

## 9. STRUCTURAL AND INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES IN INTRODUCTION, THEME AND VARIATIONS FOR CLARINET AND ORCHESTRA BY GIOACHINO ROSSINI

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**Abstract:** *In this study, we aim to decode and highlight one of the most important works in the study of the clarinet, Introduction, Theme, and Variations for Clarinet and Orchestra, by Gioachino Rossini. In this variation-type piece, G. Rossini optimally combines the problems of virtuosity that unfold over the entire range of the clarinet, with his usual cantability, of a perfect lyricism. With its ambitus, large intervals, and passages of virtuosity in various rhythmic formulas, the work falls into the category of great difficulty and represents a challenge for the soloist. Without being modest, if the piece is studied seriously, with the directions you will find in this study, the work can help clarinetists in their quest for perfection.*

**Key words:** *Variation, interpretative analysis, clarinet, Introduction, Theme and Variations, virtuosity*

### 1. Introduction – about the variational principle

The roots of the word *variatio* in the adjectival *varius*, originally had several meanings: the first referred to the ancient non-specialized use of a mixed coloring imprint in plants and animals, another had the meaning of “colored” or with the more negative connotation of ‘indeterminate’ or ‘fluctuating’. In his etymological analysis, the musicologist Horst Weber (HMT, 1986) makes useful distinctions between the transitive and intransitive meanings of the word variation (in German, *verändern* – to change, and *sich ändern* – to change yourself), realizing the connection between the former and the process itself (varying, *veränderung*) and of the second, with the result of that process (variation, *Veränderung*). Thus, right from the start we can foreshadow the dual musical meanings of variation as technique and form, and its connotations as both positive and problematic.

Later associations of variation with color can be seen in the use by the Renaissance theorist and composer Gioseffo Zarlino (1517-1590) of the term ‘*Chromatico, quasi Colorato, o Variato*’ (it. chromatic, almost colored, or varied) for the mode chromatic (Istituto armonice, 1558, 3/1573, p. 100)<sup>61</sup>.

The idea of diversity (*varietas*) had an important role in rhetoric, as Roman writers were influenced by Aristotle, who appealed to the authority represented by Euripides' Orestes: “Change is also pleasant since change is specific to nature; for perpetual likeness creates an excess of the normal condition; thus, it was said: “Change (*metabole*) is sweet in all things” (Art of Rhetoric, 1371a, I.xi.20). Quintilian remarked that “the artistic structure (composition) must be decorative, pleasing and varied” (Institutio oratoria, IX.iv.146). Diversity was a goal both in performance, especially in the pitch and tempo of the voice (e.g., Ad Herennium, III.xii.22: “The relaxation of the full tone preserves the voice, and diversity gives

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the listener great pleasure”), as well as in the realm of style (e.g., Ad Herennium, IV.xii.18: “To give distinction (*dignitas*) to style is to make it ornamented, beautifying it by diversity”).

Both *variatio* and its partial synonym *mutatio* are encountered in discussions of a diversity of themes: timbral quality related to the sonorous quality of each octave (Guido of Arezzo, *Micrologus*; Johannes Afflighemensis, *De musica*), hexachordal mutation and *musica ficta* (Marchetto da Padova, *Lucidarium*; Tinctoris, *Diffinitorium*; Finck, *Practica musica*; Zarlino, *Le istituioni harmoniche*; Demantius, *Isagoge artis musicae*, and others). *Varietas* and *variation* appear in discussions of the *differentiae*, the many possible endings for the psalms, used to link them to their antiphons. Whether the Spanish term *diferencia* used for variation in the 16th century is related to this term is not firmly established. A similar question arises for the term *divisiones* for these endings (Regino of Prüm, circa 900) and the English term divisions. The long-standing association of *varius* with *variation* and rhythm, whether in a change in metered notation or in the rhythmically varied subdivisions of a cadence, makes this latter correlation plausible, particularly in that early-century variation sets the 16th subdivides the rhythm and may alter the meter of the theme.

Rhetorical definitions of *figure* as a *scheme*, in which “the simple and obvious method of expression is varied” (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, IX.i.10–11, 13) demonstrate why *variatio* became a figure for musical theorists of the 17th century: a series of sounds with a simple rhythmic organization (without ornaments or complex figures) was needed, reorganized in a special configuration. For the composer and theorist Christoph Bernhard (1628-1692), *variatio* occurs when an interval is modified by numerous short sounds so that instead of the longer sound, numerous shorter sounds move quickly to the next main sound by all sorts of leaps and bounds gradual (*Tractatus compositionis augmentatus*, p. 73, Eng. trans. *Musica poetica*, 1997, p. 434). Thus, it can include other figures and is itself part of other figures, as *transitus*, some of the figures used to resolve dissonances by Bernhard. In the writings of Bernhard, Prinz, Praetorius, and Vogt, *variatio* is generally treated as synonymous with *diminutio*, *coloratura*, and *passaggio*, all of which have both melodic significances, being used to fill a larger interval, and rhythmic significance, to subdivide a longer sound. The cognate Spanish term *glosa* has been discussed not only as a diminution technique in itself but also in the context of the treatment of dissonance (e.g. P. Nassarre, *Fragmentos músicos*, 2/1700). The meaning of the term *variatio* as “resolving a dissonance in small note values” was used until the 18th century by Fux (*Gradus ad Parnassum*, 1725, p. 217) and Scheibe (*Compendium musices theoretico-practicum*, ed. P. Benary in *Die deutsche Kompositionslehre des 18. Jahrhunderts*, 1961, p. 62), and the earlier conception as a subdivided cadential sound is re-contextualized as “the development of a cadence into an improvised virtuoso cadence” (Riepel, *Anfangsgründe zur musicalischen Setzkunst*, iv: *Erläuterung der betrüglichen Tonordnung*, 1765, pp. 89–90).<sup>62</sup>

A later echo of *mutatio* is found in Johann Walther's *Musicalisches Lexicon* of 1732, referring to its various changes (of alterations, mode, manner or register) as a *Veränderung*. The idea of variation as something intrinsic and essential, as

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<sup>62</sup> Hindley, Geoffrey, *The Larousse Encyclopedia of Music*, Hamlyn Publishing, Bidge House, England, 1986

*ornatus*, part of the composer's "toolkit" can make other specific rules, beyond those concerning the composition of voices, impossible to determine and conceive: as the organist states, composer and theorist Andreas Werckmeister (1645-1706) "one artist has an *Invention*, a *Variation* and a *Genius* different from another (*Harmonologia musica*, 1702, p. 84).

Variety and variation as the aim of art became a frequently repeated maxim in the 17th and 18th centuries, as a source of pleasure and as an approximation of the wonderful variety of nature. Both counterpoint with embroidery and the making of a complex figured bass were perceived as ways of varying a simpler basic pattern, and the art of "divisions on a foundation" was built on this principle: English musician and composer Christopher Simpson (1606-1669) uses the terms *foundation*, *subject*, *bass*, and *theme* with overlapping meanings (*Harmonologia musica*, 1702, p. 84). If the model was named a "Given Modules" (Printz, *Phrynus Mytilenaeus*, 1696, pt 2, p. 46), a "simple melody for vocal or instrumental singing" (Walther, *Lexicon*), or "determined bass notes (*Handleitung zur Variation*, 1721 by Friedrich Erhard Niedt, revised by Johann Mattheson), the conclusion that the original must be recognizable adds an important level to the permanent evolution of the term.

The possibility of variations in the fugue has been discussed since the early 17th century, with subjects varied by inversion and by changing tonality and mode. In 1773, Johann Freidrich Daube (1730-1797) described fugues for four voices with reversible counterpoint, which by inversion "gives rise to eight *Veränderungen*" (*Der musikalische Dilettant*, 1773, p. 330). James Grassineau (1715-1769), translating Sebastien de Brossard's (1655-1730) *Dictionnaire de musique* into English, accurately describes the result of varied repetition, not just different projection of a simple pattern (*Musical Dictionary*, 1740): "Variation is the different manner of singing with voice or instrument the same song, aria, or melody, either by subdividing the sounds into several, of lesser value or by adding ornaments, in such a way that the basic line can be distinguished (*le simple*) of the melody behind all the flourishes". The dictionaries of Johann Gottfried Walther (1684-1748) and Jacques Lacombe (1724-1811) adopt Brossard's definition, but Lacombe is the first to use the plural *Variations* (*Dictionnaire portatif des beaux-arts*, 1752), then taken up by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1768. Johann Mattheson, in 1721, said that "what the French call *double*, we call variation, though that is not the best word. It's way too general" <sup>63</sup>.

Similar to the polysemantic of the term variation, many other terms referred to variations. The term *double*, having its origin in the name *pas double* from court dances (Thoinot Arbeau, *Orchésographie*, 1588, p. 33) appeared for the first time in suites, where an allemande or sarabande could have one or more *doubles*. Also, with a meaning similar to *double* but each with subtle semantic differences, the terms *de diferencia* (Spanish), *partita* (Italian), and *division* (English) referred to a *partition* – a segment, later called a theme, that was repeated with modifications – but also when subdividing the original note values. In seventeenth-century dance music, it is sometimes not very clear whether a *double*, *glosa*, or variation of a short piece denotes a varied repetition or an alternate version, especially if these terms

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<sup>63</sup> Randel, Don Michael, *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, Harvard University Press, 2003

refer both to the practice of improvising diminutives and to sets of variations. In German, *Veränderung*, like *mudanza* in Spanish and *mutanza* in Italian, on the other hand, means change or modification.

In German writings a distinction appears between it and *variatio*, the former being a broader category that subsumes the latter as a figure. Horst Weber (b. 1944) states that all these different terms “make possible a latent distinction between the concept of *figure* and that of *segment*). The terms de *mutanza* and *mudanza* were encountered in choreography in the 15th and 6th centuries, although both also applied to sets of variations (eg Antonio Valente's [1565–1580] *Intavolatura de cimbalo* of 1576). The term variation as a name for a solo dance or ballet “number” remained in choreographic terminology, being used by Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky among others, and perhaps correlating both meanings with the impression of solo exposition often visible during the performance of instrumental variations and arguing for the possible origin of the variations as modified repetitions of a melodic line to accompany the dancers.

The echo of these numerous terminological possibilities resonates in the nomenclature used by Johann Sebastian Bach: *Aria variata all[a] man[iera] italiana*, *Partite diverse* on melodic lines from chorales, Unfinished *Variationen* from *Clavierbüchlein* for Anna Magdalena Bach, *Doubles* from solo suites, *Aria mit verschiedenen Veränderungen* (Goldberg Variations) and *Einige canonische Veränderungen über das Weynacht-Lied: Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her*. Whether the abandonment of the term variation in favor of *Veränderung* reflects a change in the practice of the era or Bach's conception of the relative evaluation of his works is debatable.<sup>64</sup>

Certainly, Brahms felt that Beethoven's use of the term for the *Diabelli Variations* reflected a greater intrinsic value and a more severe strictness. Johann Abraham Peter Schulz's (1747-1800) list of variation types, ordered by importance, may lead us to the same conclusion. In his article on variations for the journal *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, he places the suite movements composed by Couperin and Bach lowest on the hierarchical scale, followed by the sonatas with varied movements by Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach (which are not practically a form of variations, although they represent a type of ‘completely varied melody’), and finally as “unquestionably the most important type”, contrapuntal variations with imitations and canons, as found in the *Goldberg Variations* and the Johann Sebastian Bach's variations *Vom Himmel hoch* (Schulz also included Bach's *Art of Fugue*, fugue by Jean Henri D'Anglebert (1629-1691) and even Corelli's *Folie d'Espagne* in this last category).

Individual variations may or may not bear the title of variation. The *Organ Variations* by Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562–1621) in Fitzwilliam's *Manual for the Virginal* have been identified as the first source to use the name *variatio* as the title for each segment (Weber, 1986).

Similar to many other sets of variations on sacred or secular themes (e.g. J.P. Sweelinck's *Mein junges Leben hat ein End*), the first segment is not titled *theme* but rather *Prima variatio*, indicating that it is already a version variation of a well-known song. Individual variations in chorales were sometimes titled *versus*

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<sup>64</sup> Randel, Don Michael, op. cit.

(*Tablatura nova*, 1624, by Samuel Scheidt [1587–1654]) or *Verset* (*Hymnes de l'église*, by Jean Titelouze [1562–1633]) to distinguish them from secular variations. However, the use of these names was not constant and was mainly used in the first half of the 17th century.

Many works from the late 16th and 17th centuries use no titles for variations, only numerals, while in theme-shaped movements with variations from the 18th and 19th centuries, composers often dispense with an identifying title, numeral or any other indicator, especially in parts of larger works. In the 20th century, numbers appear again as indicators.<sup>65</sup>

In the second half of the 18th century, theorists continued to treat variation as a technique, either improvised or composed, and provide the first clear assessments of variation as a musical form. They rarely make terminology distinctions between technique and form. Jerome-Joseph de Momigny (1762-1842) is the only one who differentiates *embroideries*, varied repetitions of phrases and melodies in any form and *variations* or *embroideries on an entire aria* (*Cours complet d'harmonie et de composition*, ii, 1806, p. 614). The second type is the one responsible for creating a general structure, and only in a variation in the *Adagio* do the figurations of the *embroidery* type appear, which change frequently. After the appearance of the term *theme with variations* (in *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition*, iii, 1793 by Heinrich Christoph Koch (1749-1816) all previous synonyms for variations, except *Veränderungen*, were dropped.

Consequently, new terms emerged in the 19th century to create new hierarchies of value in variation (e.g., strict *variations* versus *character variations*, *ornamental variations* versus *contrapuntal variations* versus *fancy variations*).<sup>66</sup> In the 20th century, the term was applied to several types of processes other than variational forms with a tangential connection to them. Arnold Schoenberg's term *developing variations* refers to the `endless remodeling of a basic form` through thematic regeneration; the *expansive variations* of Fred Lerdahl (b. 1943) develop a simple pattern into a cycle of increasing length and complexity, stable events acting as points of departure for new developments (e.g. *String Quartet No. 1*, 1978, *String Quartet No. 2*, 1982, *Valuri*, 1988). Sometimes the term is fully avoided as composers try to create different perspectives on a theme, as in *Kaleidoscopic Changes on an Original Theme ending with a Fugue* (1924) by Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901-1953).

And in the Romanian music of the 20th century, we observe very valuable works, which express the theme with variations. We are thinking of *Ipostase - variazioni per clarinetto e pianoforte*, composed by Viorel Munteanu, a work of a certain value and of great difficulty in interpretation. The full title of the work expresses very well and clearly, the fact that each variation of the theme is a new pose, achieved through original processing procedures and techniques, through the intelligent exploitation of some thematic cells, transformed by division or augmentation rhythmic and melodic, by widening the ambitus and the sound palette and last but not least by using traditional modal scales, of sacred or profane origin (Albu, 2014).

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<sup>65</sup> Randel, Don Michael, op. cit.

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>

## 2. Gioachino Rossini – Introduction, theme, and variations

It is one of the most famous concertante works for clarinet, both because of the technical difficulties it imposes, the composer demanding the maximum of the instrumentalist's abilities, through an extended scope, a rhythmic variety and a special agility, but also because of the elegance of its melodic lines. The composer highlights the timbral qualities of the clarinet, gives warmth and sensitivity to the melodic line, and gives brilliance to passages of technical agility.

The introduction begins with three dotted chords of the orchestra in *tutti*: the curtain rises and we wait impatiently for the solo instrument to begin its story. The tempo is *Andante sostenuto*, and between the three chords of the orchestra, the long suspension pauses create the necessary tension to attract the attention of the listening public. The orchestra then introduces us to the harmony through a few quietly intoned arpeggios, in octaves.

The solo instrument begins the introduction in a reduced, *mezzo-piano* shade, on an arpeggio of the basic key of the section, *E flat major*. From the first phrase, we recognize in this introduction the characteristics of an operatic recitative, the richness of coloratura and ornaments bringing the clarinet closer to the human voice. Rossini covers in this wide-ranging introduction the entire ambit of the clarinet, and the rhythmic divisions go up to sixty-four. We notice that the rich ornamentation fits perfectly into the meaning of the phrases. The form is free, and improvisational, which is another element of similarity with operatic recitative.

The orchestral accompaniment is extremely simple and transparent, limited to the simple harmonic support of the soloist clarinet. The harmony is maintained only on the main steps (I, IV, V) of the basic tonality, and from a metric point of view, the measure of six octaves chosen by the composer for this introduction gives it a slight character of a slow dance, perhaps even of a sarabande.

Scales, arpeggios, and chromatic passages follow one after the other in this narrative unfolding of the introduction. The orchestra intervenes a little, in places, to cadence or to gracefully take over an element of the speech of the soloist instrument. The phrases are wide-breathing and chain continuously, and the big jumps, octaves, and tenths, fully demand the instrumentalist. The dominant nuance is *piano* and *mezzo-piano*, the composer wants to highlight the sweet and velvety timbral coloring of the clarinet in this dynamic range. Towards the end of the introduction, there is also a cadence of the solo instrument, followed by an ample passage of virtuosity built by ornamenting the basic notes of the tonic chord to end with a three-octave arpeggio and the final cadence in forte.

Armor and meter change. The stage is set for the appearance of the theme, in the key of B flat major. The tempo is a bit more alert – *Allegretto* –, the measure is four-fourths. The clarinet enters the scene and presents the theme that will later be processed in variations. The A-B-A structure of the theme starts from a single generating cell, extremely pregnant, anacrusic, and with syncopation at the end. The orchestra responds with rhythmically similar accompaniment to this idea presented by the soloist. Again, the harmony is maintained on the main steps, and from a textural point of view, the homophonic writing of the accompaniment is meant to better highlight the soloist's instrument.

The first period of the theme follows the classical rigors, being made up of

eight measures, respectively two phrases of four each, the next period being only a short intermezzo of four measures before the re-exposition of the theme. Section A is re-exposed, with a concluding passage added at the end. The theme is concluded by a short coda of four measures of the orchestra, built on the tonic and dominant chords.

The general shade of the theme is *piano*, which gives it a special grace, but requires an extremely well-practiced interpretative lightness on the part of the instrumentalist to be able to accurately render the subtle inflections of the theme and the necessary accents in this minor shade.

**Variation I** processes the theme by changing the rhythmic pulsation, and it is built exclusively on triplets. The tempo is accelerated (*piu mosso*), and the theme is embellished and enriched by the addition of ascending and descending arpeggios. The orchestral accompaniment is also modified, appearing in places in flute triplets, that double those of the solo instrument.

Another new element is the appearance of repetition marks, both for the first A section of the theme and for the second. Also, the structure is slightly modified as follows: the second phrase in section A at the end of the theme disappears, and the coupling of the middle phrase of four measures with the half-time leads to a small bi-strophic form with the half-time.

The soloist is especially requested in the second half of the theme, where he has to perform ascending leaps of duodecima and descending leaps of tenth in the piano and in moving tempo. The ternary pulsation of the variation is also maintained in the coda belonging to the orchestra, to contribute to the unitary character of the variation.

**The second variation** returns to the binary pulsation of the theme but is predominantly organized in sixteenths. The new elements that appeared in variation I (repetition signs, changes in structure) are maintained here as well. Scales and broken arpeggios follow each other quickly, and spectacular jumps are not missing from this variation, reaching up to a jump of two octaves. The orchestral accompaniment is again homophonic and isorhythmic, with a transparent texture, to leave the solo instrument the opportunity to demonstrate its interpretive capabilities. This time, the orchestral coda is extended to eight measures, its harmonic construction remaining the same.

**The third variation** brings the nuance of strength to the dynamic palette of this work. Sixteenths again predominate, and the characteristic formula for the first A section is eighths followed by two sixteenths. This first section is organized on ascending arpeggios over two octaves, requiring extreme control on the part of the performer.

The second section provides an element of contrast by introducing descending chromatic scales, before returning to ascending arpeggios over two octaves. The orchestral accompaniment remains transparent and punctuates the highest note of the arpeggio described by the soloist instrument to support it harmonically. The orchestral coda maintains its extended size of eight measures and is completely identical to the one at the end of the previous variation.

**The fourth variation** is a character variation. The tempo is *Largo* and the tonality is that of the homonym, *B flat minor*. The rich and varied ornamentation of

the theme brings some resemblance to the improvisational character of the introduction.

The orchestral accompaniment has the same rhythmic organization as that of the theme, but the movement is much slower, bringing changes from the point of view of the character. Different methods of ornamentation, appoggiatura, trills, mordants, groups, etc. are used. The orchestra's coda unfolds over four measures, this time being more complex from a harmonic point of view. It is characterized, as well, by a rich figure of thirty-sevenths, at the end of which the tonal center returns to the major homonym, to prepare the beginning of the fifth and last variation.

**Variation V** brings a new tempo change (*piu mosso*), and its characteristic element is represented by broken, descending, and ascending arpeggios organized in sixteenths. The orchestral accompaniment is this time syncopated, bringing back the dancing character. This variation is expanded by a coda of large dimensions attributed to the soloist instrument, this time. Although the orchestral interventions remain identical to the 2nd and 3rd variations, between them new passages of virtuosity of the soloist instrument appear, which fully demand the technical abilities of the performer.

This coda ends with a three-octave chromatic range, performed *ad libitum*, starting from the G note in the low register of the clarinet and culminating in the A flat note in the superacute register. This bravura cadenza by the soloist is completed by a short orchestral conclusion which, through the repeated cadenzas on the tonic, brings this virtuoso work to a stormy conclusion.

### 3. Conclusions

This work highlights all the technical and expressive qualities of the clarinet, requiring an excellent mastery of all the elements related to the technique of the instrument: both sonority, articulation, and breathing are extremely demanded in this creation which highlights the diversity and brilliance of the soloist instrument. The rapid ups and downs of the entire scope of the instrument highlight the versatility of the clarinet and its ability to emit a strong, round and full sound in the low register and a bright and poetic one in the acute register.

Moreover, due to the fact that large nuances require a large amount of air and a pressure adapted to the register in which the melodic line unfolds, the dynamic evolutions, completed in this way, involve an economy of air, a correct distribution of breathing according to the dynamic stage completed. In turn, each phrase has its own tensional evolutionary path, its own dynamic path, either ascending, descending, or arc-shaped.

Thus, the air dosage must also be calculated at the microstructural level, starting from a small nuance (depending on the case) and gradually conquering the culmination of each phrase. Regarding the correct realization of acute sounds, they must be treated with the greatest attention, both due to the difficulty of correct intonation and emission, as well as their investment in enhanced expressive functions within the melodic phrase. On the other hand, the presence of formulas containing large interval jumps also poses problems of interpretation. The homogenization of the sound will be followed for an equalization of the sonority in all registers.



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