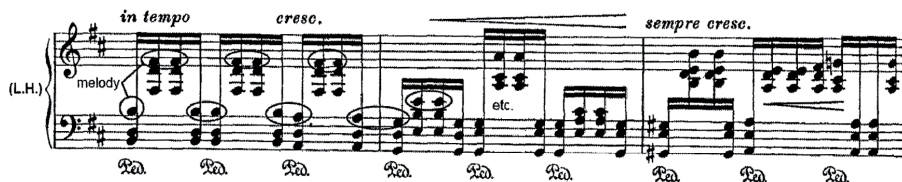


Figure 1c: Brahms, bars 202-204

1.1.2. Transposition of an Octave Lower

The Brahms transcription is an octave lower than the original pitch on the violin. The violin, playing the beginning of the work, would have to spread the first chords in double stops, thus compromising the need of a strong sense of the tonic (D minor):



Figure 2a: Bach, bars 1-3.

However in the Brahms, attention is immediately shifted to the lowest D of the first chord which rings with a greater sonority in its new register, increasing the force and assertiveness of the opening theme:



Figure 2b: Brahms, bars 1-3

Thus here Brahms has both preserved the essence of the work and enhanced it using the piano's capabilities. As said by Marina Fabrikant concerning the same approach in Busoni's transcription of the Chaconne,

When Busoni transported the range of the opening theme an octave lower, he changed not only the color of the minor, but of the theme as well, deepening it with a lower, more profound sound. This allows us to hear the harmony and its color more clearly; each individual chord becomes significant, and every little change in rhythm or melody becomes of the utmost importance.¹⁰

I believe this applies to Brahms' transcription as well. The piano's sonority and resonance is better served in the middle register, especially in one-handed transcriptions such as this.

Another example is the section in bars 126-9, where the main theme is powerfully stated in a recapitulation section:



Figure 3a: Bach, bars 126-9

Compare this with Brahms version, where the change in resonance is even more noticeable as the passage is played in forte:

Figure 3b: Bach, bars 126-9

1.1.3. Summary

We can see that Brahms' decision to use the left hand instead of the right supports his intent to create a transcription sounding closer to the original. The decision to transpose the music an octave lower was also an effective one, bringing out the natural sonority of the piano.

1.2. Textural Thickening

1.2.1. Harmonic Fillers

Brahms did not fundamentally alter the harmony used (or implied) by Bach in the original Chaconne. However, he did exploit the piano's capability to hold more notes, thickening the texture by filling in several notes which did not exist in the original violin score perhaps because it would be too technically challenging to play on the violin.

¹⁰ Fabrikant, 29.

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For example, Brahms thickens the texture to increase the tension in more intense passages, such as in bars 172-177:



Figure 4a: Bach, bars 172-177

Extra notes are added:

Figure 4b: Brahms, bars 172-177

By this he also adds to the weight and thus suspense of the passage, which is a dramatic build-up to the climax at bar 177.

Another important example is in the chorale-like section of bars 133-140 (where the key changes from the tonic of D minor to D major):

Figure 5a: Bach, bars 133-140

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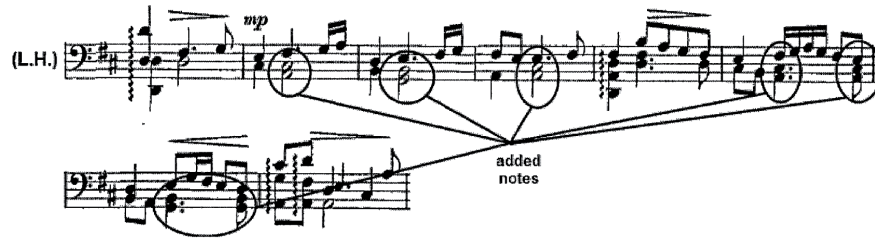


Figure 5b: Brahms, bars 133-140

In figure 5b, we see that the additional notes of the chord enhance the chorale-like effect, making it thicker. Together with the ability of the piano to sustain these extra notes, the overall effect is one which is sacred and solemn.

In figure 6a:



Figure 6a: Bach, bars 201-208

With the addition of notes in the chordal structure (figure 6b) Brahms again appropriately augments the sonorous and virtuosic effect that Bach had intended on the violin:

Figure 6b: Brahms, bars 202-208

1.2.2. Increase of Sonority using Octaves

Besides adding harmonic notes, Brahms sometimes adds octaves to the melody line, in order to achieve a higher level of sonority compared to the single line on the violin. However, he never overdoes it, as the use of only a single hand helps to keep the balance in check.

The first example comes from bars 121-124:

Figure 7a: Bach, bars 121-124

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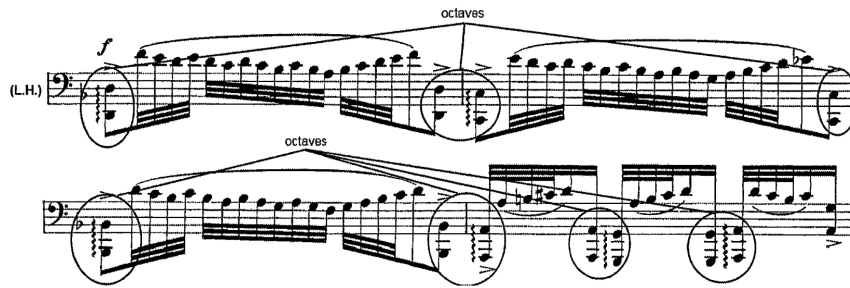


Figure 7b: Brahms, bars 121-124

The use of octaves to heighten the force of the tonic be seen in figure 8b:



Figure 8a: Bach, bars 172-176

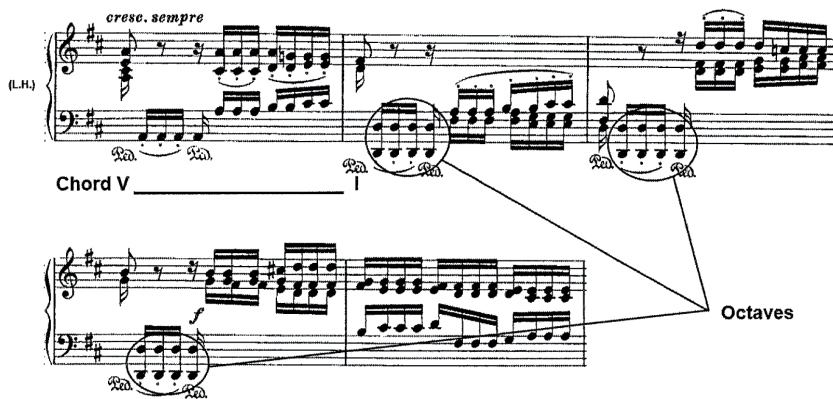


Figure 8b: Brahms, bars 172-176

Note that the octaves only occur on the Ds, and not the As of bar 172. Thus, the octaves serve to strengthen the resolution of the perfect cadence (V-I).

1.2.3. Summary

Brahms' sparing but appropriate use of harmonic fillers and octaves supports his intent to write a literal transcription effectively.

1.3. Instrumental Issues: Treatment of Violinistic Passages

Two passages in the Chaconne stand out as very characteristic of the violin and present a problem for transcribers:

1.3.1. First passage: Bars 89-120

In the original, this consists of a series of chords which are broken (arpeggiated) in a repetitive fashion. This passage serves as a transition and build-up to the grand restatement of the original chaconne theme (bar 126). Normally, in performance practice the arpeggios are improvised, with the pattern changed every time a variation on the Chaconne's chord progression has been completed.¹¹ This is the original violin passage:

Figure 9ai: Bach, bars 89-122

The intriguing feature of Brahms' adaptation here is that he changes the rhythm of the arpeggio from originally indicated. He also creates three patterns of the arpeggio

¹¹ Originally the form of the arpeggio patterns were supposed to be according to the violinist's discretion, but performances by famous violinists have led many to copy their realizations of the arpeggios. Today the patterns only differ slightly from performer to performer.

realizations.¹² The first pattern takes place from bars 89 to 92, where Brahms renders them in sextuplets with two bass notes in a beat, for example:

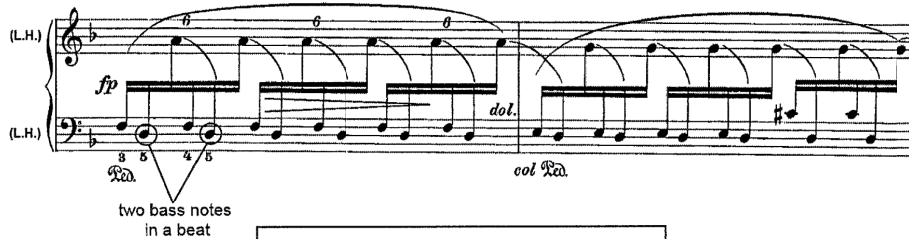


Figure 9bi: Brahms, bars 89-90

Next, bars 93-96, the chords are still in sextuplets with only one bass note in a beat, for example:

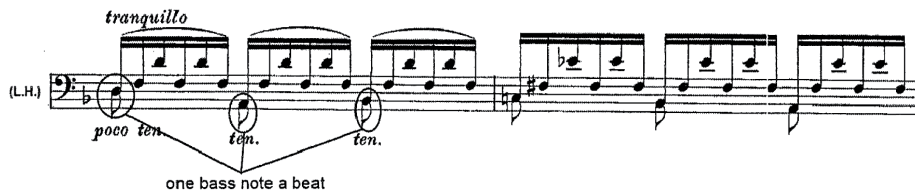


Figure 9bii: Brahms, bars 93-94

And lastly, bars 97-120, where Brahms changes to a full demisemiquaver figuration, for example:



Figure 9biii: Brahms, 97-98

The effect of the simplification here (from the demisemiquavers of the Bach to the sextuplets of bars 89-96 of the Brahms) is that the original intensity of the Bach is lost. Thus Brahms' transcription is not very effective. But we see that he has still tried to produce a gradual

¹² In normal performance practice of the original Bach Chaconne, there are only two, not three, patterns of arpeggio realization in the score (see Appendix B).

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rise in intensity, as seen by the increasing number of notes from figure 9bi, 9bii to 9biii. This is also supported by the more daring dynamic markings added (Figure 9biv), which are not present in the original Bach:

(L.H.)

(L.H.)

(L.H.)

various dynamic markings

poco a poco cresc.

mf

f

Figure 9biv: Brahms, bars 105-108

Here Brahms writes in a chain of triplets, which further increases the intensity.

(L.H.)

sempre f

Figure 9bv: Brahms, bars 113-114

1.3.2. Second passage: Bars 229-241

In this passage, the violin makes use of its multiple strings in playing the note A as a pedal:

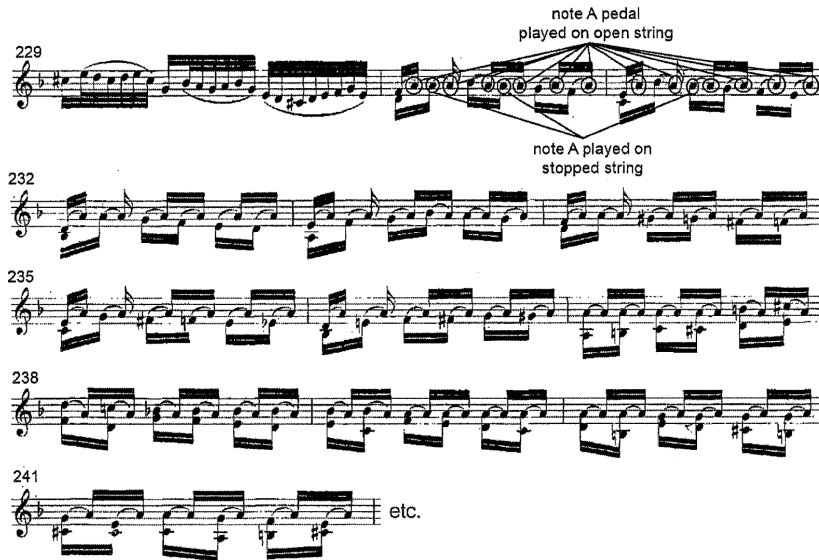


Figure 10a: Bach, bars 229-241

Notice that in many places a fingered A (played on the D string) is played in contrast to the A on the open string held as a pedal throughout this passage. There is no possible equivalent in piano for this exploitation of tone colour difference, and thus this difference is lost as Brahms transcribes the passage literally:



Figure 10b: Brahms, bars 236-240

1.3.3. Summary

Here Brahms encountered problems when transcribing literally passages which are very violinistic. He has managed to somewhat remedy the problem in the case of measures 89-120, but the problem of the loss of contrast of string tone colours is left unattended in measures 229-241.

2. Analysis of Raff's Transcription

Raff's transcription differs to Brahms' in that it is very pianistic, meaning that the music is written in a way which is characteristic of piano music writing, bringing out the peculiar style and sound qualities of the piano.

2.1. Textural Thickening

2.1.1. Harmonic Fillers

"Harmonic fillers" will be defined as notes which either complete the "missing notes" of the chord or are added for musical purposes (such as doubling the melody in thirds or sixths).

In the example at Figure 11b, the circled notes are not found in Bach's original:



Figure 11a: Bach, bars 17-20

Figure 11b: Raff, bars 17-20

The effect of these added notes is of a denser, chordal feeling in this particular passage, highlighting a pianistic tone. On a violin (or two violins), the use of such thicker textures may be too opaque. However, on a piano such an addition does not change the general impression of the passage, while at the same time providing a rounder sound in which the two hands will be of better use.

At bar 53-55, Raff doubles the melody with sixths:



Figure 12a: Bach, bars 53-55

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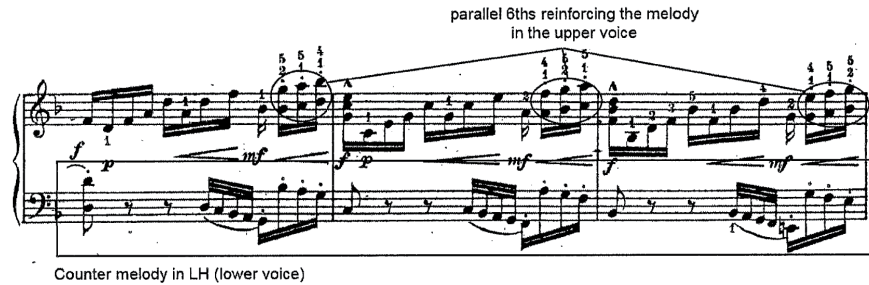


Figure 12b: Raff bars 53-55

In this two-voiced passage there is a counter melody in the LH. Raff reinforces the last three notes of the upper line in each bar with parallel sixths. Parallel sixths is no doubt a pianistic feature. However, the use of it here merely makes the texture even denser, losing the clarity of the melody line.

Raff would also expand single notes into full chords, for example in figure 13:



Figure 13a: Bach, bars 121-124

The image shows a musical score for Joachim Raff's piano transcription of Bach's Chaconne, bars 121-124. The score is in D minor and 3/4 time. It features a piano (p) dynamic in the first system and a forte (f) dynamic in the second system. The upper voice consists of scalic runs, and the lower voice consists of chords. The score is annotated with 'upper voice: scalic runs' and 'lower voice: chords'.

Figure 13b: Raff, bars 121-124

Notice that in between the chords, the scalic runs are also in sixths. Here, the chords also only serve the sole purpose of thickening the texture and making a more sonorous sound. However, in this instance it is more justified since the thickening does not occur when multiple voices are sounding at the same time: there is a clear contrast between the upper voice (the scalic runs) and the lower voice (the chords), as they are played consecutively, not simultaneously.

2.1.2. Additional voices

Raff's transcription transforms some passages of polyphony in the Chaconne from implied to actual, as he liberally thickens the texture further by the adding of voices. Some of these additions were strongly implied in the original, which means that it is very likely that Bach left them out only because of the violin's limitations in being unable to play multi-voiced music effectively, and Raff takes advantage of the piano in being able to play all of the voices. However, some of the other additions are more weakly implied, which is saying that there is almost no evidence in the original Chaconne that Bach intended the passage to be multi-voiced.

2.1.2.1. Voices Strongly Implied by Bach

Let us examine bars 9-13, where Raff “completes” what Bach seems to have left missing, most likely because the violin is unable to play all the voices:



Figure 14a: Bach, bars 9-13

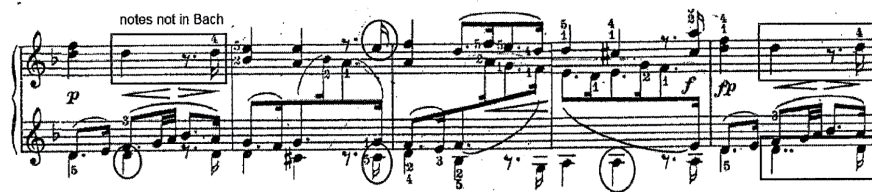


Figure 14b: Raff, bars 9-13

It is justified to call this a completion, since Raff truly completes the main subject. The completion brings into attention the very strong evidence that Bach could have written these lines in, only if not for the fact that the violin is physically unable to play them.

Another example would be at bars 125-132:



Figure 15a: Bach, bars 125-132

In bars 125-126 we see Bach suddenly changes from writing a flowing semiquaver figuration to a strong chordal passage played with multiple stops which is similar to the declamatory opening of the Chaconne.

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Raff interpreted this as due to the physical inadequacy of the violin to play the multiple voices, thus necessitating the violin to suddenly change voices. Thus Raff "improves" on this in his transcription:

The image shows a musical score for Raff's piano transcription of Bach's Chaconne, bars 125-132. The score is in D minor and features a complex texture with multiple voices. The upper voice is labeled "completed upper voice" and the lower voice is labeled "completed lower voice". The tempo is marked "a Tempo animato" and the dynamics are "f sempre". The score shows a dense arrangement of notes, with the lower voice playing in octaves in the lower register of the piano.

Figure 15b: Raff, bars 125-132

At bar 125 Raff adds the two "missing" chords of the opening theme, and in 126-132 he adds an octave left hand passage which continues from the lower voice at bar 125. The problem is that this lower line is played in octaves in the lower register of the piano, which inevitably will result in the upper voice (which is the opening subject theme) being buried by the torrent of notes.

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I believe that Raff has failed to take into account the fact that Bach may have actually used the violin's limitations to his advantage: the abrupt change in writing in bar 126 amplifies the return of the theme in 126, making it very climactic, which contrasts better to the ensuing passage to follow at bar 133 onwards: the calmer chorale-like section in a quiet D major:

126 Climactic section

133 Stark contrast with calmer chorale section in D major

Figure 15c: Bach, bars 126-138

However, at times Raff "completes" the polyphony not by adding actual voices, but changing their register to separate the lower and upper voices more distinctively, such as in bars 65-68:

Figure 16a: Bach, bars 65-68

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In the example at figure 16b, the busy, lively mood of the two voices (upper in the RH and lower in the LH) interacting with one another seems to be what Bach originally intended. The scale in contrary motion in bar 68 is also a clever addition on Raff's part, capping the end of the variation effectively.

Figure 16b shows a musical score for Raff's transcription of Bach's Chaconne, bars 65-68. The score is in two staves (RH and LH). The top staff is marked "Non affrettare" and "f p". The bottom staff is marked "mf p". Annotations include "register change" pointing to a change in the LH staff, "added, not present in Bach" pointing to a new melodic line in the RH staff, and "added scale in contrary motion" pointing to a scale in the LH staff.

Figure 16b: Raff, bars 65-68

However there are still some instances when register changing has questionable results, such as bars 61-64:

Figure 17a shows a musical score for Bach's Chaconne, bars 61-64. The score is in two staves (RH and LH). The top staff is marked "f" and the bottom staff is marked "p". The music is in a fast, rhythmic style with a complex melodic line in the RH staff and a more rhythmic line in the LH staff.

Figure 17a: Bach, bars 61-64

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Figure 17b: Raff, bars 61-64

Here Raff expanded the first two beats of each of the bars from 61-63 into a full lower voice. However, overall a weaker configuration has resulted from the loss of the powerful gesture of a single voice ascending two octaves in the span of four notes. The crucial link between the high Bb and the E in bars 61-62, for example, is disrupted by a descent back to Db (circled in Figure 17b). The overall momentum is lessened. The torrent of the octaves in the left hand which forms the lower voice does add to the sonority of the passage. However in the process of doing so it also buries the upper voice melody of the Chaconne.

2.1.2.2. Voices Less Strongly Implied by Bach

These can be roughly divided into two types of voicings.

The first is the addition of a completely new independent countermelody to the original, for example Figure 18a (bars 25-32):

Figure 18a: Bach, bars 25-32

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Figure 18b: Raff, bars 25-32

What are we to make of this countermelody? In the Bach we can see some double stops indicated in bars 25-29. This does seem to suggest that Bach implied a lower voice in the original Chaconne, which is to be expanded as Raff did it in Figure 14b, adding only a few notes to the lower voice. Instead he has chosen to add a long, flowing counter-melody which detracts from the force and colour of the upper voice melody. Raff's decision to treat the C# in bar 30 and the A in bar 32 as part of the lower voice, but not the A and Bb in bar 31 also seems inconsistent. Lastly, he also has omitted a D in bar 26, somewhat changing the colour of the harmony by replacing it with an E.

The second type of additional voicings is by adding a motif which is then repeated in sequence in the variation:

Figure 19a: Bach, bars 49-52

The extent of the Effectiveness of Joachim Raff's and Johannes Brahms' Piano Transcriptions of Bach's Chaconne from the Partita No.2 in D minor for Solo Violin

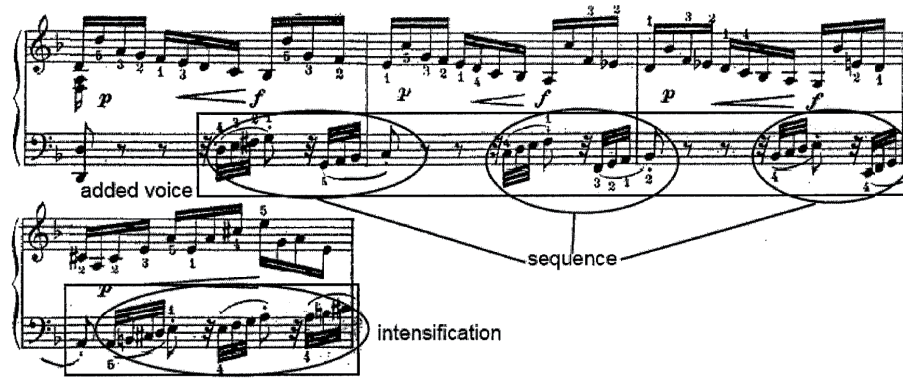


Figure 19b: Raff, bars 49-52

In Figure 19b, Raff's additions enhance the melody of the Chaconne. The motif of the lower voice occurs only in the second half of each bar. This allows the upper voice to sound clearly, undisturbed, in the first half of the bar. When the lower voice motif comes in, it provides a driving force to progress to the next bar. This motif is repeated in ascending sequence more frequently, creating an intensifying effect which connects well with the next section (which is played forte):

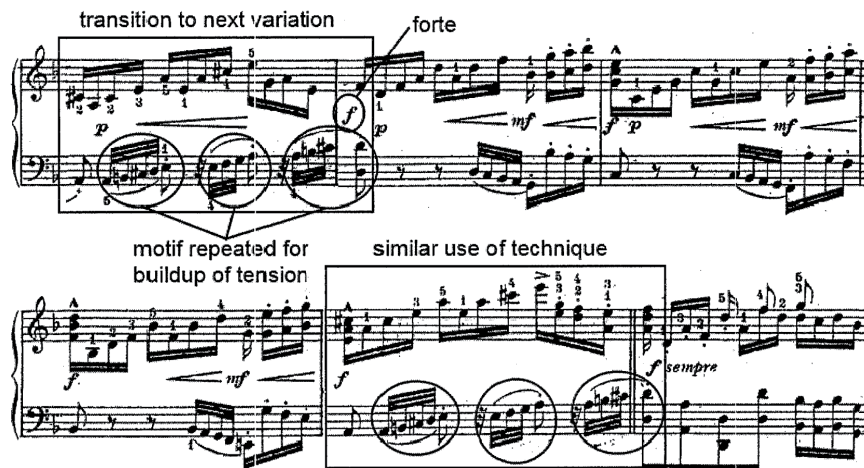


Figure 19c: Raff, bars 52-57

2.1.3. Summary

In thickening the texture through his ubiquitous harmonic fillers, Raff has made the harmony richer. However, his addition of voices is more effective when he adds those which are strongly suggested in the Bach, compared to his liberal excesses in adding more voices in passages which were only weakly suggested in the original. Still, even in the case of strongly implied voices, he often adds sonority but less clarity.

2.2. Instrumental Issues: Treatment of Violinistic Passages

2.2.1. Measures 89-120

Elaborating a little from common performance practice, Raff changes figuration every time the Chaconne's main chord progression is finished and the next variation begins.¹³ Interestingly, he also adds new voices in these passages. Let us examine the first figuration:

The image shows a musical score for piano, measures 89-92. It consists of two systems of music. Each system has a treble clef staff (RH) and a bass clef staff (LH). The RH part is a continuous arpeggiated figure. The LH part consists of a series of chords. In the first system, a 'new voice' is indicated in the LH. The second system continues the same texture.

Figure 20a: Raff, bars 89-92

Here Raff has added a lower voice in the LH, while the RH is busy playing the arpeggios as the violin would normally play them. On the surface this arrangement, with the strong, sonorous chords in the LH, is very characteristic of the piano and successfully pits the opening theme of the Chaconne against the famous arpeggio figurations. However, there are actually two problems. First concerns the harmony. In the Bach Chaconne, the harmony of bars 89-90 is as such:

¹³ Refer to Appendix B for how violinists normally realize this passage in performance.

The extent of the Effectiveness of Joachim Raff's and Johannes Brahms' Piano Transcriptions of Bach's Chaconne from the Partita No.2 in D minor for Solo Violin



Figure 20b: Bach, bars 89-92

Raff's version has a difference:

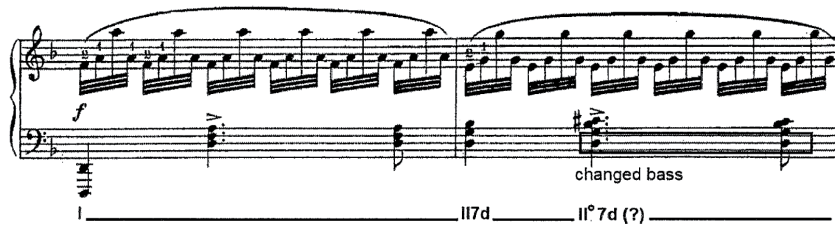


Figure 20c: Raff, bars 89-90

In putting chords in the LH, Raff also altered the harmony. In bar 90, beats 2-3, the Vc chord has been changed. Raff opted to preserve the bass of D instead of shifting to E, resulting in a diminished chord which is normally not found in the opening theme of the Chaconne. The acoustic effect is not only of sonority, but also opaqueness and a lack of clarity.

The second problem is that of the passage's relation to the preceding passage. In the Bach, the arpeggio section occurs after a rapid series of scalic runs:

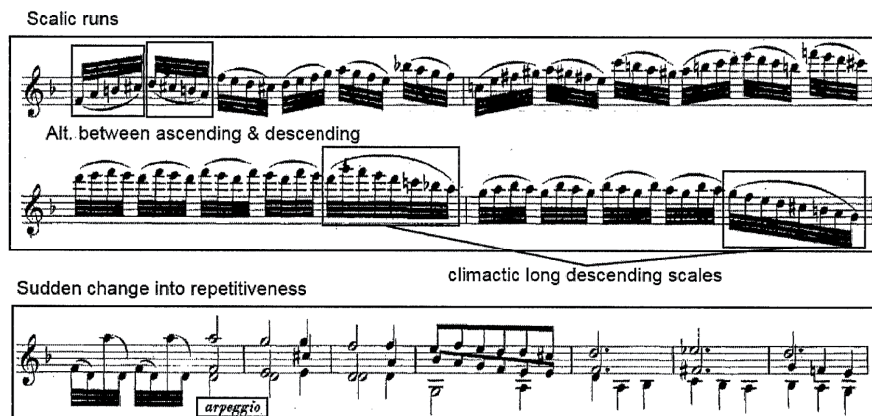


Figure 20d: Bach, bars 84-94

The extent of the Effectiveness of Joachim Raff's and Johannes Brahms' Piano Transcriptions of Bach's Chaconne from the Partita No.2 in D minor for Solo Violin

These scalic runs from bars 84-87 span a wide range of notes, alternating between ascending and descending figures and ultimately ending with a sequence of climactic long descending scales: essentially an intense, action-packed passage, which is immediately contrasted with the still intense but more focused and static movement of the repetitive broken chords from bars 88 onwards. However, in the Raff, by adding such a LH part, the contrast is much lessened:

Figure 20e: Raff, bars 86-90

Here the LH voice is loud, declamatory, and grand, taking a lot of the attention away from the more important and interesting upper voice in the RH. This is an example in which I think that the violin's inability to play both the upper and lower voices is not a disadvantage: Bach actually meant for the listeners to be relieved of the opening theme for a few moments and focus on the powerful chord progression. Raff has failed to consider this possibility, and his adaptation here is inferior.

At bar 93 Raff changes the figuration:

Figure 21: Raff, bars 93-94

The extent of the Effectiveness of Joachim Raff's and Johannes Brahms' Piano Transcriptions of Bach's Chaconne from the Partita No.2 in D minor for Solo Violin

This 3-voiced setup further deviates from the original effect of Bach, but it is consistent with the writing before.

In the next variation, bars 97-104, another new figuration is used. The remarkable part, however, is at bar 99:

added melody has become main feature

Figure 22: Raff, bars 99-100

The added middle voice is no longer merely an addition which only thickens the texture. It has become the main feature, while the broken chords in the upper voice is now functioning as only accompaniment. Again, this seems musically inferior to Bach, who in this section most likely felt that the arpeggios were more important than the melody (hence the exclusion of the melody). But again, this way of writing connects with what Raff had written in the previous figuration.

2.2.2. Measures 229-241

Raff apparently was aware of how two notes are contrasted on two different strings of the violin in the Chaconne. We refer to the measures 229-241:

Figure 23a: Bach, bars 229-241

On the piano, he transcribes it thus:

Figure 23bi: Raff, 229-230

Conclusion

Brahms held the original Chaconne in such high regard that he chose to make no significant changes, clearly intending to make a transcription as literal as possible. The vast difference between the two instruments inevitably makes this note-for-note transcription somewhat less effective compared to its original passages which are very characteristic of the violin. However Brahms has more than compensated for this by introducing appropriate modifications which makes use of the piano's advantages over the violin, such as the ability to hold more notes, sustain them, and also increase their sonority by using octaves. Overall the transcription is largely effective and successful.

The additional voices in the texture of the Chaconne are highlighted well in Raff's transcription, fully realizing the contrapuntal nature of Bach's work. Raff also made ingenious adaptations to make his transcription more dramatic, virtuosic and most of all pianistic. However at other times with a lack of discretion he overdoes this, such as by adding voices to the point of blurring the clarity and mood of passages, failing to take into account how the violin's contrapuntal shortcomings might actually have been used in a beneficial way by Bach in certain passages. As a standalone work, these modifications still make pianistic sense. However, they certainly cannot be said to create a work musically on a par with the original Chaconne, and hence ultimately Raff's transcription is only partially effective.

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Appendix A

The Chaconne

Let us examine what musical elements a chaconne possesses. Larry Solomon has articulated the typical characteristics of a Bach chaconne:

- The chaconne is a special type of continuous Theme and Variations where a fairly short subject (normally 4 measures) is relentlessly repeated and varied.
- The subject or theme occurs either as a repeating melodic bass line or as a harmonic progression.
- It is a slow dance in simple triple meter, often in a minor key, using the rhythm of a Sarabande, with an agogic accent on the second beat.¹⁴

This Chaconne from Partita No. 2 certainly fulfil all of these criteria. The four-chord progression played in bars 1-5 is indeed repeated over and over through the work, but with different variations every time. At times it is delayed, augmented, or turned to its relative major, but the basic harmonic structure remains the same.

The investigation will thus keep these features in mind as it analyses the transcriptions' adaptations and modifications to determine a fair conclusion.

¹⁴ Solomon, Larry. *Bach's Chaconne in D minor for solo violin: An application through analysis*. <http://solomonsmusic.net/bachacon.htm>. Date accessed: 21 April 2010.

Appendix B

Realization of bars 89-120

Here is the pattern of arpeggios in bars 89-120 of the Chaconne normally realized by many of the world's major violinists today:

The image displays a musical score for violin, specifically focusing on the arpeggiated patterns in bars 89 through 120 of Bach's Chaconne. The score is written in 3/4 time and D minor. It consists of five staves of music. The first staff (bar 89) shows a sequence of arpeggios. The second staff (bar 91) has a box around the first two measures with an arrow pointing to it labeled 'changes in figuration'. The third staff (bar 93) continues the pattern. The fourth staff (bar 95) continues the pattern. The fifth staff (bar 97) continues the pattern and ends with 'etc.'

Figure 24: Bach, bars 89-99 realization

Only up to bar 98 is the pattern quoted, because it follows the same pattern as bar 98 until the end (bar 119). It can be seen that there are only two arpeggio patterns: the one in 89-90, 91 and the one in the rest of the passage. Although other editions may have more variety of patterns, changing each time the chord progression is completed, the majority of recordings of this piece follow the simpler pattern above.