RARE FINDS

Granados The Patriot

BY JOSEPH SMITH

Great composers have long based compositions on national anthems, creating variation sets, fantasies, or simple transcriptions. Even though the themes may have been chosen for extra-musical reasons, a number of fine piano works have resulted.

When Mozart was touring Europe, he spent some time in Holland. In 1766, he composed a set of variations on *Willem van Nassau*, the national anthem of the Netherlands. The words of this anthem date from about 1586, the melody is older still, and there are many different versions of both; the one sung today is far different from the one Mozart knew. In Mozart's piece, the tune is characterized by its unusual six-bar phrases. The work displays a pleasing variety within each of the seven variations, although the last variation doesn't seem a satisfying finale. Oh, did I mention that Mozart had just turned ten when he composed it?

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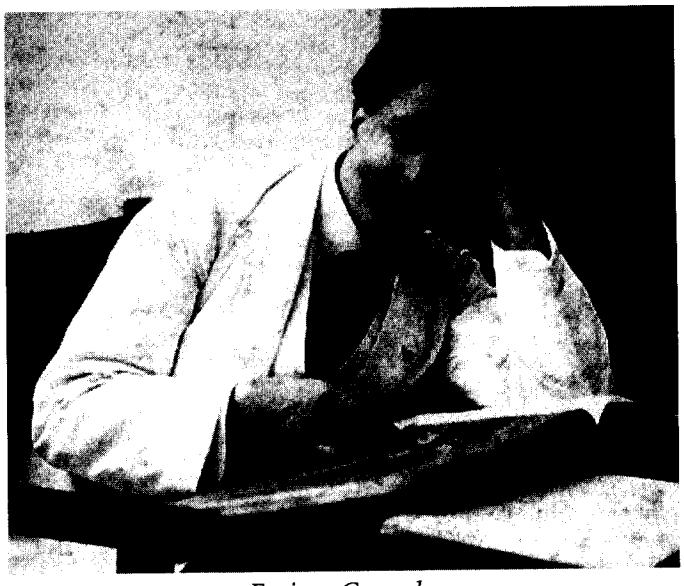
Haydn, during his London residencies, was so deeply impressed by the public's reverent response to "God Save the King" that he was inspired to give Austria an equivalent hymn. His warm, affectionate "God Preserve Kaiser Franz" (1796-7) was the result, and it seems to have been immediately embraced as a national anthem. At the end of World War 1, however, Austria adopted a new anthem. By the time it decided to restore Haydn, in 1929, Germany had already appropriated the tune for *its* anthem, and Austria abandoned it in 1947. How sad that Haydn's intentions should have been so cavalierly ignored by *two* countries. Shortly after creating the anthem, Haydn composed reverent, reflective variations on it as the slow movement of a string quartet, and subsequently arranged the movement for piano. The result is clearly classical in content, but without any of the typical piano figurations of the era. Beethoven would arrive at something similar in some of his late bagatelles: an emphasis on part writing, rather than figuration.

In 1803, the year after Beethoven composed his ambitious variation sets op. 34 and 35, he produced variations on "God Save the King," (as well as a set on "Rule, Britannia"), presumably in



Enrique Granados

gratitude for England's appreciation of his works. But Beethoven seems to have genuinely liked the tune (Of course, to Americans, the tune is "My Country 'tis of Thee." The pitches and note values are indeed the same. But the correct accentuation of the American text changes the perceived meter from 3/4 to 3/2—"My country" becomes three quarter-note upbeats). Later, preparing to compose it into his *Battle Symphony: Wellington's Victory*, he told his diary, "I have to show the English a little of what a blessing 'God Save the King' is." While the notoriously bombastic *Battle Symphony* is a strong candidate for Beethoven's worst composition, the set of piano variations is a subtle, intimate, and inventive piece.

The United States won political independence from England in the Revolutionary War, but didn't achieve musical independence until long after. Not only "My County 'tis of Thee," but also our national anthem is a British tune. "To Anacreon in Heaven," the musical source of "The Star Spangled Banner," was written for a club of musical amateurs, and celebrates Venus and Bacchus. The melody is painfully difficult to sing. Grieg once noted that the wide range of the Norwegian national anthem—an octave and a fourth—rendered it impractical for community singing. The "Star Spangled Banner" spans an octave and a fifth! Since the text of our anthem was shoehorned into a pre-existing tune, its word stresses are understandably imperfect. When examining the British song, however, I was astonished to find that its prosody is no better—in its very first verse the word "harmony" is accented on the second syllable! Leopold Godowsky used

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A bass line walk up begins in measure 17, inching up to the C-7 in measure 25. This bass movement, along with the corresponding harmonic color changes, provided a change of pace from the first 8 measures, and also allowed for a more dramatic melody to emerge.

Measure 29 begins the transition to the next "exercise," the ii-V-I over a pedal point (a static bass note). I could easily have used a C7 to get to the F-7/Bb (Bb7sus4) in measure 33. Instead I opted for the tritone substitution of Gb7+11. The Gb root leads nicely up a major third to the Bb pedal. Also of interest is the minimal melody of the transition (measures 29-32), and the descending scale tone triad responses to it.

The melodic line beginning at measure 33 also makes use of scale tone triads, this time in arpeggiated form. The ascending thirds answer and counterbalance the descent of the melodic line (measures 34-38). Then, building to the conclusion of the tune, the scale tone triads in measure 40 set up the long delayed resolution that starts in measure 41. Finally we get to the "I" chord, but alas, it's still delayed with the use of the Eb diminished, which is still over the V pedal. It's interesting to note that the chord scale (Eb Dominant Diminished scale) doesn't contain a Bb, thus creating even more dissonance. Measure 48 marks the end of the form; it was here that I needed a good harmonic transition to get back to the G-7 at the beginning. What better way to get there than a D7b9, which is exactly what an Eb diminished is, except with a different root. It helps to know your diminished scale applications and relationships!

The coda is played the last time only, after improvising. It's not until the final 2 beats of the coda that we come to rest on the Ebadd2, home at last.

Kind of Blue has just been recorded by jazz pianist Steve Myerson on his new CD, *In Your Absence.*

Regarding the title of the tune: I've come to discover an untapped resource for tune titles—names of famous jazz recordings that don't contain a tune with the same name on the recording. One of my previous efforts is *Portrait in Jazz,* from the famous Bill Evans recording of the same name. After writing the piece featured here, it occurred to me that the tune begins with a kind of minor blues, and that's when it hit me: the best selling jazz recording of all time is Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue.* I rushed to find my CD, a lo and behold, no tune on that disc titled *Kind of Blue.* The final piece of the puzzle was in place!

See *Kind of Blue* on the following pages.

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"The Star Spangled Banner" to close the "Requiem" that ends his cycle of thirty pieces in triple meter, *Triakontameron.* Later, he extracted his tasteful arrangement of the anthem as a separate piece. Rachmaninoff also made an arrangement, which survives only in the form of a piano roll. It is perhaps too respectful—one finds Rachmaninoff flavor only in the rhythmic sharpness of his performance (One should exercise caution when arranging the United States anthem. Following a 1944 Boston concert where Stravinsky conducted his own orchestral arrangement, the police came to warn him that Massachusetts law forbids "tampering" with national property, and went on to confiscate the parts).

Pianists only recently gained an endearing version of a national anthem by a significant composer. Granados composed his transcription of the Spanish *Marcha Real* (Royal March) before 1908, but it remained an unpublished manuscript for almost two hundred years—its first appearance in print was in the *Granados Complete Piano Works* edition, edited by Alicia De Larrocha and Douglas Riva, and published by Editorial Boileau. The original melody is anonymous. Carlos III chose it as a royal march in 1770, and thus it became the oldest national anthem except for "God Save the King." Granados's unpretentious setting extracts an appealing variety of expression from remarkably little melodic material.

The repeat of the initial eight bars is harmonically elaborated to provide a more intense character, and the chorale-like central episode in F repeats the same theme, but its harmonic rhythm is so much slower that it sounds utterly different. In bar 17 the bass line is *molto marcato* to show that it quotes the opening of the initial melody.

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A complete edition of almost any composer necessarily preserves a lot of music of lesser interest. But it can also disseminate some jewel that would otherwise languish in an archive. I didn't even know that Granados had set the *Marcha Real* until I was looking through his Scarlatti elaborations, and happened upon it by chance. I played the *Marcha Real* for the opening of this year's series of concerts, *In the Gardens of Spain,* produced by the Instituto Cervantes in New York City and curated by David Dubal. Now, I can't imagine not knowing it.

Joseph Smith will give a lecture-recital on nineteenth century Jewish composers at Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, 30 West 68th Street New York, on December 7th, at 1:30 PM. The event is free, and open to the public.

See Granados's *Marcha Real* on page 6.