
Clarinet and Piano

I have chosen to begin my exploration of Busoni's instrumental and vocal music with his output for the clarinet. The reason is obvious and simple: Busoni's father Ferdinando was a professional clarinetist, who composed some music for his own performances (often showpieces after Girolamo Salieri), and who also wrote a "Scuola di perfezione per il clarinetto", published in Hamburg in 1883 by Crazz, a publisher who also published Ferruccio's early efforts. Ferdinando's music, and even style of performance and technical approach to sound production on the clarinet, was already old fashioned at the time of his son's education. The few pieces by Ferdinando that I have come across confirm what one would expect: mostly ABA form, focusing purely on the clarinet, the piano just supporting the harmonic scaffold. The overall result is rather tawdry to the modern ear.

The very young Ferruccio toured with his parents and a number of his early works for clarinet were intended for his father. Ferdinando was also quite capable of writing poems to attractive women and then getting his son to set them to music; at least one such example has survived in the vocal music. The relationship was ambivalent: Busoni recognised, quite early, that his father was rather limited in his own tastes and compositions, and enjoyed playing grand fantasias on popular airs from Italian operas. At the same time, Ferdinando somehow understood that his young and obviously very gifted son required strong discipline in composition, and insisted on a strictly controlled output, covering a wide spectrum of styles and techniques and a strong dose of counterpoint. It was thanks to his father that Busoni undertook a study of much Bach—a composer not really popular in Italy. When Ferdinando died, Busoni marked the occasion with a deeply felt "Fantasia nach Bach", rich with Bachian quotes and allusions.

Ferdinando also avoided shielding Ferruccio from the daily rough and tumble of the music profession. Anna Weiss/Busoni would have given young Ferruccio a more sheltered and classically controlled atmosphere, playing four-hands repertoire with him such as Clementi, Diabelli and so on. But Ferruccio needed muscle to find his way in the art-music world. It has ever been thus.

WORKS IN MANUSCRIPT

Busoni-Nachlass 17: PRELUDIO PER CLARINETTO E PIANOFORTE

Prelude in C Major for clarinet and Piano (12 July 1875). Arranged from Prelude in C Major for Piano, October 1874, Op.11.

The superimposition of a simple melodic line over an arpeggiated piano piece was possibly inspired by the example of Bach's first prelude from the "48" combined with Gounod's "Ave Maria".

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The *Busoni-Nachlass* also contains an incomplete sonata for clarinet and piano in D major. It is simply a bad imitation of a classical sonata. There is a first movement in sonata form, a slow movement and a minuet. The obvious missing portion is that of a last movement. The work is not worth our attention.

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BUSONI NACHLASS 20

PRELUDIO PER CLARINETTO E PIANOFORTE. OP.18. (26 February 1875, 14 July 1875), Op.18.

Musically a very similar attempt at the same concept as the very first piece.

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Busoni Nachlass Nr.136. Allegro vivace in C Minor for Clarinet and Piano (1879?)

Busoni Nachlass Nr. 104. Piece in A Minor for Clarinet and Piano

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The early Busoni clarinet music, whether still in manuscript or published, contains some common characteristics. There is Ferdinando's preference for the higher register, the exploration of established forms, the fluent but rather predictable writing in a salon-like texture with the piano sometimes playing with imitations of the solo clarinet line. The very young Busoni has fluency and assurance, even if the form to be filled is more prevalent than the content of the form. At the same time, the piano part is full of technical fluency and is not without difficulty.

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EARLY CHARACTER PIECES FOR CLARINET AND PIANO. G. HENLE VERLAG. 1991. EDITED BY GEORG MEERWEIN.

ANDANTINO for Clarinet and Piano. (1877 – 4 May 1879) Op.41/Op.18 on ms. (Jageillonian University)

Untitled piece in E Minor for Clarinet and Piano (1877). Possibly meant for a Suite in E Minor for Clarinet and Piano (1877?). Op.10, also Op.11 on ms.

The Henle Verlag edition titles this piece *Andante Con Moto*, but this is a tempo indication, not the title. Interestingly, a clarinet in C is called for in this one-page piece. It is rather sparse writing, with plenty of melodic imitation.

Note that the almost impossible confusion with regard to Opus numbering is already alive and well at this very early stage. Busoni kept renumbering his output as he was constantly dissatisfied with his works (see description of his 'system' in the earlier book dealing with the piano works).

SUITE FOR CLARINET AND PIANO (MAY–JUNE 1878).

The Suite consists of:

1. Improvisata (Impromptu)
2. Barcarola
3. Elegia
4. Danza campestre
5. Tema variato
6. Serenata

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The Improvisata has an opening of impressive piano chords before settling into a Schumannesque language.

Barcarola: smooth but undistinguished, with the technique of a duet and a soulful palette. These are all essentially salon pieces, but with a high level of polish.

The Elegia from this very early Suite (May–June 1878) is a simple Schumann-like piece, with very conventional broken chord accompaniment in the piano, which takes the melody after it is heard at first in the clarinet, followed by a conventionally winding-down Coda.

The Tema variato is constructed of a theme that lends itself to repetition with more elaborate texture, especially in the first two variations. Variation 3 is marked *Adagio*, whilst Variation 4 is a *Finale* in *Andantino* tempo. There is still some way to go towards the late Variations in many guises, but these are early steps.

The Serenatas are serene but largely uneventful. One has to constantly remind oneself of the age of the composer! Serenata from the Suite: (Op.42/Op.19 on ms., labelled No.2). (Jageillonian University). The technique of a duet is present here as well. This Serenade contains a turbulent middle section with semiquavers for the piano. (June 1878).

SERENADE for Clarinet and Piano. (4–31 May 1879). Op.42/Op.18 on ms. This Serenata is not from the Suite, but a separate piece.

SOLO DRAMATIQUE in B-flat Minor for Clarinet and Piano. (2 February 1879). Op.13/Op.33 on ms. Operatic qualities, with left-hand rumbles and sweeping gestures, with the piano imitating, but the clarinet always dominating in this rather melodramatic piece, with free interludes.

The NOVELLETE for Clarinet and Piano is dated 2 August, 1879, Op.52/Op.27 on ms. (Jageillonian University). The piano part is fairly difficult, reminding us of Busoni's early virtuosity.

The above early pieces for clarinet and piano are published in one volume by G. Henle Verlag in an excellent performing edition by Georg Meierwein (1991).

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The disparity in these very early Busoni works is between technique and content. It is hard to put into words, but it is like mature work written by a second-class composer, except that the composer's age is very young indeed.

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MÂRCHEN FÜR KLARINETTE VIOLONCELLO (KLARINETTE) UND KLAVIER. Breitkopf & Härtel, 2000. Edited by Joachim Draheim.

(October 1879). Op.60/Op.34 on ms. (Jageillonian University).

The version using clarinet is more effective simply due to the higher and more prominent tessitura of the wind instrument. See chapter on music for cello and piano.

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ELEGIE FÜR KLARINETTE UND KLAVIER. Breitkopf und Härtel. 1920. (Other reprints followed).

Interestingly, this very late work is in Eb Major, whilst the much earlier Elegia (see above) is in E Flat Minor, with an ostinato laying the foundation in both pieces. Comparing this late Elegy with its predecessor(s), it becomes ultra-clear that Busoni has evolved a great amount. Like the early Elegia, Busoni uses the tonality of Eb, but all the characteristics of the late Busoni are here: the austerity, the static harmonic field, the shifting to and from tonality, the unexpected modulations, the excursions into non-tonal territory. And that extraordinary last page with the piano playing a low counterpoint to the clarinet, plus the ambiguous ending.

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Music Example 1/1: comparing the opening bars of the early Elegia with the late Elegy. (Only the opening systems of both pieces are given, numbering Music Example 1/1a and 1/1b.)

A Edmondo Allegra

Elegie

für Klarinette und Klavier

Ferruccio Busoni

Andante sostenuto

Klarinette in B

dolce

Klavier

Music Example 1/1a

3. Elegia

Adagio
con espressione

ppp

Adagio

(ppp)

leggero

m. s.

Music Example 1/1b

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Busoni Nachlass 320. Two Cadenzas for the Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra No.1 in F Minor, Op.73, by Carl Maria von Weber (18 May 1920).

These two cadenzas remain unpublished, though complete and from Busoni's late period. Like two other works, they are dedicated to Edmondo Allegra. Just as there are a number of widely variant editions of this Concerto, creating controversy at differing levels, so Busoni's contribution to this work adds further confusion. Busoni's title page proclaims: "Cadenze per il Concertino (sic) in fa min di C. M. Weber". There is a Concertino by Weber, written in the same year as the Concerto, but it is not in F Minor, but Eb. Is Busoni implying something here by downgrading the work? The second problem: it is unclear where precisely the Cadenza commences. The usual place where the Baermann Cadenza is played, at bar 143, doesn't fit. As far as I can make out, Busoni intended his cadenza to be played after the diminished 7th chord at bar 271. Then a further question arises: as usual with his cadenzi, Busoni is unhappy about what happens next, so he writes out the rest of the movement, in his own ending with the soloist continuing to play. Once more Busoni undercuts the possibilities for performances of his cadenza, as there is the question of the orchestral parts differing from the original. At a bar marked "Orchestra originale di Weber", Busoni quotes from the original (see bar 38, usually marked as Fugure B in the scores I have consulted) and then winds the movement down fairly quickly, without the usual bombastic outburst from the orchestra following a cadenza.

The cadenza to the slow movement is unambiguous and is inserted between bars 40 and 41 after the fermata sign. This needs publication after all the time that has lapsed since its composition, and given the quality of musical thought behind it.

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Busoni-Nachlass 170:

Schumann: Three Romances for Oboe, Op.94. (1879–1881). Solo part only. For clarinet. Apparently, the piano part is meant to remain the same as the original accompaniment for oboe. This is another work of the Graz period that witnessed so many works written for Busoni's father.

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Clarinet and Other Instruments

SUITE FÜR KLARINETTE UND STREICHQUARTETT. Breitkopf und Härtel (1995). Edited by Jutta Theurich. Probably composed in 1881.

1. Andantino- Vivace assai
2. Vivace e marcato
3. Moderato

The manuscript score describes the work as ‘for clarinet accompanied by string quartet’, thus clearly stating that this is not a clarinet quintet in the usual sense, but a featured solo instrument, intended for his father. The clarinetist’s role is akin to someone like Johann Strauss, standing in front of his ensemble whilst playing and leading. It is always difficult to be certain in these matters, but one cannot help wondering whether there was another—probably fast—movement intended to round off the piece. The 3rd movement is impressive on its own, longer than the other two together, full of feeling, with more presence from the strings than henceforth. It could comfortably stand on its own in a concert.

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ROBERT SCHUMANN. ABENDLIED FÜR KLAVIER ZU DREI HÄNDEN OP.85 NR. 12. BEARBEITUNG FÜR KLARINETTE UND STREICHQUARTETT VON FERRUCCIO BUSONI. Breitkopf & Härtel, 1997. Edited by Joachim Draheim.

This is one of Schumann’s best-known miniatures, and has been arranged for every conceivable ensemble, even during Schumann’s life. It was performed at his funeral. So, Busoni was hardly breaking new ground here, merely providing yet another short piece for his father, possibly an encore for the Suite for clarinet and string quartet. The work is here transposed into C major, perhaps for the sake of the last, rich chord and the cello octave. (Date of composition probably ca.1880.)

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A companion piece to the above is unpublished (Busoni Nachlass 168):

INTRODUCTION PAR SPOHR ELEGIA DI H.W. ERNST. RIDUZIONE
PER CLARINETTO CON ACCOMPAGN. DI QUARTETTO AD ARCO DI
FERRUCCIO BENVENUTO BUSONI.

There is no date on the manuscript, but ca.1880 is very probable. Although a companion piece to the Schumann, above, the result is far less effective. The Schumann is a gem of its kind, but the Ernst Elegie is a second-rate piece of music, and Busoni did not yet possess the skills to lift it above its own natural level.

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CONCERTINO FÜR KLARINETTE UND KLEINES ORCHESTRA, OPUS 48,
1918.

Breitkopf & Härtel, 1918. Also, Edwin Kalmus.

AUSGABE FÜR KLARINETTE UND KLAVIER Bearbeitung von Otto Taubmann.

The work is dedicated to Edmund Allegra, Principal clarinetist of the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra.

As a miniature Concerto, the work is divided into these short movements, played without a break:

Allegretto Sostenuto—un poco Animato

Andantino

Adagio

Allegro Sostenuto

Tempo di Menuetto

A companion piece to the Divertimento for Flute and Orchestra, this work is similarly scored for small orchestra with a beautiful, transparent palette of colours. As though still writing for his father, Busoni begins immediately in the high register, with the solo instrument proclaiming its ascendancy. Unmistakably late period Busoni, the work is full of the usual Busonian twists and turns, so that the ear is often deceived and misled, sometimes fulfilling expectations, but more often than not taking a turn into unexpected tonality, major/minor ambiguity, and using sequences to lead our ears astray.

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W. A. MOZART. ADAGIO AUS DEM KLARINETTEN KONZERT HERAUSGEGEBEN UND MIT EINER KADENZ VERSEHEN VON FERRUCCIO BUSONI. Composed no later than 1920. Breitkopf und Härtel. 1922.

See *Busoni and The Piano* for a discussion about Busoni's attitude to Cadenzas composed by the pianist. This continues to be a controversial topic; Busoni did not believe in composing cadenzi 'in style' and persisted in his belief that two time zones were intersecting. His late cadenzas for the Mozart clarinet and flute concerti continue to pursue this philosophy; a hundred years later, audiences are still bewildered by the Mozart/Busoni cadenzi and most soloists lack the courage to perform them.

For the clarinet concerto, Busoni inserts his cadenza precisely where one would expect it: the difference here is that the Cadenza—extending over 20 bars—is fully notated and barred, since the orchestra continues to play under the solo instrument. The built-in problem here is not so much that there is a jolt in the stylistic flow—in fact, there is very little of that, although the wind has some chromatically descending quavers that Mozart may have objected to—but rather that, to perform the Busoni Cadenza, the orchestra has to have a set of parts containing the extra 20 bars, which involves hire fees and the rest of the nuisance that would be incurred. So once again, Busoni manages to subvert his own agenda, and we hear this Cadenza very rarely indeed. A pity, since it provides a fresh approach to this lovely movement from late Mozart.

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