

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: BEYOND ROCOCO: VARIATION FORM IN FIFTEEN WORKS FOR CELLO

Emily A. Doveala, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2022

Dissertation directed by: Dr. Eric Kutz, School of Music

This dissertation examines the formal structures, technical demands, and historical significance of 15 works for cello that take the form of theme and variations. The works featured are variations by Ludwig van Beethoven (Variations WoO 45, Variations Op. 66, and Variations WoO 46,) Felix Mendelssohn (Variations Concertantes), Jean Sibelius (Theme and Variations), Gioachino Rossini (*Une Larme*), Ferruccio Busoni (*Kultaselle*), Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (Variations), Donald Tovey (Elegiac Variations), Paul Hindemith (A frog he went a-courting), Bohuslav Martinů (Variations on a Slovakian Theme), Imogen Holst (Fall of the Leaf), Edison Denisov (Variations on a Theme of Schubert), Elena Ruehr (Prelude Variations), and Adolphus Hailstork (Theme and Variations on “Draw the Sacred Circle Closer”). These pieces are divided into two categories: works with existing themes and works with original themes. The discussion of each piece includes the historical context of the work, relevant biographical information on the composer, and description of the role of the theme and the use of specific compositional techniques to alter that theme. Through the examination of these pieces, this paper accomplishes three objectives: tracing the history of cello playing through the expansion of technical demands as observed in these works; following the evolution of variation form in this selection of music;

and encouraging the increased inclusion of these compositions in cello recitals. The recitals were performed at the University of Maryland School of Music's Gildenhorn Recital Hall and Tawes Recital Hall. Recordings can be found in the Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM).

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by

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## Recital Programs

Dissertation Recital 1  
Emily Doveala, cello  
Yurong “Ria” Yang, piano  
December 2, 2021  
8:00pm  
Gildenhorn Recital Hall

**Zwölf Variationen über ein Thema  
aus dem Oratorium “Judas Maccabäus”  
von Händel, WoO 45**

Ludwig van Beethoven  
(1770–1827)

**Zwölf Variationen über das Thema  
“Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen” aus der Oper  
“Die Zauberflöte” von Mozart, Op. 66**

Beethoven

**Sieben Variationen über das Thema  
“Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen” aus der Oper  
“Die Zauberflöte” von Mozart, WoO 46**

Beethoven

**Une Larme, Tema e Variazioni**

Gioachino Rossini  
(1792–1868)

**Theme and Variations in D minor for solo cello, JS 196**

Jean Sibelius  
(1865–1957)

Dissertation Recital 2  
Emily Doveala, cello  
Yurong “Ria” Yang, piano  
Alexei Ulitin, piano  
Rohan Joshi, viola  
February 26, 2022  
8:00pm  
Gildenhorn Recital Hall

**Variations Concertantes, Op. 17**

Felix Mendelssohn  
(1809–1847)

Ria Yang, piano

**“A frog he went a-courting”**

Paul Hindemith  
(1895–1963)

Alexei Ulitin, piano

**Prelude Variations** for Viola and Cello

Elena Ruehr  
(1963–)

Rohan Joshi, viola

**Elegiac Variations, Op. 25**

Donald F. Tovey  
(1875–1940)

Alexei Ulitin, piano

**Theme and Variations**  
on “**Draw the Sacred Circle Closer**” for solo cello

Adolphus Hailstork  
(1941–)

Dissertation Recital 3  
Emily Doveala, cello  
Alexei Ulitin, piano  
April 26, 2022  
8:00pm  
Ulrich Recital Hall

**Kultaselle, Variations on a Finnish Folk Song**

Ferruccio Busoni  
(1866–1924)

**Fall of the Leaf** for Solo Cello

Imogen Holst  
(1907–1984)

**Variations on a Theme of Schubert**

Edison Denisov  
(1929–1996)

**Variations**

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor  
(1875–1912)

**Variations on a Slovakian Theme, H. 378**

Bohuslav Martinů  
(1890–1959)

## Introduction

In an 1876 letter, Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) wrote, “I have a peculiar affection for the variation form, and consider that it offers great scope to our talents and energies.”<sup>1</sup> While Brahms did not write variation works for cello, the talents and energies of this selection of thirteen composers are apparent in their variation works for cello. These 15 pieces for cello examined for this dissertation range from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and provide an overview of variation form in the cello repertoire.

While variation form is represented in chamber and large ensemble repertoire, the stand-alone variation form is disregarded in the cello recital repertoire. The 15 pieces that were chosen for this project are all stand-alone variation works. I chose to exclude variation movements that were contained in cello sonatas or concerti because those works are part of larger forms that are already frequently performed. Tchaikovsky’s *Rococo Variations* is likely the most well-known and often-played variation piece for cello, but as a concerto I believe it belongs in the orchestral setting rather than the recital setting. I also believe that cellists should be familiar with the oft-neglected, stand-alone variation works outside of this most famous example; this was another reason for its exclusion from this project.

In variation form, composers explore the musical potential of a theme through repetition and alteration. In a variation movement within a larger work, the musical or thematic content of the theme is related to the work as whole. For example, in the finale of Beethoven’s *Eroica* Symphony, variations on a theme from his ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus* provide a satisfying conclusion to the work. The use of this particular theme and its variations invokes the

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<sup>1</sup>Ming-Shung Lee, “A Selected Study of Three Variations by Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms,” (D.M.A. diss., University of Cincinnati, 2003), 15, ProQuest 304258980.

character of Prometheus and the story's Enlightenment themes in relation to the symphony's title, "Heroic Symphony composed to celebrate the memory of a great man."<sup>2</sup> In a non-programmatic work like Mozart's String Quartet in D minor K. 421, the variation form in the fourth movement begins with the minor, dark quality heard in the preceding movements of the piece, but the variations provide contrast with a sense of lightness and ease to set up the D major conclusion. In the single-movement variation pieces used for this project, the theme (or themes) is developed outside of a larger context, often with a theme borrowed from another source.

The discussion of these 15 pieces is divided into works with an existing theme and works with an original theme. In works with an existing theme, the musical and emotional content of the borrowed theme can be highlighted or subverted through the journey of the variations. These pieces often use themes that are known to the audience of the time and place of composition, and many of the themes have lyrics that give overt meaning to the piece as a whole. In works with an original theme, some pieces explore a particular topic with the use of a descriptive title (for example, *Elegiac Variations* and *Une Larme*). In the few works in this project with no borrowed theme and no evocative title, the composers rely heavily on the display of their compositional inventiveness and the technical prowess of the musicians in the variations.

Before discussing the individual works, it is valuable to provide a brief overview of variation form more broadly. Since the beginning of music history, composers made changes to music with repetition. Musicologist Donald Tovey (1875-1940), composer of the *Elegiac Variations* in this project, described 16<sup>th</sup>-century variation form as the polyphonic treatment of Gregorian chants.<sup>3</sup> Instrumental music of the time used variation form by combining one or more

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<sup>2</sup>Lewis Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies: An Artistic Vision* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2017), 62.

<sup>3</sup>Donald Tovey, "Variations," in *The Forms of Music* (Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Company, 1961), 240.

popular melodies (often from the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, later used by Imogen Holst for Fall of the Leaf) with an ornamental variation in between.<sup>4</sup> There was also the use of a “double” in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in which a movement was repeated a second time in a more highly-ornamented way (this technique was used in J. S. Bach’s violin partitas).<sup>5</sup> A specific type of variation form arose in the Baroque, which Douglass Green refers to as “continuous variations.” Green defines continuous variations as “those based on a theme comprising only a phrase or two” in which “the variations follow each other uninterruptedly.”<sup>6</sup> However, Green’s classification of continuous variations contains only the Baroque forms of the *chaconne*, the *passacaglia*, and ground bass – all categories that employ the use of a fixed harmonic progression or bass melody. In this project, there are several examples of variation works that progress continuously from variation to variation without pause, but could not be categorized as a *chaconne* or *passacaglia* due to their phrase structure and harmonic content. Therefore, any use of the term “continuous variations” should refer to all variation works that are to be performed continuously, rather than to exclusively discuss *chaconnes*, *passacaglias*, and ground bass. *Passacaglias* and the like have been excluded from this project in order to limit the scope. They are also left out of this research because *passacaglias* are often movements in larger works and few feature the cello in a solo capacity.

As variation form developed, it has had many names, including theme and variations, “the Classical and Romantic Ornamental variation,”<sup>7</sup> or “sectional variations.”<sup>8</sup> The term “sectional variations” refers to a variation form in which each variation adheres to the phrase

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<sup>4</sup>Heinrich Lemacher and Herman Schroeder, “Free Forms,” in *Musical Form* (Cologne: Musikverlage Hans Gerig, 1967), 83.

<sup>5</sup>Douglass Green, “Theme and Variations,” in *Form in Tonal Music: An Introduction to Analysis* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1965), 98.

<sup>6</sup>Green, “Theme and Variations,” 115.

<sup>7</sup>Lemacher and Schroeder, “Free Forms,” 86.

<sup>8</sup>Green, “Theme and Variations,” 96.

structure of the theme (Green explains that some theorists believe that variations that do not adhere to the phrase structure of the theme should instead be called “Developments on a Theme,” a distinction I find unnecessary and which adds another layer of confusion). The term “ornamental variation” seems insufficient as well. While variation pieces often progress to higher levels of ornamentation, ornamentation is not the sole compositional method used to vary the theme.

Variation form remains the most all-encompassing term, which I will define as the statement of a musical theme, followed by repetitions of this theme with alterations to one or more – but never all – of its musical elements. Analysis shows common techniques for how the composer achieves variation in variation form. Rhythmic variation can come from diminution (in which faster note values are used) or augmentation (in which slower note values are used). Harmony can be altered, either on a small scale with adjustments to individual chords or on a large scale with an entire variation in a new key (or in some cases, departing from tonality entirely!). Tempo, meter, instrumentation, texture, timbre, range, and sonority can also be changed, as long as at least one element remains the same to hold a connection to the theme.

## Existing Themes

### Beethoven: Theme and Variations, WoO 45

The theme in Beethoven’s Variations on “See the Conqu’ring Hero Comes” was taken from the oratorio Judas Maccabaeus by George Frideric Handel. The oratorio recounts the story of the title character, who defeated the oppressor of the Israelites. “See the Conqu’ring Hero Comes” is sung by the chorus in Act 3 to celebrate Judas Maccabaeus’s victory and triumphant return. The chorus sings, “See the conqu’ring hero comes! Sound the trumpets, beat the drums.

Sports prepare, the laurel bring, songs of triumph to him sing.”<sup>9</sup> The melody has been referenced as Handel’s second-most famous chorus (after the inescapable Hallelujah chorus from *Messiah*). “See the Conqu’ring Hero” was so well-received that though Handel originally wrote it for his oratorio *Joshua*, he used it for both that work and *Judas Maccabaeus*.<sup>10</sup> Both its popularity and its heroic affect made it a great choice for Beethoven to repurpose for this WoO 45 variations. Throughout his compositional career, he often employed heroic thematic material, most obviously in his Symphony No. 3 titled “*Eroica*,” but also in his ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*, *Fidelio*, and other works. Additionally, he was a great admirer of Handel and towards the end of his life regarded him as “the greatest composer who ever lived.”<sup>11</sup>

This work was dedicated to Princess Christiane, wife of one of Beethoven’s most important patrons, Prince Karl Lichnowsky. Princess Christiane was, according to Beethoven biographer Maynard Solomon, “one of the better pianists among the Viennese nobility.”<sup>12</sup> This dedication accounts for the virtuosity of the piano part. While the cello part has its own moments of difficulty, the piece largely displays the pianist’s technique. This is the case for all three sets of cello and piano variations written by Beethoven. With his later Sonata No. 3 in A major, Op. 69, the composer set the standard for cello sonatas to come: the two instruments became an equal duo. However, before his third sonata, the piano is still the focus of works for cello and piano.

The theme is presented simply, much like Handel’s original, with three eight-bar phrases: one in G major, one beginning in E minor, and the final phrase again in G major. The first three variations set up a trend of diminution, which adds progressively faster rhythms to the beginning

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<sup>9</sup>George Frideric Handel, *Judas Maccabaeus*, (Leipzig, Germany: Deutsche Händelgesellschaft, 1865), 186.

<sup>10</sup>Merlin Channon, “Handel’s Early Performances of ‘Judas Maccabaeus’: Some New Evidence and Interpretations,” *Music and Letters* vol. 77, no. 4 (Nov., 1996), 514. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/737803>

<sup>11</sup>Maynard Solomon, *Beethoven*, (New York, NY: Schirmer Trade Books, 1977), 295.

<sup>12</sup>Solomon, *Beethoven*, 83.

of the piece. The fourth variation and eighth variation are presented in G minor, standing in stark contrast to the triumphant original. These minor mode variations, in addition to the intimate and moving Adagio in variation eleven, completely change the meaning of “See the Conqu’ring Hero Comes,” casting doubt or reservation where there was once triumph and celebration. The remaining variations retain the feeling of the theme, through changing meter (variation twelve), adding playful call and response between the instruments (variations five, six, and nine), or highlighting the virtuosity of an individual instrument (variations seven and ten).

#### Beethoven: Theme and Variations, Op. 66

The theme for Beethoven’s set of variations in F Major was taken from Act II of Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*, or The Magic Flute. The original aria is sung by the character of Papageno, sidekick to the hero Tamino. Papageno has not passed the tests of the priests in the Temple of Wisdom, so they do not make him a god, but they decide to reward him despite this and ask what he wants. His first answer is a glass of wine and when that request is fulfilled, he sings that what he really wants is “*Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen*” (“a woman or a girl”) with whom to share his life.<sup>13</sup> At the conclusion of this aria, the gods present him with this woman: Papagena. Throughout the aria, Papageno plays his magic bells (the counterpart to Tamino’s magic flute, from which the opera derives its name), heard on the glockenspiel.<sup>14</sup> Though this is an aria about desire for love, the overall affect is cute and unserious, mirroring the character of Papageno.

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<sup>13</sup>Emanuel Schikaneder, *The Magic Flute: Original Text and English Translation*, trans. Ruth Martin and Thomas Martin (Chester, NY: G Schirmer, Inc., 1941), 21.

<sup>14</sup>Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, (New York, USA: Dover, 1985), 156-162.

Beethoven likely chose this melody for the set of variations due to its popularity and the composer's deep admiration for Mozart. This set of variations follows a very similar trajectory to that of his WoO 45 variations on a theme of Handel. The work is still heavily reliant on piano virtuosity, but the cello shines in a slightly more important role in variation two and variation twelve. Variations seven, ten, and eleven stand out here as the furthest departure from the light-heartedness of the theme. Variation seven displays tenderness in a major mode and *pianissimo* dynamic, while variations ten and eleven explore a chilling F minor. These three variations sound most Beethovenian in their depth of feeling and moments of darkness.

#### Beethoven: Theme and Variations, WoO 46

The final set of variations by Beethoven – dedicated to his patron the Count von Browne-Camus – also takes its melody from The Magic Flute. The theme comes from the duet “*Bei Männern welche Liebe fühlen*” in the opera's first act. This is a duet between Papageno and Pamina (a damsel in distress and love interest of the hero Tamino). In the duet they sing, “we live by love, by love alone.”<sup>15</sup> Though this duet has a similar message to “*Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen*,” the music and lyrics of “*Bei Männern*” are much more serious and profound.

Once again, the theme is presented simply. In keeping with Mozart's original, there are few dynamic or articulation markings and each voice is given the opportunity to play both melody and accompaniment. The first two variations once again employ the technique of diminution, with first sixteenth-notes then thirty-second notes. The thirty-second notes continue into variation three, with one piano embellishment of sixty-fourth notes. Variation four is presented in the dark key of E-flat minor, the first departure from the lofty and optimistic tone of

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<sup>15</sup>Schikaneder, *The Magic Flute*, 8.

the theme. Variation five seems to mock the theme, with both instruments passing bouncy triplet sixteenth notes between them. Variation six and seven seem the most indicative of Beethoven's own feelings towards the message of the theme. The variation six *adagio* takes on an emotional, at times even pleading tone, while variation seven expands into an angry C minor coda.

Beethoven was a lifelong bachelor with a handful of failed romantic relationships and affairs, and later in his life had a dramatic paternal relationship with his nephew, likely stemming from his desire for a family of his own. Perhaps these last two variations (and the similar commentary on the love theme in the Op. 66 variations) give us insight into both his own longings and anger stemming from his difficult quest for love and belonging.

### Busoni: *Kultaselle*

Italian pianist and composer Ferruccio Busoni was a well-known child piano prodigy. As a result of his fame as a pianist, he was recommended by musicologist Hugo Riemann to join the faculty of the Institute of Music at Helsinki (later called the Sibelius Academy) at the age of twenty-two.<sup>16</sup> During his time there, on March 18, 1889, he met a young woman named Gerda Sjöstrand, who was a piano teacher in the area. On March 20<sup>th</sup>, Busoni invited her and her father to a recital he was performing the following day. Sjöstrand and her father attended the performance, but did not meet Busoni afterwards, much to his disappointment. Sjöstrand and Busoni met two more times that week and then on March 25<sup>th</sup>, he asked her to marry him and she agreed.<sup>17</sup> They were married for thirty-three years, until his death in 1924.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Roberto Wis, "Ferruccio Busoni and Finland," *Acta Musicologica* Vol. 46, Fasc. 2 (Jul.-Dec., 1977): 251.

<sup>17</sup>Wis, "Ferruccio Busoni and Finland," 259-261.

<sup>18</sup>Edward Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni: A Biography* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1974), 287.

In 1891, while in his new teaching position at the Moscow Conservatory,<sup>19</sup> Busoni wrote *Kultaselle*, Ten Short Variations on a Finnish Folksong. *Kultaselle*, meaning “To the Beloved,” was a popular Finnish tune and his use of it in this context pays homage to his time in Finland and to his Finnish wife (beyond the translation of the title, I was unable to find more information about this theme and whether it had lyrics). He later used this same melody for the fourth of his six *Klavier-Stücke* Op 33b, titled *Finnische Ballade*. The work is dedicated to “his friend and colleague Professor Alfred von Glehn in Moscow.”<sup>20</sup> Alfred von Glehn was a cello professor at the Moscow Conservatory and an early teacher of famed cellist Gregor Piatigorsky.<sup>21</sup> We do not know much about the premiere of this piece or whether von Glehn and Busoni played it together.

The opening *Kultaselle* theme is heard in the cello, in a deliberate 2/4 meter, in C minor, with frequent dotted rhythms, and chromatic notes. The eight-bar phrase descends an octave and a fifth. Chromatic descent plays a large role in both the theme and in the following variations. Busoni uses fairly typical techniques for each variation. For example, variation two is still 2/4, but in a slower *Adagio* and *largamente*, with turbulent flourishes that connect the main notes of the theme. The cello part is marked *sempre forte e drammatico*, making this variation even more impassioned and fiery. This is contrasted with variation three, when the theme is in F-sharp major in the original 2/4 meter and tempo. This time, the flurry of activity takes place in the piano part but in a softer dynamic, creating a new, calmer atmosphere for the cello melody. Here, Busoni uses rhythmic augmentation to present the theme in half-time from

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<sup>19</sup>Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni*, 94.

<sup>20</sup>Ferruccio Busoni, *Kultaselle, Ten Short Variations on a Finnish folk song for Violoncello and Piano* (Warngau, Germany: Accolade Musikverlag, 2013). 1.

<sup>21</sup>Boris Schwarz, “Piatigorsky, Gregor,” In *Grove Music Online*. (Oxford University Press, 2001), accessed Apr. 13, 2022, <https://doi-org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.21650>

the original. Later, in variation five, he makes use of rhythmic diminution, so that the theme is heard in double-time in steady sixteenth notes in both instruments. Variations nine and ten make a return to the insistent C minor and both harken back to the beginning. Variation nine is preoccupied with constant dotted rhythms and variation ten is concerned with chromatic motion – the piano line descends chromatically while the cello line ascends chromatically to the finish.

Unlike early variation works for cello and piano, the theme and ten variations are presented without pause between each distinct variation. Additionally, while many characteristics of the theme remain in each variation, the phrase structure is not the same in each variation. The theme itself is only eight measures, but Busoni created an opening theme section lasting thirty-one measures. It seems that the *Kultaselle* theme and its musical characteristics merely inform the style of the variations, rather than dictating their structure. This expansion of the form gives the piece continuity and narrative. Whether the melody is expanded, compressed, modulated, or otherwise altered, each variation encapsulates a brief new mood related to the emotion from the original *Kultaselle* theme.

Unsurprisingly, Busoni's prowess as a pianist is on full display in this piece, with dense, technical passages, coupled with large, Romantic harmonies in the piano part. In other such works for cello and piano by pianist-composers, the piano parts contain large portions of the melodic material, cadenzas, or even entire variations without cello. Despite the intense difficulty of the piano part in *Kultaselle*, the melodies are almost all found in the cello part, with the piano providing harmonic or textural support.

### Hindemith: “A frog he went a-courting”

In the years preceding the composition of this set of variations, Paul Hindemith and his wife Gertrude Hindemith left Berlin for Switzerland, due to the increasingly hostile political environment in Nazi Germany. Though Gertrude was half-Jewish but had converted to Catholicism, the couple’s emigration was predominantly motivated by the Nazi government’s views on Paul’s “Degenerate Music.”<sup>22</sup> In 1940, Hindemith accepted a position as a composition professor at Yale University. In that year he wrote his Cello Concerto and by November 7, 1941 he completed Variations on “A frog he went a-courting.”<sup>23</sup> Just a month later, the United States entered World War II. In fact, due to the war, he encountered publishing issues (this work was not published until 1952 and has remained somewhat neglected ever since).<sup>24</sup> It is striking that in such a fraught context the composer chose to write variations on a lighthearted theme. Famed cellist Gregor Piatigorsky had told Hindemith about the dearth of contemporary encore pieces in the repertoire, so some have suggested that this work is a response to that complaint. Additionally, Gertrude was also a cellist and he wrote some small pieces for her enjoyment or for their anniversary, so this piece could have been inspired by her interest in cello.<sup>25</sup> Despite the playful subject matter, the piece is quite virtuosic for the cellist and pianist.

Hindemith’s set of variations for cello and piano utilize the theme from the Old-English Nursery song “A frog he went a-courting.” The thirteen variations follow the thirteen stanzas of the song, which describes a frog who wants to marry a mouse. However, like so many old nursery rhymes there is no happy ending. Below are the lyrics listed in the Schott edition of this work.

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<sup>22</sup>Michael Steinberg, *The Concerto: A Listener’s Guide* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 205.

<sup>23</sup>Luther Noss, *Paul Hindemith in the United States* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 114.

<sup>24</sup>Noss, *Paul Hindemith in the United States*, 115.

<sup>25</sup>Noss, *Paul Hindemith in the United States*, 115.

1. A frog he went a-courting, he did ride  
With a pistol and a sword hung by his side.
2. He rode up to little Mousie's door,  
He off his horse and he boarded the floor.
3. He took Miss Mousie upon his knee,  
Saying: Miss Mouse will you marry me?
4. O kind sir, I can't say that,  
You have to ask my uncle rat.
5. Uncle rat went galloping to town,  
To buy his niece a wedding gown.
6. Where will the wedding supper be?  
Away down yonder in the hollow bush tree.
7. The first come in was the bumble-bee  
With his fiddle on his knee.
8. The next come in was an old fat goose,  
He began to fiddle and she got loose.
9. The next come in was a little flea,  
To dance a jig with the bumble bee.
10. The next come in was the old tom cat,  
He says: I'll put a stop to that.
11. The goose she then flew up on the wall,  
And old tom cat put a stop to it all.
12. Gentleman Frog swam over the lake,  
And he got swallowed by a big black snake.
13. That is the end of one two three,  
The frog, the mouse and the bumble-bee.<sup>26</sup>

“A frog he went a-courting” has existed in many versions since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when it first appeared in *The Complaynt of Scotland* in 1548 with the name “The Frog came to the myl dur.”<sup>27</sup> Later, the song was included in the collection *Melismata* by Thomas Ravencroft, who named it “A most strange weddinge of the frogge and the mouse.”<sup>28</sup> The song has also taken root in American country and folk music and has been performed by many artists, including Burl Ives, Tex Ritter, and Bob Dylan. The fate of the frog and his betrothed has varied widely in the hundreds of years of the song's existence. Sometimes, different animals are the cause of the

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<sup>26</sup>Paul Hindemith, *A frog he went a-courting*, (London, UK: Schott & Co. Ltd., 1951), 1.

<sup>27</sup>Jan Philip Schinhan, *The Frank C. Brown Collections of North Carolina Folklore* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1962), 5:205.

<sup>28</sup>Schinhan, *The Frank C. Brown Collections of North Carolina Folklore* 5:205.

demise of the mouse and frog, while other times the two characters wed and live happily ever after. Hindemith's version tracks the tragedy of the star-crossed lovers, with many of the variations clearly depicting the arc of the story.

Composers often go about creating and labeling the structure of variation form in one of two ways: either they label the music with "theme" and "variation 1," etc., or nothing is labeled, leaving the listener and performer to distinguish sections themselves. However, in this piece all thirteen variations are labeled with roman numerals, yet nothing is labeled as "theme." Instead, the first variation (variation I) serves to establish the theme and perhaps to create distance from the original, well-known song. Variations one and thirteen serve as a Greek chorus; they act as book-ends to the action and comment on the tale, with the music in its simplest form. Triplets are used in many places in the first six variations to mimic the galloping of a horse. By the seventh stanza of the lyrics, the bumble-bee is playing his fiddle and the other creatures are dancing to it, so of course variation seven is labeled "Jig," in 6/4 time. The Jig variation is an example of a characteristic variation, in which a variation takes on the features of another kind of music. J. S. Bach wrote characteristic variations with *gigue* or *sicilienne* rhythms, and Hindemith uses his characteristic variation to set the scene perfectly. The same meter and tempo of the Jig continue from variations seven to nine. Variation seven also features swirling chromatic scales in the cello, surely an ode to Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumblebee*. A new tempo, meter, and a driving affect are adopted in the tenth variation, to coincide with the arrival of the antagonist, the old tom cat. In the final bars of variation twelve, a rising minor second seems to represent the gulping sound of the snake swallowing the frog. Hindemith brilliantly uses these variations both to show off his diversity of compositional ideas, but also to follow the programmatic narrative of the piece, which is rare in a variation work.

A Frog He Went A-Courting is unique in the variation repertoire not only for its programmatic nature, but also for its light theme and digestible length. While challenging for both instruments, the mood provides a welcome reprieve from the seriousness of much of the cello repertoire. I believe Piatigorsky would be satisfied with its use as a playful, but technically challenging encore.

### Martinů: Variations on a Slovakian Theme

Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů wrote Variations on a Slovak Folk Song in 1959, in the last year of his life. He was born and raised in Polička, received his first formal musical training in Prague, and later lived for several years in France and the United States before returning to Europe at the end of his life. In 1959, he was living in Switzerland and had recently suffered the losses of both his brother and sister. He was also plagued by health problems that later led to the diagnosis of inoperable stomach cancer.<sup>29</sup> It is in this context that the composer was preoccupied with the music of his homeland and his desire to return there once more. Other works from this time also utilize the Bohemian or Moravian influences from his childhood in Polička.<sup>30</sup> The folk song that Martinů used for this work is “*Kebych já veděla*” (“If I had only known”), which he discovered through the collection of Viliam Figuš-Bystrý, a Slovak composer.<sup>31</sup> A very rudimentary internet translation of the lyrics included in Figuš-Bystrý’s transcription of the song gives the impression of the singer searching for lover or family or friends, which was a poignant message for Martinů to use in that time of his life.

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<sup>29</sup> Jan Smaczny, “Martinů, Bohuslav,” In *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001), accessed Apr. 13, 2022, <https://doi-org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.17940>

<sup>30</sup> Jan Smaczny, “Martinů, Bohuslav.”

<sup>31</sup> Edward Harper, “Tonal Ambiguity in Bohuslav Martinů’s *Variations on a Theme of Rossini* and *Variations on a Slovak Theme* for Cello and Piano,” (DMA diss., University of Houston, 2020), 48.

Martinů's treatment of the variations is distinctive. Each variation presents new ideas that seem only tangentially connected to the original theme through a shared style and musical language. The variations use different tempi, meters, and rhythms from the opening music, but are connected by their frequent changes in mood, their modal ambiguity, and their use of syncopation and extended harmonies. He then embeds the theme – with its characteristic falling tritone motive, trochaic rhythm, and syncopation – into a new context in variations one, two, and four. In these instances, when the theme makes its cameo appearance, something in the music changes to highlight the return of the theme, either an abrupt shift in texture or meter. Variation three builds to a melody that resembles the theme in its musical language and use of syncopation, but this time it abandons the falling tritone and most of the trochaic rhythms for a more searching melody. Variation five breaks the mold entirely and it seems that the variation's only relationship to the original theme is its Slovakian influence. This final variation is fast and energetic, using ornamented and syncopated melodies that give it its folk style. In contrast with the seriousness of the original folk melody, Martinů uses the last variation to express a sense of triumph over the brooding feelings of the theme, almost as if the last variation is an entirely new, more celebratory folk melody.

Surprisingly, this piece is another example of a cello part with much great melodic material and an involved, intricate piano part with mostly accompanying texture and relatively few melodies. Though the cello part is in the foreground, the music is not extremely technically demanding, with only a few notes above the neck positions and relatively comfortable double-stops. The Slovakian syncopated rhythmic patterns – somewhat unfamiliar in Western classical music – present a small challenge to a cello and piano duo. Overall, the

short length of the piece, the lively folk style, and the accessible technique make the Variations on a Slovakian Theme a great choice for programming in recital.

### Holst: Fall of the Leaf

Imogen Holst's life and career have often been defined by her relationship to two towering figures of English music: her father Gustav Holst and her idol and employer Benjamin Britten. Imogen Holst was an accomplished composer, conductor, music educator, music administrator, and writer, but her intense devotion to those two men overshadows her own musical legacy. After her father died, she dedicated much of her time to writing about his life and career.<sup>32</sup> She also deeply admired Britten and his music, seeing him as a successor to her father's musical legacy, and became his musical assistant and confidante. She copied his scores, took on his excess composition students, directed his Aldeburgh Festival, completed his domestic chores, assuaged his artistic doubts and stress, and was generally at his service to the point of putting her beloved Ben's needs above her own. In fact, her early diary entries give her the impression of a woman infatuated with Britten, who was possibly in denial of the extent of his romantic relationships with Peter Pears and other men. She appeared to cope with those feelings by taking over a motherly role for him (though she was only six years older) and working even harder for him. Imogen Holst therefore prioritized her all-consuming commitment to Gustav Holst and Benjamin Britten over her own work as a composer.<sup>33</sup> This could account for some of the reason her work is relatively neglected today.

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<sup>32</sup>Christopher Tinker, "Holst, Imogen (Clare)," In *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001) accessed Apr. 13, 2022. <https://doi-org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.13254>

<sup>33</sup>Christopher Grogan, *Imogen Holst: A Life in Music*, (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2007), 132-133.

The Fall of the Leaf was commissioned by cellist Pamela Hind O'Malley for a 1963 recital at Wigmore Hall.<sup>34</sup> O'Malley was a former student of Gustav Holst's and was also a colleague of Imogen Holst's at the Dartington Hall school. The theme and title of the work come from a melody by Martin Peerson, found in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, a collection of sixteenth and seventeenth century virginal, or keyboard music.<sup>35</sup> The theme itself is simple and solemn and incorporates a descending scale in a nod to the title Fall of the Leaf. Each of the variations that follow incorporate this falling scale in some way. While the main common time D minor melody is quite simple, she adds double-stops and technically-difficult pizzicato chords to its second iteration. Pizzicato plays an important role not only in this opening section, but throughout the piece, perhaps to emulate to the sound of a virginal, an instrument which plucked the strings much like a harpsichord. The first variation is almost entirely pizzicato, in 10/8 time. In the cello repertoire, and especially the theme and variations cello repertoire, it is quite rare for an entire section of a piece to utilize pizzicato for the melody. By setting almost all of the variation in pizzicato, the tune is given both a rhythmic vitality and a specific kind of virtuosity not often expected of cellists. The second variation, in *poco adagio* 3/4 time, returns to the somber mood of the theme. This variation begins with a double-stop on a minor second, an interval that was common in her music, which lends the music a despairing affect. The third and final variation is a presto 9/8, with perpetual motion eighth-notes that explore almost the full range of the cello. The section ends with a pleading minor second, now heard melodically. The piece concludes with a restatement of the theme, but slower and in a higher range than the original. Though some previous variation works for cello included codas, other works do not restate the original theme to conclude the piece. With the changes in

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<sup>34</sup>Grogan, *Imogen Holst*, 322.

<sup>35</sup>Grogan, *Imogen Holst*, 426.

range and tempo, the final theme is more conclusive, bringing together the elements of all three variations into its final statement. Unlike earlier variation works in this project, Holst does not adhere to the same phrase structure, meter, rhythm, or harmony in these variations. The connective elements in these variations are the use of D minor and the falling motives, but little else bonds the variations to the theme. By eschewing traditional compositional techniques in the variations (like using diminution, change of mode, or change of meter while keeping the other elements constant), Holst's *Fall of the Leaf* more closely resembles a short solo suite for cello.

The *Fall of the Leaf* is significant to the cello repertoire for three reasons: representation of a neglected composer, connection to older variation form, and unique technical challenges. The standard cello repertoire needs to expand to include more women, and Imogen Holst's legacy is an important one to revive. The use of Peerson's *Fall of the Leaf* hints at one of the earliest variation forms, discussed in the introduction. Awareness of the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book informs audiences and performers of the origins of organized variation forms. Lastly, the technical challenges in this piece are uncommon, but still necessary for cellists to be familiar with. Holst requires the cellist to have extraordinary command over pizzicato, shifting through large changes in range without much preparation, and accurately landing natural harmonics all over the instrument. All of this is to be achieved with maximum expression, in a solo piece that is incredibly exposed.

## Denisov: Variations on a Theme of Schubert

Edison Denisov was a Russian *avante-garde* composer who was active during the Soviet era. His mother was a doctor and his father was a mathematician.<sup>36</sup> From a young age, Denisov was drawn to both music and mathematics and went on to study both fields at a high level. He enrolled in the Physics and Mathematics department of Tomsk University, graduating in 1951 with a specialization in functional analysis, while simultaneously taking classes at the Musical College, graduating in 1950.<sup>37</sup> At this time, he was considering a path in music and wanted to know whether it was worth pursuing, so he wrote a letter to the famous Dmitri Shostakovich (with whom he had no previous personal connection), laying out his predicament. Shostakovich responded, asking for some of Denisov's compositions to assess before weighing in. After receiving the compositions, Shostakovich replied, "Your compositions have astonished me... I believe that you are endowed with a great gift for composition. And it would be a great sin to bury your talent."<sup>38</sup> In addition to the encouraging message for the up-and-coming composer, Shostakovich also included detailed critiques and evaluation of Denisov's scores. As a result of Shostakovich's advice, Denisov tried to enroll in the Moscow Conservatory (the famed institution where he later taught music theory and analysis). On his first try, he was not admitted due to failing the entrance exams, but after additional training, he enrolled in the Conservatory in summer 1951.<sup>39</sup>

Denisov's musical style is a unique blend of tonal and atonal styles, with influences from composers who he held in high regard. His musical life was both directly and indirectly

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<sup>36</sup>Yuri Kholopov and Valeria Tsenova, *Edison Denisov* (Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), 1.

<sup>37</sup>Kholopov and Tsenova, *Edison Denisov*, 3-5.

<sup>38</sup>Kholopov and Tsenova, *Edison Denisov*, 4-5.

<sup>39</sup>Kholopov and Tsenova, *Edison Denisov*, 5.

affected by the views and policies of the Communist Party. In 1948, the Central Committee of the Communist Party began to renounce “formalists” including Prokofiev, Myaskovsky, Khachaturian, and Shostakovich.<sup>40</sup> Despite the ban, Denisov was increasingly drawn to Shostakovich’s music and early on he wrote in similar styles and genres as his idol.<sup>41</sup> After graduating from the conservatory, he spent much time and effort analyzing the music of an enormous range of composers to notice what compositional techniques and devices were effective.<sup>42</sup> Detailed analysis of other composers and experimentation in his own music combined to form a unique *avant-garde* style, which eventually faced its own backlash from the Communist Party. Various performers were not allowed to perform his music both in the country and abroad.<sup>43</sup>

Despite Denisov’s interest in modern composers and atonality, his favorite composers were Glinka, Mozart, and Schubert.<sup>44</sup> He had used Schubert’s themes in other works, including his Violin Concerto. Variations on a Theme of Schubert for Cello and Piano uses Schubert’s Impromptu in A-flat major, Op. 142 No. 2. The same theme was also used for the fourth movement of his Viola Concerto and both works were composed in 1986.<sup>45</sup> In comparing the viola concerto movement to the cello variations, the two pieces appear to be almost the same music, just with different orchestration and instrumentation. For example, the piano plays the opening melody in the cello variations, while the celesta plays the opening melody in the viola concerto movement. Later in the viola concerto, a solo cello is heard playing an eerie eighth-note bass line that accompanies the solo viola melody. In the cello

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<sup>40</sup>Kholopov and Tsenova, *Edison Denisov*, 4.

<sup>41</sup>Kholopov and Tsenova, *Edison Denisov*, 40.

<sup>42</sup>Kholopov and Tsenova, *Edison Denisov*, 14.

<sup>43</sup>Kholopov and Tsenova, *Edison Denisov*, 21.

<sup>44</sup>Kholopov and Tsenova, *Edison Denisov*, 36.

<sup>45</sup>Kholopov and Tsenova, *Edison Denisov*, 97.

variations, this bass line is also present in the cello part (though most of the rest of the cello part in the cello variations lines up with the material in the solo viola in the concerto). It is unclear which piece was composed first or whether they were written at the same time.

Variations on a Theme of Schubert for cello and piano opens with the Impromptu theme, exactly how it is heard in Schubert's original. For the first sixteen bars, the piano part contains the exact same notes as the Schubert version, with occasional changes in dynamic or expressive markings. The cello enters in measure five and though the addition of cello differs from Schubert's Impromptu, the cello part fits the harmony and mood of the piano part – with one exception. In measure 15, the inclusion of a G-flat in the cello line foreshadows the coming deviation from this idyllic music. The G-flat is so brief that the unsuspecting listener might just think it was a mistake. In measure seventeen, the cello takes over what would have been the second half of the Allegretto section in Schubert's original. After a return of the theme with new *pianissimo* double-stops in the cello part, the theme comes back to the piano part once again. This time, the theme in the piano is accompanied by triplets in the cello, perhaps an allusion to the triplets in the trio section of Schubert's Impromptu. These triplets gradually lead the piece into an entirely different affect and completely away from any relationship to A-flat major. As the piece continues, the conventions established in the beginning are entirely broken: the rhythms become amorphous, both instruments push the extremes of their ranges, and tonality is left behind. It is extremely difficult to ascertain the connection between the music in the middle of the piece with what came before. Then, after a cello cadenza, the piece promptly returns to the beginning material, as if nothing ever happened. The remainder of the piece switches between moments of tonality and clarity and moments of atonality and ambiguity.

Denisov's Variations on a Theme of Schubert is the most extreme variation form in the 15 works in this project. Besides the clear phrase structure of the tonal sections (both in the beginning and in the return) the piece does not appear to have clearly delineated variations. Given that the opening and closing of the piece still retain some structure and relationship to the theme, I would not go as far as to call it a free variation form. It is also difficult to discern a relationship between Schubert's music and some of the ambiguous material in the middle. At times, the only musical element shared by the theme and the middle variation section is the use of 3/4 meter, but even that is constantly obscured with complicated rhythms and ties. The complex rhythms, extreme range, and awkward atonal runs present an enormous challenge to the performers, but the change from the familiar and comprehensible to the unfamiliar and confusing makes for a very effective piece in performance. On first listen, the return to tonality is shocking and can trick the audience into questioning what they previously heard.

### Ruehr: Prelude Variations

Elena Ruehr was raised in Michigan and began her musical life with piano lessons at age four. One of her earliest influences and musical role models was Melvin Kangas, a composer and player of the Finnish *Kantele*, a type of zither. She studied composition at the University of Michigan and the Juilliard School and has been a composer-in-residence with the Boston Modern Orchestra project, a Guggenheim Fellow, and a fellow at Harvard's Radcliffe Institute. Currently, she is on the faculty at MIT, where she has taught since 1992.<sup>46</sup>

Prelude Variations was commissioned in 2008 by Sarah Hauschka as a 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary present to her husband Steve. The work is dedicated to the couple and references how they met.

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<sup>46</sup>Kathryn King, "Kathryn King Media: Elena Ruehr," *Kathryn King Media: Public Relations, Audio and Video Production*, Accessed Feb. 8, 2022, <https://www.kathryningmedia.com/artist.php?id=ruehr>.

The Hauschkas also requested that the work be written for their level, as advanced amateur musicians. Ruehr said of the couple's story and the commission, "She [Sarah] was playing some Bach preludes on the piano in Woods Hole on Cape Cod, and he is a marine biologist. He heard her playing and knocked on the door. It was the Bach preludes that stood out for me in the story. So there are two Bach preludes that are in there – it's not transcription, but there is a lot of quoting."<sup>47</sup> The two preludes used as source material for the piece are the C major prelude and the D minor prelude from Book 1 of the Well-Tempered Clavier.<sup>48</sup> The D minor prelude is quoted in the opening motive, with one instrument playing the unchanging left-hand part, while the other instrument plays an arpeggiated melody, concluding with a circle-of-fifths progression in both voices. Towards the middle of the work, the C major prelude is hinted at by a slow and deliberate melody, with the other instrument repeating the interval of a third. Unlike the other works in this series of dissertation recitals, *Prelude Variations* is a free variation work. Instead of clear demarcations signifying the end of one variation and the beginning of the next, the preselected musical ideas slowly evolve from beginning to end. The free variation form gives the listener a feeling of linear rather than cyclical progression; were it not for the title and the context a listener might have trouble recognizing the work as a variation form. Additionally, it is the only work in this series of recitals with not one, but two themes. Ruehr's *Prelude Variations* serve as a welcome addition to the repertoire for viola and cello duo, and the accessible technique of the piece allows it to reach a wide selection of performers.

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<sup>47</sup>Tom Moore, "A Conversation with Elena Ruehr," *Sonograma Magazine*, 2015, <https://sonograma.org/2015/04/conversation-with-elena-ruehr/>.

<sup>48</sup>Elena Ruehr, "Prelude Variations," Email message to author, Feb. 3, 2022.

### Hailstork: Variations on “Draw the Sacred Circle Closer”

Dr. Adolphus Hailstork studied composition at Michigan State University, Manhattan School of Music, Howard University, and the American Institute at Fontainebleau (with Nadia Boulanger). Currently, he is a Professor of Music and Eminent Scholar at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia.<sup>49</sup>

This 2009 variation work takes its melody from Hailstork’s 2006 work *Earthrise*, a cantata for two choirs and orchestra, which explores ideas of healing and unity. The title of *Earthrise* comes from the 1969 photograph of the same name, taken of the earth from space. The text for *Earthrise* is Schiller’s *Ode to Joy* (the same text used for the chorus of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony). In his program notes for the piece, he writes, “*Earthrise* features a festival chorus singing in German, in alternation with an African-American chorus singing in English with vernacular verve.” The cantata closes with the two choruses uniting to sing a hymn of the text “Draw the Sacred Circle Closer.”<sup>50</sup>

The cello variations on “Draw the Sacred Circle Closer” are similarly hopeful and exuberant, though the solo cello brings more introspection to the theme than the full double choir and orchestra of the original. Hailstork’s use of solo cello draws on the lineage of solo cello works established by Bach and expanded by Sibelius, Britten, Ligeti, Kodaly, Hindemith, and others. Like other solo cello works, he makes use of frequent double stops (and some left-hand pizzicato) to provide the harmony for the theme. The theme itself is in mixolydian mode presented slowly and relatively simply, with occasional written-out ornaments to convey a Spiritual style. Variation one begins with a light-hearted triple meter – with added scoops and

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<sup>49</sup>Adolphus Hailstork, “Biography,” *Adolphus Hailstork*. Accessed Feb. 8, 2022.  
<https://www.adolphushailstork.com/bio>

<sup>50</sup>Adolphus Hailstork, *Theme and Variations on “Draw the Sacred Circle Closer,”* 7.

slides as used in Gospel music– and ends with violent outburst leading to a moment of quiet contemplation. Variation two provides a humorous contrast to the end of variation one – the composer writes, “Playfully.” Once again, abrupt changes in mood interrupt the explosive riffs of sixteenth notes. One of these interruptions leads to variation three, which along with variation four, conveys a feeling of wandering, searching, and uncertainty. In variation four, the uncertainty bubbles over with a run of sixteenth notes, marked “agitated,” that lead to the return of the theme. This time, however, the theme is presented in a high register of the cello, with more chromaticism that gives the impression of wailing. Finally, variation five brings back the joy and cheerfulness of the beginning, requiring virtuosic playing on the part of the cellist to create an exhilarating conclusion. Despite the piece’s technical difficulty, it is very well-written for the instrument in a favorable key area, and comfortable to play, so that the technique does not overshadow the expression in the work.

Variations on “Draw the Sacred Circle Closer” is the only work in this series of recitals to use a theme from another piece that is also an original melody by the composer. I chose to include this work in the category of pieces with existing themes since the melody was not written for this piece exclusively and its context in *Earthrise* changes the meaning of the theme. Hailstork’s *Variations* is yet another example of composers stretching the original parameters of variation form. Each variation is a long, self-contained unit (not just a couple of phrases) with unique characteristics. Only the mode, key area, and ornamentation are maintained throughout, as well as the original melody in some form. Much like *Fall of the Leaf*, Hailstork’s *Variations* on “Draw the Sacred Circle Closer” is a refreshing addition to the standard cello recital repertoire. The music sits well on the cello, so the melodies and double stops are resonant and singing. The cello part contains impressive flourishes and technique, all while repeating a

heartfelt melody that captures the listener. Additionally, this piece allows the classically-trained cellist to venture into the Gospel and Blues playing styles of Hailstork's African American background, displaying a unique kind of virtuosity with which cellists should be familiar.

## Original Themes

### Mendelssohn: Variations Concertantes

Mendelssohn wrote Variations Concertantes in 1829, around the same time of the composition of his religiously themed Symphony No. 5 (also known as the Reformation Symphony) and his revival performance of Bach's St. Matthew Passion. This set of variations was dedicated to his brother, amateur cellist Paul Mendelssohn.<sup>51</sup> In these variations, the composer shows off his prowess as both a string player and pianist, with each instrument playing highly virtuosic variations. Unlike earlier sets of variations for cello and piano by Beethoven, both performers have more of an equal opportunity to display their technical expertise, though the piano part is still slightly more involved than the cello part. Mendelssohn also breaks from the form established by Beethoven's cello variation sets. Instead of a symmetrical, well-known theme with variations of the same length and phrase structure, these variations have several different structures and lengths. Some of the longer variations can be heard almost as an outgrowth of only one measure of the original theme.

The theme is presented simply, with an eight-bar antecedent phrase played by the piano, then repeated by the cello, followed by an eight-bar consequent phrase again played by piano and repeated by the cello. Thus, the opening theme section is thirty-two measures, with the phrase structure AABB, but the variations that follow do away with the unnecessary repetition. This

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<sup>51</sup>Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 195.

larger structure in the theme allowed Mendelssohn to choose a particular portion or motif of the theme to focus on in each variation, rather than be confined to one melody in its entirety.

Variations one, two, three, and four utilize the predictable compositional technique of diminution, in which progressively smaller note values are used. This gives the illusion that the piece is getting faster, while the beat and the overall phrase structure remains the same. Variation three presents a challenge to the cellist, with fast ascending and descending thirty-second note passages, while variation four is very difficult for the pianist, with additional running thirty-second notes. Variation five is a welcome reprieve from the technical passages, with a humorous back and forth between the piano's staccato gestures and the cello's pizzicato responses.

Variation six is marked *tranquillo* and consists of the two instruments playing in counterpoint in two flowing eight-bar phrases with the theme's original harmonic structure underneath. Variation seven disrupts the sweet, more Classical music with a wild, *agitato* D minor sound that is unmistakably Romantic in style. This variation seems to be fixated upon one of the final four measures of the theme, with many irregular phrase lengths, favoring emotion over symmetrical form. This – in combination with the thunderous piano cadenza – gives the listener the impression of anger or insistence. However, like so much of Mendelssohn's music, the piece does not stay dark and stormy for very long. Variation eight returns to the theme and transitions to the coda, which echoes the transcendent D major conclusion of the Reformation Symphony, with both instruments trading light, sparkling thirty-second notes.

Mendelssohn's Variations Concertantes are an important landmark in the development of variation form in the cello repertoire, linking the Classical style and form of the works of Beethoven with the Romantic style and experimentation with form that came from later composers like Rossini and Sibelius. It is a good selection for use in recital because of the

songful theme, the clearly delineated variations, and the balance between the two instruments. It is also a way for cellists to perform Mendelssohn in recital without asking a pianist to bear the burden of his incredibly challenging – and considerably longer – sonatas for cello and piano.

### Rossini: Une Larme

“*Une Larme*,” (“A Tear”) is a variation work from Rossini’s collection entitled “*Péchés de Vieillesse*” (“Sins of Old Age”). Rossini is best known for his 39 operas, though he mysteriously retired from opera composition in 1829 at the age of 37 (he lived until 1868). Scholars point to the death of his mother, his poor health, and his bouts of depression (many believe this depression would today be diagnosed as bipolar disorder) to explain his move away from his most popular genre. He wrote “*Péchés de Vieillesse*” while living in Paris, in a return to composition as his health rebounded. This collection includes several volumes of chamber music, including works for keyboard and voice.<sup>52</sup>

Tobias Glöcker, bassist and Henle edition editor, believes the *Une Larme* theme to be a brief, original composition for the double bass, given that a copy of the manuscript includes the dedication “*pour basse*.”<sup>53</sup> While some have believed this to be Rossini using “*pour basse*” to indicate cello, the composer frequently distinguished between “*violoncelle*” and “*basse*” in his operas. Glöcker suspects that Rossini later expanded “*Une Larme*” into a set of variations for cello, including many variations that are unplayable on double bass.

Though this version of *Une Larme* is a cello work, it clearly displays Rossini’s mastery of opera. The theme itself conveys drama and emotion. This theme is reminiscent of his last opera,

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<sup>52</sup>Zachary Woolfe, “The Puzzle of Rossini’s Brief Career,” New York Times. Jul. 1, 2011. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/03/arts/music/rossini-and-his-abrupt-farewell-to-opera.html>

<sup>53</sup>Annette Oppermann, “A tear for or from Rossini?,” *G. Henle Verlag* (blog), Nov. 12, 2018, <https://www.henle.de/blog/en/2018/11/12/a-tear-for-or-from-rossini/>

“*Guillaume Tell*,” known by its famous overture, which features a lyrical and exposed cello solo (often requested in auditions). The cello part includes long, sweeping melodic lines, coupled with chromatic interjections that invoke a sense of regret or indecision (perhaps related to the collection’s title, “Sins of Old Age”). Much like Rossini’s operas, nothing in the theme is truly dark or despairing, and the music does not retain the sadness for long. A *poco più animato* section in A major projects confidence and dignity, but quickly returns to the A minor music, which intensifies in this second iteration. With so many phrases and changing moods, the theme here is not so much one theme as an entire theme section or brief movement, which resembles an impassioned tenor aria.

In contrast to the opening *Une Larme* theme, its variations display the height of Rossini’s comic opera style. The humor is found not only in the many flourishes and flirtatious ornaments in the variations, but also in the ridiculous extremes of technique required of the cellist. After the initial statement of the theme and between variations, the piano provides robust and jovial transitional material – almost like scene-change music. The first variation uses diminution, with A major triplets exploring the range of the cello. In the mischievous leaps and playful rubato, one hears a light-hearted soprano aria, which displays technique without compromising humor. After another transition section from the piano, the cello returns in variation two, which once again employs diminution in its use of sixteenth-note triplets. The bouncing, *leggero* A major melody belies the incredible technical difficulty to come in the cello part, with challenging passages of octaves. Variation three returns to A minor, with a stormy introduction into a section marked *recitativo*, another nod to opera. Variation four is a return to the music of the theme, but this time with constant double-stops in the cello melody that concludes with a virtuosic cello cadenza. Variation five is the perfect operatic finale that pulls out all the stops and accelerates forward to

the end, once again using a faster note value and faster tempo to create variation. This last variation maintains the carefree A major affect, but with the cellist playing rapid sixteenth-note runs, double-stop thirds, double-stop sixths, broken thirds, concluding with a fast ascent to the final chords.

Rossini's *Une Larme* is a hidden gem in the repertoire – a chance for a cellist to combine comic opera style with dazzling virtuosity. *Une Larme* is a perfect selection for a showpiece and it is important not only as one of Rossini's only works for cello, but as a variation work that showcases the cellists' technical ability and expression of character.

### Sibelius: Theme and Variations

Finnish composer Jean Sibelius wrote his Theme and Variations in D minor for solo cello in 1887, during his time as a student at the Helsinki Music Institute or perhaps on a summer vacation in Korppoo.<sup>54</sup> The Theme and Variations did not receive an opus number or even a formal title from the composer and was probably not publicly performed in his lifetime. There is also controversy surrounding a possible extra variation – omitted from my performance and from the majority of professional recordings. Sketches for this variation are present in both the manuscript that contains this work and in another manuscript which included his piano trio in A minor.<sup>55</sup> The editor maintains that the incomplete nature of that controversial variation is due to Sibelius running out of room in the first manuscript and sketching the remainder in another book, but many performers (myself included) are unconvinced of his intent to include it in the this set of variations.

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<sup>54</sup>Jean Sibelius, *Theme and Variations for solo cello*, (Helsinki, Finland: Fennica Gehrman, 2000), 2.

<sup>55</sup>Sibelius, *Theme and Variations for solo cello*. 3.

The content of this work is influenced not only by Sibelius' Finnish background, but also by the solo works of Bach. In school, he studied Bach's counterpoint as a music theory student and at least one of Bach's violin sonatas as a violinist. Though today there are many solo works for cello, in 1887 there had been none written since Bach (or at least none that are well-known today). It was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century – with Bach performances by Pablo Casals and solo works written by Kodaly, Hindemith, Britten, and others – that solo cello became as popular in concert as it is today. In 1995, Munir Bakieh performed what is thought to be the world premiere of this work at the Gräsbeck family Sibelius concert.<sup>56</sup> Since then, however, the piece has remained relatively unknown, despite its significance not only as a work for solo cello, but also as a cello work by Sibelius (of which there are very few, including little-known early works for cello and piano and for violin and cello) and as a variation work for cello.

The theme is presented in two parts: a brief *adagio* and a songful *andantino*, both in 6/8 time. Like in the solo cello theme and variations of Imogen Holst and Adolphus Hailstork, Sibelius' variations in this piece do not adhere to the original meter of the theme. Instead, the variations are tied together by phrase structure, and to a certain extent by the harmony (though variation four is in the major mode). He uses standard compositional techniques to generate variation: diminution, ornamentation, and adding voices (with double stops). Variation one is an immediate departure from the mood of the theme, with fast *spiccato* sixteenths that could almost serve as an accompaniment to the theme. Variation two returns to a similar mood of the *andantino* theme, but with brusque *fortissimo* interjections and near constant double-stops. Variations three and four are varied in meter, tempo, and mode, with increasing displays of virtuosity and increasingly faster ornaments and flourishes. Variation five is reminiscent of a

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<sup>56</sup>Sibelius, *Theme and Variations for solo cello*. 3.

cadenza and the meter and tempo feel somewhat suspended to allow the cellist to explore varying moods and technical passages. All of the variations follow the sixteen-bar structure of the *andantino*, however variation six uses the structure of the *andantino* with an expansion of the musical material from the *adagio*. The piece concludes with a simple, haunting coda with a hint of optimism in its Picardy-third cadence on D major harmonics.

### Coleridge-Taylor: Variations

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was born in 1875 to a white British mother, Alice Hare Martin, and a Black Sierra Leonan father, Daniel Hughes Taylor. The composer's father was in England studying medicine, but as a Black doctor he was unable to establish a medical practice in the country and returned to Sierra Leone before Samuel was born.<sup>57</sup> His mother named him Samuel Coleridge-Taylor after the poet Samuel Taylor-Coleridge and raised him in Croydon, outside London. As a young person, he began violin lessons and joined the church choir and later was admitted to the Royal College of Music in 1890 at the age of 15.<sup>58</sup> Though he originally began his studies at RCM in violin, at age seventeen he began studying composition with Professor Charles Villiers Stanford.<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, at the RCM premiere of one of Coleridge-Taylor's compositions, Gustav Holst played trombone and Ralph Vaughan-Williams played the triangle.<sup>60</sup>

Despite this musical success at a young age, Coleridge-Taylor faced much overt racism from his peers at the school – many ugly instances of name-calling and abuse have been recounted by the composer's children.<sup>61</sup> His awareness of his racial identity led to his interest

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<sup>57</sup>Rodreguez King-Dorset, "Samuel Coleridge-Taylor," Chap. 6 in *Black Classical Musicians and Composers, 1500-2000*. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company Publishers, 2019), 104-105.

<sup>58</sup>Rodreguez King-Dorset, "Samuel Coleridge-Taylor," 104-105.

<sup>59</sup>Rodreguez King-Dorset, "Samuel Coleridge-Taylor," 105.

<sup>60</sup>Rodreguez King-Dorset, "Samuel Coleridge-Taylor," 106-107.

<sup>61</sup>Rodreguez King-Dorset, "Samuel Coleridge-Taylor," 107.

and involvement in Black artistic and political movements. The composer had friendships with W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and poet P. L. Dunbar. Washington wrote the preface to his *Twenty-Four Negro Melodies*, and Dunbar's poetry provided the text for some of the composer's vocal pieces.<sup>62</sup> Coleridge-Taylor is perhaps most well-known for his *Song of Hiawatha* trilogy, three cantatas set to the poetry of Longfellow. In 1901 as his compositions gained more international recognition, two African-American singers, Harry T. Burleigh and M. E. Hilyer formed the Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Society in Washington, D.C. The choral society made several requests for the composer to come to the United States and conduct them, which he did in 1904.<sup>63</sup> On this same first visit to the United States, he was invited to the White House, where he met President Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>64</sup>

Sadly, Coleridge-Taylor died of acute pneumonia in September 1912 at the age of thirty-seven.<sup>65</sup> At the time of his death, the composer was internationally recognized, but in the years that followed his music fell out of favor. In recent years, his works have seen a resurgence.

Due to the prolonged absence of Coleridge-Taylor's music in the standard repertory, little is known about his *Variations for Cello and Piano*. The work has no opus number and was published by the now-defunct Augener music publishing firm in 1918, after the composer's death. It is unclear when the work was written: most sources say 1907, while Silvertrust Editions (the work's current publisher) says 1905.<sup>66</sup> Given the lack of available information about this piece, there is no evidence to indicate that the theme in this work was borrowed from a previous work or composer, therefore one must assume it is the composer's original melody.

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<sup>62</sup>Stephen Banfield, "Coleridge-Taylor, Samuel," In *Grove Music Online*. (Oxford University Press, 2013), accessed Apr. 13, 2022. <https://doi-org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2248993>

<sup>63</sup>Rodreguez King-Dorset, "Samuel Coleridge-Taylor," 108.

<sup>64</sup>Rodreguez King-Dorset, "Samuel Coleridge-Taylor," 109.

<sup>65</sup>Rodreguez King-Dorset, "Samuel Coleridge-Taylor," 107.

<sup>66</sup>Silvertrust Editions, Email message to author, Mar. 24, 2022.

As a variation work for cello, this piece is unique in two ways. First, the piano part is mostly secondary to the cello part. In Beethoven's variation sets for cello and piano, the difficult technical passages and the melodic material are mostly given to the piano. In later works, the instruments share the material equally. In Coleridge-Taylor's Variations however, the piano provides harmonic and rhythmic support to the cello, with infrequent melodic content. Secondly, each of the variations in this work is expanded to form its own short movement, unlike the variations of earlier composers that lasted only two or three phrases. With this expansion, each variation provides not only an alteration to the original theme, but also a development of that alteration into its own independent structure, with contrasting sections and even ternary form within a variation.

Coleridge-Taylor's Variations opens with a rich, passionate B minor theme in 2/4 time, followed by six long variation sections. The main theme is comprised of a series of cello declamations in dotted rhythms, each a fragment of a B minor scale that ascends a third. In essence, this melody is an embellished scale with frequent use of groups of notes encompassing a third, almost like a cadential turn – it is these simple parameters that he uses to build the other variations. In the first variation, a short *poco piu mosso* section uses this scalar third in its quintuplets. In the second variation, now in G major, he changes the meter to 3/4 time, giving the movement a dance-like feel, while the scalar thirds return closer to their original dotted-rhythm form. Variation three returns to B minor, but these scalar thirds are presented not with dotted rhythms, but instead with flowing virtuosic scales, dramatic rubato, and more quintuplets later on in the movement. Variation four is a lush, expressive Larghetto in D major and 3/4 time. In this variation, there are frequent descending and ascending thirds and dotted rhythms, but this time the thirds are achieved not by stepwise, or scalar motion, but with leaps. The use of the third is

also heard in the modulations from D major up a third to F major, then through a series of descending thirds back to the D major conclusion. The final variation is expanded to form a ternary form that contrasts virtuosic, *spiccato* sixteenth-notes in D minor with a soaring, heartfelt D major melody. Both sections within this final variation seem obsessed with the third – it is heard constantly until the piece reaches its fiery conclusion in B minor. In addition to its significance as a neglected work from Coleridge-Taylor, this music is an example of the height of Romantic sensibility, with many satisfying opportunities for expression in the cello part. There is no doubt it deserves the same place in the cello repertoire as the cello and piano works of Brahms and other Romantic era composers.

#### Tovey: Elegiac Variations

English Romantic pianist, conductor, composer, and musicologist Sir Donald Tovey wrote his Elegiac Variations in response to the death of his friend, cellist Robert Hausmann, a celebrated musician who worked closely with Piatti, Joachim, Brahms, and of course Tovey himself. Hausmann premiered Brahms' Op. 99 Sonata in F Major and his Double Concerto (and interestingly, did so without ever using an endpin).<sup>67</sup> To mourn the lost cellist, Elegiac Variations makes full use of the expressive capabilities of the cello. He was very effective in his use of register, particularly with the cello's C string, which for balance reasons is not often used for a melodic line in this instrumentation. Though the composer was English, this work is close in style to the dense German Romantic writing of Brahms.

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<sup>67</sup>Lynda MacGregor, "Hausmann, Robert," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001-), accessed Feb. 15, 2022. <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxy.um.researchport.umd.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000012566>.

Tovey's opening theme makes appropriate use of the dark sound of the lower cello strings, with frequent double stops in C minor. In this register and timbre, the cello is heard with an uncharacteristic lack of clarity and projection, in keeping with the mood of an elegy. The variations themselves seem to confront the different stages and moments of grief. In variation one, he explores a brighter affect in A-flat major, perhaps the nostalgia of the time he shared with his friend. Variations two and three explore anguish and anger in a return to C minor, using sixteenth notes and sixteenth-note triplets, respectively. In these variations, he uses diminution to convey these agitated emotions. The cello frequently climbs up to searing high notes, almost in a cry of despair. Variations four and five journey through a variety of keys and depict more complicated emotions of grief, but ultimately conclude with a hopeful, *pianissimo* C major. The cellist is presented a technical challenge with increasing rapidity of the melodic material in these variations, as well as with the ascents to powerful high notes, and the brief use of octaves. The piano part also contains awkward writing. The technical difficulty is compounded by the emotional difficulty; the duo must properly convey the feelings of loss in this highly expressive, Romantic music. The deep and complicated emotional content of this work is unique in the variation pieces for cello, making it a valuable addition to the cello recital repertoire.

## Conclusions

The rich assortment of music in the variation category provides cellists with new avenues of musical expression and technical achievement. While other ensembles and instruments enjoy seminal variation works that are well-known (such as the towering Goldberg Variations of J. S. Bach), cellists have long settled for very few stand-alone variation works outside of the ubiquitous Rococo Variations by Tchaikovsky. The inherent meaning in an existing or original

theme can be heightened, distorted, or rendered unrecognizable through the process of variation. The nearly omnipresent use of diminution in variations displays the cellist's fast playing, while increasing ornamentation, changes in texture and timber, and addition of voices shows off advanced techniques.

In the chronological progression of variation form seen in this project, the role of the cello increases as cello technique expanded through history. Beethoven's variation works are significant in their place as the first of their kind, but their cello parts are lacking in substance in comparison to the piano parts. In order to provide more than one voice in one instrument, the three solo cello variation pieces in these recitals expanded upon the technical demands established by Bach in the Cello Suites, using harmonics, pizzicato, left-hand pizzicato, and many double-stops. The Romantic-era variation works pushed the boundaries of expression, with the cello on equal footing with the piano. Pieces like Ruehr's Prelude Variations and Denisov's Variations on a Theme of Schubert broke open variation form, while still using borrowed thematic material to connect to an earlier musical lineage.

Variation works could be to cello recital programs what showpieces and caprices currently are to violin recital programs. The inclusion of variation pieces in the cello repertoire (with not just the music in this project, but also the music that was excluded and the music still being written) could provide balance and diversity to the usual cello program that predictably includes a Bach Suite or other solo cello work and long sonatas. The repetition in variation pieces allows the listener to quickly grasp the musical and emotional elements of a variation, and the technical demands of these works fulfill the desire for displays of virtuosity in recital.

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Dent, Edward. *Ferruccio Busoni: A Biography*. London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Dent writes about Busoni's life and works, including how he was hired at the Helsinki Music Institute, met and married his wife, and then moved to Moscow for a position at the conservatory there.

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A meticulous account of the life of Imogen Holst, including passages of her diary that provide insight into her thoughts.

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<https://www.adolphushailstork.com/bio>

This is the biography page on Adolphus Hailstork's website, which provides useful information about his studies, his career, and his works. Given that Hailstork is still living and working today, there is not yet a book or article source for this information.

Harper, Edward. "Tonal Ambiguity in Bohuslav Martinů's *Variations on a Theme of Rossini* and *Variations on a Slovak Theme* for Cello and Piano." DMA diss., University of Houston, 2020.

This dissertation discusses Martinů's life, career, and his two variations pieces for cello. Harper traces the origins of the themes used in both works as well as the Moravian harmonic language.

Kholopov, Yuri and Valeria Tsenova. *Edison Denisov*. Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995.

The only available biographical book on Edison Denisov. Details his childhood in Tomsk, his studies in math and music, his suppression by the USSR government, his career and works, and the basis of his compositional style.

King-Dorset, Rodreguez. "Samuel Coleridge-Taylor." Chap. 6 in *Black Classical Musicians and Composers, 1500-2000*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company Publishers, 2019.

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A performance edition of this cantata in full-score.

Hindemith, Paul. *A frog he went a-courting. Variations for Violoncello and Piano*. London, UK: Schott & Co. Ltd., 1951.

The only available edition of this work. The layout of the thirteen variations is easy to read.

Holst, Imogen. *The Fall of the Leaf*. London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1964.

The only available edition of this work. Contains editorial fingerings and bowings, presumably from Pamela Hind O'Malley, who commissioned the work.

Martinů, Bohuslav. *Variations on a Slovakian Theme for Violoncello and Piano*. Kassel, Germany: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1988.

The only available edition of this work. Contains at least one misprint in the rhythm of the theme in the cello part. Otherwise easy to read and well-formatted.

Mendelssohn, Felix Bartholdy. *Variations concertantes op. 17*. Kassel, Germany: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 2017.

A critical edition of Mendelssohn's works for cello and piano. Well-formatted.

Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus. *Die Zauberflöte*. New York, USA: Dover, 1985.

A reputable edition of the orchestral score of this opera.

Rossini, Gioachino. *Une Larme, Tema E Variazioni Per Violoncello E Pianoforte*. Milan, Italy: Zanibon-Casa Ricordi, 1971.

A decent performance edition of this piece. Somewhat hard to read due to the handwritten appearance of the notation.

Ruehr, Elena. *Prelude Variations for Viola and Violoncello*. USA: Self-published. 2008.

The only available edition of this work. Clean and easy to read.

Schubert, Franz. *4 Impromptus Op. 142, No. 2 in A-flat major*. Leipzig, Germany: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1888.

An early edition of this work. Useful for study in comparison to the Denisov Variations setting of this theme.

Sibelius, Jean. *Theme and Variations for solo cello*. Helsinki, Finland: Fennica Gehrman, 2000.

The only available edition of this work. This edition includes the disputed extra variation found in another sketchbook. The editor also included commentary on the origins of the piece and the corrections and changes that were made to the part.

Tovey, Donald. *Elegiac Variations Op. 25 for Violoncello and Piano*. London: Schott & Co. Ltd., 1910.

The only available edition of this work. Easy to read.