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Recontextualizing Brahms's *Handel Variations*, Op. 24 through Robert Volkmann and Emanuel Moór

Joanna Chang
Duke University
jc578@duke.edu

Brahms's Handel Variations, *Op. 24 (1861) stands out for its direct quotation of the Baroque master's Harpsichord Suite No. 1 in B-flat (HWV434), as well as its treatment of the theme in 'old forms'. While the composer's knowledge of antiquated forms finds expression through canonic treatment, a siciliano, musette and fugal finale, the 25 variations written in the strict Baroque variation style further underscore his commitment to tradition.*

Several earlier revivals of Handel include settings by Louis Spohr, Ignaz Moscheles and Robert Volkmann of Handel's familiar 'Harmonious Blacksmith' tune. In 1856, Volkmann treated the theme to the fantasy variation, winning approval from performers and critics alike. Unnoticed, however, was the finale's remarkable modernization of Baroque keyboard styles through the revival of harpsichord texture, timbre, harmony, rhythm and melodic figurations. The unprecedented fidelity to the keyboard medium, literature, as well as expressive modes deserves a re-evaluation in relation to Brahms's setting.

Brahms's return to the Baroque style variation served as a model for later composers. One case study is that by the neglected Hungarian composer Emanuel Moór (1863–1931). A former student of Volkmann and an ardent admirer of Brahms, Moór composed his Variations and Fugue on a Hungarian Theme. Op. 24 in 1890, which coincidentally bears the same opus number, as well as a Baroque fugal finale. This article examines Brahms's musical predecessors in the Handel revival, as well as his influence on Moór, allowing us to reassess the historical context and import of Brahms's Handel Variations, Op. 24.

Since the appearance of Brahms's *Handel Variations*, Op. 24, in 1861, the work has been accorded a special canonic stature by friends and foes alike: the usually captious composer himself confessed to his publisher that the *Lieblingswerk* was 'particularly dear' to him.[1] For Selmar Bagge, the appealing 'fullness of music, grace, freshness and health' contrasted with the 'thoughtless, intricate, superficial' salon music of the time.[2] Wagner, too, expressed genuine admiration, conceding that the young composer had proven 'what could still be done with the old forms'.[3] In the twentieth century Donald Francis Tovey declared the composition as among

[1] Johannes Brahms, *Briefwechsel* (Berlin, 1921; repr. Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1974): vol. XIV: 60 and 66.

[2] *Deutsche Musik-Zeitung*, 3/41 (11 October 1862): 323.

[3] 'Man sieht, sagte er zum Schlusse, was sich in den alten Formen noch leisten läßt, wenn einer kommt, der versteht, sie zu behandeln', Max Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms* (Berlin, 1904–14): vol. II: 117.

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the 'half-dozen greatest variation sets ever written'[4]; meanwhile Heinrich Schenker further concluded his analysis of the work by hailing Brahms as a Messiah-like figure in a hypostatic union of the divine and human.[5] Late in life, Schoenberg upheld the variations as a pedagogical exemplar of the form in his final text, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* (1937–48).[6]

Although Brahms's *Handel Variations* gains its stature as among the most complete yet original homages to the Baroque style, his selection of a theme by Handel was not in itself novel. In fact, a lineage of settings based on the popular Air and Variations movement of the Keyboard Suite No. 5 (HWV430), commonly known as the 'Harmonious Blacksmith', testified to Handel's enduring legacy, particularly in Austro-German lands in the first half of the nineteenth century. Variances in a composers' reinterpretations of the Baroque master suggest an evolving process in musical historicism, that is, the preservation of past styles in the present, which gradually intensified alongside the growing scholarly interest in early music at mid-century. Robert Volkmann's *Variationen über ein Thema von Händel*, Op. 26, written five years before Brahms's in 1856 offers a strong case study for neo-Baroque expression in its modernization of early eighteenth-century rhythm, texture and timbre. Despite its originality, the work's debt to the prevailing 'character variation' reflected a continual reluctance for the full immersion and synthesis of Baroque styles manifest in Brahms's variations of 1861. Reviewing these predecessors throws into sharp relief the monumentality of Brahms's work, while underscoring a forgotten pathway of historicism devoted to Handel.

Brahms's reinstatement of a strict Baroque variation form culminating in a fugal finale effected a new horizon with which later composers had to contend. Gravitating to his model was the neglected Hungarian composer, Emanuel Moór (1863–1931). A former student of Volkmann in Budapest, Moór relied on Austro-Germanic, if not Brahmsian, examples early in his career, as he sought to forge his own national musical identity. Despite the absence of Handel, his *Variations and Fugue on a Hungarian Theme* (c. 1889) – coincidentally numbered Op. 24 as well – is one of several examples by which Brahms's revival of neo-Baroque techniques manifest in diverse manners for later composers.

I

The most enduring tune among Handel's instrumental oeuvre was the Air and Variations movement from his fifth keyboard suite (HWV430). Table 1 presents a few examples of composers in the early half of the nineteenth century adapting the theme.

Dating from 1720, the Air (and its popular moniker) became one of the most endearing melodies linked to Handel's name. A sustained bass intonation initiates the movement, whereupon a six-bar theme in E major unfolds in binary form. The

[4] Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis: Chamber Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1944): 167.

[5] Heinrich Schenker, *Der Tonwille: Pamphlets in Witness of the Immutable Laws of Music: Offered to a New Generation of Youth*, ed. William Drabkin, trans. Ian Bent (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): vol. II: 77.

[6] Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, ed. Gerald Strang and Leonard Stein (London: Faber & Faber, 1967): 171–3.

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Table 1 Instrumental Treatments of Handel's *Harmonious Blacksmith* Theme

Date	Composer	Work
1783	Beethoven	Two-Part Organ Fugue, WoO 31 (Theme by Handel)
1814	Spohr	Octet, Op. 32, mvt. iii: Andante con variazioni (Thema di Handel)
1814	Moscheles	*Variations sur un Thème de Händel*, Op. 29 (piano)
1827	Giuliani	*Variations sur un Thême de G.F. Haendel*, Op. 107 (guitar)
1850	R. Schumann	Arrangement of a Theme by George Handel (piano)
1856	Volkmann	*Variationen über ein Thema von Händel*, Op. 26 (piano)

first two-bar phrase ends on a half cadence, followed by a four-bar phrase which returns to the tonic (Ex. 1).

The five *doubles* within the movement adhere to the same harmonic scheme. Rhythmically paired, variations 1 and 2 alternate semi-quaver accompaniment figures in the left and right hands, while variations 3 and 4 do likewise in semi-quaver triplets. The concluding fifth variation embellishes the theme with rhythmic diminution of demisemiquaver scales between the hands.

Among the earliest adaptations of the *Blacksmith* theme was from the 13-year-old Beethoven. Handel's theme forms the subject of his two-voice organ fugue, whereby the melodic contour is preserved, but transposed with slight rhythmic alterations (Ex. 2). The unpublished setting (WoO 31) was submitted in 1783 for an organist position in Bonn and foreshadowed the composer's lifelong reverence for Handel.[7]

Three decades later, the bourgeoning reception of Handel in Vienna inspired three additional homages on the same tune. Louis Spohr, Ignaz Moscheles and Mauro Giuliani, then living in the Habsburg capital, contributed to the growing variation literature with works corresponding to their individual talents. In 1814, Spohr set the *Harmonious Blacksmith* in the third movement of his Octet, Op. 32.[8] His expanded chamber setting (clarinet, two horns, violin, two violas, cello and double bass) offered Handel's melody new dimensions of timbral variety: strings engage antiphonally with horns and clarinet, meanwhile virtuosic countermelodies in the solo violin enrich the theme, and instrumental pairings lend the movement a kaleidoscope of colours. Framing the theme according to Classical objectivity, the six-bar *Blacksmith* melody is now fitted into a regular, eight-bar periodic structure. In contrast to the uniform designs of Handel's original variations, Spohr employs contrasting dramatic styles, sudden sforzandos, and a variety of dynamics and rhythmic figurations. Furthermore, the roundness of symmetrical phrases, seamless transitions and vertical linearity in melody and

[7] When asked who was the greatest composer that ever lived, Beethoven immediately replied, 'Handel … to him I bow the knee'; Elliot Forbes, ed. *Thayer's Life of Beethoven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967): vol. II: 920. Handel's influence on Beethoven appears in his *12 Variations on a Theme from Handel's* Judas Maccabeus, WoO 45 (1796), which borrows the oratorio's chorus 'See the conqu'ring hero comes', as well as *Die Weihe des Hauses* (1822), which Beethoven had expressly composed 'after the style of Handel'; Forbes, *Beethoven*, II: 807.

[8] The inclusion of the theme came at the commission and behest of the violinist-turned-cloth merchant Johann Tost (dedicatee of three of Haydn's string quartets), who planned to present several chamber works by Spohr in London; Clive Brown, *Louis Spohr: A Critical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984): 97.

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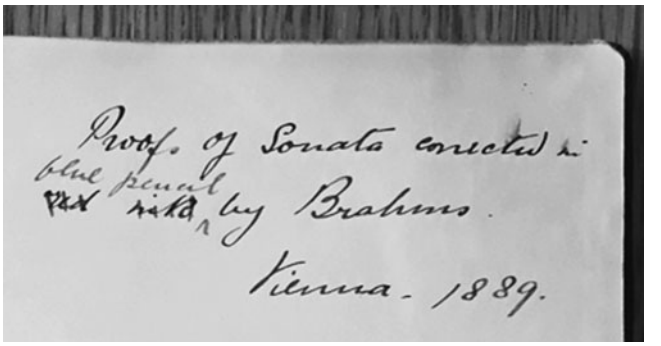


Fig. 1 Note of Brahms's markings made in 'blue pencil' of Moór's Violin Sonata, Op. 23



Fig. 2 Moór, Draft of variations located at the Westminster Public Library, London

accompaniment accentuate the late eighteenth-century style. Only briefly in the first five bars of the penultimate minor-key variation does Spohr set aside the dominant classicizing tendencies of his music. Here, staggered pizzicato voices in the lower strings enter at a halting crochet rhythm, offering a dry whiff of counterpoint (Ex. 3).

Also in 1814, a 20-year-old Moscheles published his *Variationen über ein Thema von Händel*, Op. 29, undoubtedly responding to the increasing demands for literature suitable for domestic music-making. Transposed to the more accessible key of F major, the variations avoid the extravagant brilliance expected of the virtuoso pianist, instead exploring the newly found expressive possibilities available on the pianoforte. Delicate transformations of the melody appear in alto and tenor registers, meanwhile pearly scales sweep across the expanded breadth of the new six-octave keyboard. As in Spohr's variations, Handel's melody is expanded into an eight-bar period, with the repeated binary form present throughout all variations. Perhaps imitating the soft timbres of Handel's keyboards, Moscheles employs a generally quiet range of dynamics (mostly *pianissimo* and *piano*), a deliberate contrast to the popular bravura variations of his time. Two instances of counterpoint acknowledge Handel: invertible counterpoint in variation 4 (Ex. 4a), and imitation in the penultimate *minore* variation (Ex. 4b).

Moscheles's variations likely influenced a third set, by his close friend, the Italian guitar virtuoso Mauro Giuliani. As the foremost guitarist in Vienna in the 1810s, Giuliani published his virtuosic rendition for the fretted instrument in 1826 near the end of his life. Having published several dozens of variations in

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Ex. 1 Handel, Keyboard Suite No. 5, HWV430, 'Air', bars 1–8



Ex. 2 Beethoven, Fugue for Two Voices, WoO 31, bars 1–7

his lifetime, the selection of Handel in his variations (Op. 107) underscores the ongoing tendency to select themes motivated by familiarity, meanwhile showcasing the performer's technical aptitude.

Over the next decades, what began as popular appeal for an antiquated theme gradually turned to a concern for historical awareness. In 1824, Moscheles composed his two-movement *Hommage à Handel*: *Grosses Duo für zwei Pianoforte*, Op. 92, a concert work in which the first movement (Andante patetico) distils the dramatic pathos of Handel's minor-key French overtures through dotted rhythms, contrasting cantabile melodies and orchestral flourishes onto a two-piano medium. Performed at least twice with Mendelssohn in 1824 and 1835, the work led Robert Schumann to praise those 'moments of that period of health, honesty and fertility'.[9] Shortly after, Moscheles launched a series of historical concerts in London with programmes of Bach and Handel featured on the

[9] 'Warum es mit dem Namen "Händel" prunken will, weiß ich nicht und ließe mir den Titel nehmen. Doch war ein Zusatz nötig, da man ohne ihn sich fragen müsste, ob Moscheles absolut und auf reinem Naturweg nach rückwärts trachtete, oder ob er sich nur auf einige Augenblicke in jenes Zeitalter der Gesundheit, Ehrbarkeit und Derbheit zurückversetzt. Das letzte ist der Fall, und wir wissen es ihm herzlich Dank'; Robert Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, ed. F. Gustav Jensen (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1891): vol. I: 241. Moscheles first performed *Hommage à Handel* with Mendelssohn upon meeting in 1824, repeating the performance for a subscription concert at the Gewandhaus in 1835; R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003): 135; 'Leipzig', *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 37/42 (21 October 1835): 704.

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Ex. 3 Spohr, Octet, Op. 32, Andante con variazioni, bars 66–73

harpsichord. In 1842, Moscheles further served as one of the founders of the English Handel Society, for which he edited Handel's *Suites de Pieces* in two volumes.[10] Spohr, too, premiered his sixth symphony ('Historische Symphonie im Styl und Geschmack vier verschiedener Zeitabschnitte') in 1839, whereby the first movement pays tribute to Bach and Handel through the use of a fugue and pastoral.

One of the major impetuses driving the serious reassessment of Handel was Justus Thibaut's influential *Über Reinheit der Tonkunst* (1825) which exhorted composers to return to studying the masters, chief among whom he regarded Palestrina, Bach and the 'incomparable Handel':

[10] Handel, *Suites de Pieces*, ed. Ignaz Moscheles (London: Cramer, 1847).

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Ex. 4a **Moscheles, *Variations on a Theme by Handel*, Op. 29, bars 55–59**



Ex. 4b **Moscheles, *Variations on a Theme by Handel*, Op. 29, bars 73–76**

> But what is totally inexcusable is the general neglect of Handel, whose works can be obtained without trouble in English editions in full score … forming a most valuable treasury of the most real and masterly music of nearly every style. Handel is the Shakespeare of music … he stands up in all kinds of musical form as an immortal example for imitation … . In all styles, from the fond and playful to the sublime, he has provided us with unexcelled specimens of inspiration and culture.[11]

Thibaut's influence extended to patriotic efforts to reclaim Handel's national heritage. In 1834, the novelist Johann Peter Lyser (1804–1870), anonymously published his own tale about the 'Händel' in the inaugural year of *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. Though fictional, Lyser's tribute was the first of its kind in German literature; aside from translated English biographies, no other German had undertaken an original panegyric of the composer. Endorsing Lyser's publication, Schumann shared the sentiment that despite his British naturalization, Handel was indeed a 'freier deutscher Mann' and 'deutscher Meister'.[12] In 1837, the theorist and composer Gottfried Wilhelm Fink echoed similar convictions in his discussion of the oratorio: 'The highest and the crown of all in this branch of composition

[11] A.F. Thibaut, *Purity in Music*, trans. John Broadhouse (London: Reeves, 1882): 3 and 73–4.

[12] For a full assessment of Schumann's reception of Handel, see Ulrich Tadday, 'Zu Robert Schumanns Händel-Rezeption', *Göttingen Handel Beiträge* 12 (2008): 49–62.

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Ex. 5 **Robert Schumann,** ***Ein Thema von Georg Friedrich Händel***

[oratorio] is and remains until now our German Händel, without comparison to all who preceded and followed him, by far outstanding.'[13]

Meanwhile, the *Blacksmith* variations continued to be performed in the concert hall and household. Mendelssohn who, like Beethoven, owned Samuel Arnold's Handel edition (1787–97), improvised on the theme for one of Leipzig's four historical concerts in 1841, in addition to a concert in Exeter Hall, London the following year.[14] Clara Schumann also included Handel's variations on her tours; meanwhile Robert noted in the household diaries their 12-year-old daughter Marie playing the work at home.[15] Shortly after the success of the *Album für die Jugend* in 1848, the Schumanns began sketching plans for yet another children's collection, 'Ein kleinere Lehrgang durch die Musikgeschichte'. Although unpublished, the miniature anthology traced the masterpieces of a foreshortened history of music, with the theme of Handel's Air movement inaugurating the set.[16] Marked 'Kräftig vorzutragen', the theme's key signature notates three sharps rather than the original four, with D♯s inserted onto the score, perhaps to simplify the version for its youthful consumers (Ex. 5).

[13] 'Der Höchste und die Krone Aller in diesem Fache der Tonkunst ist u. bleibt bis jetzt immer noch unser deutscher Händel, ohne Vergleich über Alle, die vor ihm waren und nachfolgten, weit hervorragend'; G.W. Fink, 'Oratorium' in *Encyclopädie der gesammten musiaklischen Wissenschaften*, ed. Gustav Schilling (Stuttgart, 1837): vol. V: 264.

[14] Todd, *Mendelssohn*, 304, 410 and 438.

[15] Robert Schumann, *Tagebücher: Haushaltbücher 1837–1856*, vol. 3, ed. Gerd Nauhaus (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag f. Musik, 1982): vol. 2: 620.

[16] Bernhard R. Appel, *Robert Schumanns 'Album für die Jugend': Einführung und Kommentar* (Mainz: Schott, 2010): 300.

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Ex. 6 **Volkmann, *Variationen über ein Thema von Händel*, Op. 26, bars 41–53**

II

In 1858, efforts to restore Handel's position within its Teutonic heritage climaxed with the establishment of a German Handel-Gesellschaft. Led by Friedrich Chrysander and Georg Gervinus, the undertaking recognized the need to safeguard a complete critical edition of the composer's oeuvre within its rightful territory. Claims on Handel, *jus soli*, had already been assumed in the literature, but an authoritative *Gesamtausgabe* (carried out with *deutscher Sorgfalt und Gründlichkeit*) would surely surpass other editions, namely those of England.[17] On the eve of the society's formal establishment, another setting on Handel's *Harmonious Blacksmith* appeared, this time by the north Saxon composer, Robert Volkmann. Familiarity with the melody had remained so fresh in Vienna at mid-century

[17] 'Ankündigung einer vollständigen Ausgabe von Händel's Werken', *Niederrheinische Musik-Zeitung* 4/19 (10 May 1856): 322–3.

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Ex. 7 Volkmann, *Variationen über ein Thema von Händel*, Op. 26, bars 54–59

such that one critic described Volkmann's theme as that which, 'Mozart, and later, I believe, *all* Viennese musicians have written' (emphasis mine).[18]

Volkmann's set contains an introduction, theme, seven variations and finale. The free, rhapsodic introduction initially dispenses with bar lines, later easing into a fluctuating metre, whereby episodes of Lisztian virtuosity alternate with the pensive introspection characteristic of Schumann's Eusebius. The improvisatory nature of the introduction is thinly disguised as an unmeasured prelude of a Baroque suite, although its harmonic language rests upon extemporizations on diminished-seventh sonorities. These tonal ambiguities resolve 40 bars later with the theme's arrival, heralded by the same sustained bass intonation featured in Handel's harpsichord suite over a century earlier. Above the low *sforzando* E, Volkmann presents the Air melody verbatim, yet the written out, repeated binary form is, in fact, a dialogue between the old and the new (Ex. 6).

Initially stated *sempre pianissimo*, the theme then yields to a reharmonization of the passage at *mezzo forte* with thick, sonorous chords and chromatic inner voices. The second four-bar phrase returns similarly at *pianissimo*, later yielding to a reiteration in bass octaves and a gradual crescendo to *forte*. The *poco ritardano* at the theme's close further attenuates stylistic differences between 1720 and 1856.

The seven variations that follow embrace the fantasy variation espoused by Schumann in works such as *Carnaval* and the *XII Études Symphoniques* two decades earlier. The first variation, Andante con moto, masks the theme in a free, semiquaver contrapuntal texture in which hints of the Blacksmith melody's rising third and fourth intervals appear (Ex. 7).

Variation two, Meno Mosso, plunges into a fretful C-sharp minor melody, interrupted by nervous, syncopated chords and bass interjections. The following Allegretto vivace (Var. 3) springs forth into an uplifting A major of dotted-quaver

[18] 'Das Thema dieser Variationen ist das bekannte Händel'sche, über welches Händel selbst, dann Mozart, und später, wie ich glaube, alle wiener [sic] Tonkünstler zusammen Variationen geschrieben haben', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 46/17 (8 May 1857): 201–2. To my knowledge, Mozart did not publish a setting of Handel's *Blacksmith* theme, although his unfinished keyboard suite (K399), is written in the style of Handel.

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Table 2 Parameters in Volkmann's *Handel Variations*

Section	Tempo Markings	Metre	Tonal Region
[Introduction]	Allegro – Andantino – Allegro	[blank] – c – $\frac{3}{4}$ – c – $\frac{5}{4}$ – c –	E minor
Theme	Adagio (♪ = 66)	**c**	E major
1	Andante con moto (𝅗𝅥 = 54)	**c**	E major
2	Meno mosso	**c**	C♯ minor
3	Allegretto vivace (𝅗𝅥. = 100)	$\frac{6}{8}$	A major
4	Un poco più tranquillo	$\frac{9}{8}$	A minor
5	Alla Marcia maestoso	**c**	C major
6	Andante con moto (𝅗𝅥 = 54)	**c**	F minor
7	Andantino (♩ = 80)	**c**	C♯ minor
	Allegro	**c**	E major
Finale	Allegro vivo	$\frac{6}{8}$ – $\frac{9}{8}$ – $\frac{6}{8}$ – $\frac{9}{8}$ – $\frac{6}{8}$	E major

rhythms in compound duple metre, while *Un poco più tranquillo* (Var. 4) broods pensively over a steady portamento pedal on A. In contrast, the successive Alla Marcia maestoso (which Liszt regarded as the 'masculine march'[19]) offers octave chords in unremitting dotted rhythms sweeping toward the outer peripheries of the keyboard in contrary motion, a gesture reminiscent of the muscular finale of Schumann's *XII Études Symphoniques*. Embedded into the variation is a motif from Handel's 'Hallelujah' chorus from the *Messiah*.[20] The March in C major serves as the dominant for the following *Andante con moto* in F minor. Here, Volkmann casts a fragment of the *Blacksmith* theme in a contrasting dirge-like melody in the bass harmonized by dense chords in the treble. After four bars the theme metamorphoses into an essentially new melody in which the only lingering connection to the theme is the perfect fourth. The seventh variation modulates to C-sharp minor before a short six-bar interlude (Allegro) returns to the home key of E major for the Finale. Similar to Schumann's variations, each of the through-composed variations flow into the next, *attacca*, separated by double bar-lines, varied tempo markings and measured pauses (ritardando or fermatas). Harmonically, Volkmann links each variation with a chain of keys related by thirds (Table 2).

The dialogic juxtapositions of Romantic and Baroque found in the theme's binary construction are magnified onto the whole of the work. A near complete absence of Baroque topics in the work's seven variations is accounted for in the massive Finale, which in notated length alone exceeds the previous seven variations by a single bar.[21] In the final section, the *Blacksmith* theme now finds clear

[19] Liszt to Volkmann, 'I would especially mention the Meno mosso on page 7, the magnificent masculine march (in C major), the following Variation (in F minor), then the charming Prelude (pages 12 and 13 with the coda in C-sharp minor) – finally the entire Finale, in a word, everything. Bravo my honored friend – You have produced a splendid work which praises its creator more than he thought himself capable'. Franz Liszt, *Liszt Letters in the Library of Congress*, trans and ed. Michael Short (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2003): 216.

[20] This observation is pointed out by the composer's nephew, Hans Volkmann, *Robert Volkmann: Sein Leben und seine Werke* (Leipzig: Hermann Seemann, 1903): 68.

[21] The Finale occupies 168 bars (bars 222–390), while the seven variations (including the eight-bar transitional interlude before the Finale) constitute 167 bars. The playing time of the Finale, however, is roughly a quarter of the entire work.

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Ex. 8 Volkmann, *Variationen über ein Thema von Händel*, Op. 26, bars 222–229

articulation against a revitalization of the homophonic, motoric style of the late Baroque.

A buoyant Allegro vivo in compound metre contains the theme serving as an independent and active walking bass (Ex. 8). Offsetting the melodic bass line are rhythmically stratified upper voices in rapid semiquavers. These passages feature relentless triadic figurations, scales, alternating notes against a common tone, tremolos and angular leaps with wide intervals, all recalling the idiomatic violin writing of Corelli and Vivaldi, whose styles Handel (and Bach) had synthesized into their compositional language. Harmonically, first inversion chords, sequences driving towards cadences and long pedal points generate the powerful harmonic tensions that encapsulate the dramatic expression of the Baroque style. Volkmann imbues the rich harmonic rhythm with chromatic dissonances and temporary but sudden shifts to the minor key, thus deepening the coloristic qualities of Handel's theme. Rhythmically, the Baroque hemiola, used to demarcate the ends of sections or to offer cadential expansions, appears before the theme's restatement. A final iteration of Handel's tune undergoes rhythmic augmentation before yielding to a dominant pedal (Ex. 9).

Volkmann made a special effort to transfer to the modern piano the distinctive, incisive articulation of the eighteenth-century harpsichord. Strategically placed staccato markings emphasize the sparkling brilliance of the keyboard's timbre, recreating its immediate tonal decay. Two-note slurs ensure tonal clarity in the rapid harmonic motion, while portato articulations display one of the few timbral nuances available to the performer of the instrument. Detached and legato markings similarly offer linear clarity within the hand. These neo-Baroque effects become modernized as well: deep bass octaves and arpeggiated figures glide across registers previously unavailable, and pedalled passages offer lush shades in sonority, demonstrating the orchestral fullness of the modern piano. Texture, articulation and register are no longer the primary means for communicating terraced gradations in volume, but explicit dynamic markings underline the expressive capabilities of the modern instrument. From the *fortissimo* arpeggiations of harmonic dissonances to the *mezzo forte* recurrence of the theme, the nineteenth-

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Ex. 9 Volkmann, *Variationen über ein Thema von Händel*, Op. 26, bars 331–338

and eighteenth-century performance traditions seem to merge in this finale. Such self-evident, historical references to the High Baroque not only displayed the composer's own intimate familiarity with repertoire and historical performance practices but his desire to root the present in the past.

On the whole, Volkmann's variations juxtapose points of contact between the present and past. On one hand, the work supports the ongoing aesthetic ideal of fantasy variations, pioneered by Schumann's *Carnaval* (1835) and the *XII Études Symphoniques* (1837) two decades earlier. Pursuing these ideals, elucidated by theorists A.B. Marx (1848) and Julius Schäffer (1860), Volkmann prioritized motivic development over mere thematic modifications, introspection over superficial displays of technique and cyclic procedures that unified its parts into a cohesive whole.[22] The manifestation of the 'psychological bond' between variations liberated the musical content from Handel's theme into a freely developed 'fantasy-variation' in which unbridled, inner expression assumed priority. Moreover, its

[22] Schumann once stated, 'Gone are the days when one amazed at a sugary figure, a yearning appoggiatura, an E-flat major running over the keyboard; now one want thoughts, inner context, poetic wholeness, everything bathed in fresh imagination'. (Die Zeiten, wo man über eine zuckrige Figur, einen schmachtenden Vorhalt, einen Es-dur-Läufer über die Klaviatur weg in Staunen geriet, sind vorbei; jetzt will man Gedanken, innern Zusammenhang, poetische Ganzheit, alles in frischer Phantasie gebadet); see Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1: 277. A.B. Marx and Julius Schäffer's views on the variation form are summarized in Elaine Sisman, 'Variations', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, www.oxfordmusic.com (accessed 22 June 2021).

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significantly loose adherence to the theme is notable, wherein each variation embodies its own distinct profile and temperament and plays upon the idea of contrast – in sum, rather resembling Schumann's *Carnaval* with its motley assortment of characters.[23] Volkmann's nearly complete disassociation from Handel in the first half of the work would establish a sufficiently wide aesthetic gulf to would throw into relief the recreation of the late Baroque style.

III

All of which begs the question: from where did Volkmann gain such inspiration? To be sure, the conventional *modus operandi* to evoke antiquity was through fugues and canons. Mendelssohn composed his *Six Preludes and Fugues*, Op. 35 (1836) and Organ Sonatas, Op. 65 (1845), and Schumann, in his 'contrapuntal' year of 1845, published *Six Studies in Canonic Form*, Op. 56, *Six Fugues on B-A-C-H* for organ, Op. 60, and *Four Fugues* for piano, Op. 72, among others. Prior to Volkmann's variations, Liszt issued his *Fantasy and Fugue on the Chorale* 'Ad nos, ad salutarem undam' (1852) and the first version of his *Präludium und Fuge über den Namen B-A-C-H* for organ (1855). The common denominator among these compositions, however, remained a preoccupation with the strictest sense of imitation, far different from Volkmann's newly founded interests.

The most significant cornerstone for Volkmann's familiarity with tradition came from his teacher in Leipzig, Carl Ferdinand Becker, with whom he studied from 1836 to 1839. The conservative Becker had also been influenced by Thibaut's conviction that one's craft should be rooted in tradition, and this view is amply evident in his roles in Leipzig as organist, manuscript collector, editor and pedagogue. Aside from serving as the city's highest-paid organist, at the Nicholaikirche, Becker made substantial contributions to the then-inchoate field of musical scholarship.[24] His articles regularly appeared in Schumann's *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* covering subjects from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century German church music and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century keyboard literature to theoretical treatises on counterpoint and fugues. In 1836, Becker was responsible for issuing the *Systematisch chronologische Darstellung der Musikalischen Literatur von der*

[23] That Volkmann knew how to compose in the strict Baroque variation style is evident in his *Rheinweinlied* variations composed four years earlier. The influence of Robert Schumann in Volkmann's Handel variations, however, certainly emerged during his student years in Leipzig from 1836 to 1839. Volkmann's teacher Carl Ferdinand Becker emphatically endorsed Schumann's *XII Etudes Symphoniques* upon its publication in 1837: 'diese Etüden sind prachtvoll, ganz eigentümlich, meisterhaft, offenbar neu und durchaus nicht mit andern zu vergleichen'; C.F. Becker, 'Florestan und Eusebius: zwölf Etuden', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 7 (Aug 1837): 50. According to Schumann's diaries, Volkmann met the composer twice in the following year: 'Montag früh Julius Becher, interessanter Mann, Robert Volkmann, junger Musiker, Walther Goethe u.kl. Schmidt früh bei mir' (28 February–5 March 1838), 'Von Besuchen: Sänger Schmidt – ein junger Volkmann, hübscher Junge, Clavierlehrer' (6 September 1838), see Robert Schumann, *Tagebücher 1836–1854*, ed. Gerd Nauhaus (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag f. Musik, 1971): vol. II: 51 and 65.

[24] Carl Ferdinand Becker served as organist at Leipzig's Peterskirche (1825–1837) and Nikolaikirche (1837–1854), see Annegret Rosenmüller, *Carl Ferdinand Becker (1804–1877): Studien zu Leben und Werk* (Hamburg: Bockel, 2000): 23.

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Frühesten bis auf die neueste Zeit (1836), a comprehensive four-part bibliography of musical writings initiated in 1792 by Johann Forkel.[25] His personal library, donated to the Stadtbibliothek Leipzig in 1856, numbered upwards of 1,420 books and writings, with printed editions and scores dating from as early as the sixteenth century. Rare manuscripts by J.S. Bach, Kuhnau and Hasse, among others, formed the basis of various writings, namely *Die Hausmusik in Deutschland in dem 16., 17. und 18. Jahrhunderte* (1837), the first study of the social-cultural practice and its attending literature, composers and performance.[26] As editor, Becker published two collections of selected keyboard works from Baroque masters, featuring an international array of composers such as Scarlatti, Pescetti, Muffat, Couperin, Kuhnau, Benda and Böhm. Without question, Becker's erudition facilitated his lectures on music history at the Leipzig Conservatory (where he taught organ) and his service as a co-founder of the Bach-Gesellschaft in 1850. Three years later, Becker was tasked to edit the third volume (*Clavierwerke*), a decision the committee made over Ignaz Moscheles.[27] With Becker, Volkmann studied harmony, composition, voice, as well as the early periods of music history, undoubtedly reinforcing his strong historicist leanings in the process.

The conservatism of Leipzig was certainly conducive to Volkmann's engagement with tradition. Mendelssohn's arrival in the city in 1834 introduced concerts at the Gewandhaus aimed to restore original performance practices, among which the most distinguished was his offering of Handel's *Israel in Egypt* in 1836. Becker, reviewing the performance, lauded Mendelssohn's fidelity (or 'purist approach') to the 'immortal Händel' through the reinstatement of the organ, as well as former cuts.[28] The German premiere of Mendelssohn's own oratorio, *Paulus*, in the

[25] Carl Ferdinand Becker, *Systematisch chronologische Darstellung der Musikalischen Literatur von der Frühesten bis auf die neueste Zeit* (Leipzig: Friese, 1836–39).

[26] Carl Ferdinand Becker, *Die Hausmusik in Deutschland in dem 16., 17. und 18. Jahrhunderte: Materialien zu einer Geschichte derselben, nebst einer Reihe Vocal-und Instrumental-Compositionen von H. Isaac, L. Senfl, L. Lemlin, W. Heintz, H.L. Haßler, J.H. Schein, H. Albert u.A. zur nähren Erläuterung* (Leipzig, 1840). This volume initially appeared as a series of articles in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* between 1838 and 1840: 'Zur Geschichte der Hausmusik in früheren Jahrhunderten (I): Die Claviersonate in Deutschland', *NZfM* 7 (1837): 25–6, 29–30, 33–4; '(II): Die Claviersuite', *NZfM* 7 (1837): 177–8, 181–2; '(III) Tonmalerai', *NZfM* 8 (1838): 45–7, 49–51; '(IV): Tonstücke für den Gesang', *NZfM* 9 (1838): 5–6, 13–14, 115–16; '(IVb): Tonstücke für Tasteninstrumente', *NZfM* 9 (1838): 115–16, 119–20; '(IVc): Tonstücke für die Laute', *NZfM* 9 (1838): 195–7, 199–200; '(V): Tonstücke für den Gesang. Zweiter Abschnitt', *NZfM* 10 (1839): 105–07, 109–10; '(VI): Die Applicatur auf den Tasteninstrumenten', *NZfM* 10 (1839): 121–2, 125–6; '(VII): Die Variationen', *NZfM* 12 (1830): 22–3, 25–6, 29–30.

[27] The choice of Becker over Moscheles as editor of Bach's *Clavierwerke* was a controversial one and reveals, to some degree, the esteem which the board bestowed upon Becker. Although details remain unknown, Moscheles immediately resigned from the Gesellschaft's board altogether, see Charlotte Moscheles and A.D. Coleridge, eds. *Recent Music and Musicians: As Described in the Diaries and Correspondence of Ignatz Moscheles* (New York: Henry Holt, 1873): 374–5.

[28] C.F. Becker, 'Händel's Israel und dessen Aufführung in Leipzig', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 5/41 (November 1836): 163. For other reviews of Handel's oratorios in Leipzig, see Becker, 'Aufführung des Messias in Leipzig', *NZfM* 7/42 (24 November 1837): 167–8; 'Händel's Judas Maccabäus', *NZfM* 8/26 (September 1840): 103; 'Das Oratorium "Jephta" von Händel in Mosel's Bearbeitung', *NZfM* 15/37 (5 November 1841): 145–6; and 'Händel's Oratorium: Samson', *NZfM* 19/25 (23 September 1843): 99–100.

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following year further demonstrated the success of revitalizing an older genre through the blending of idioms from Bach and Handel with modern instrumentation and techniques.

The three years spent in Leipzig established a foundation for Volkmann which would later be solidified by the friendship of yet another scholar, Gustav Nottebohm. After studies in Leipzig with Mendelssohn and Schumann (1840–46), Nottebohm had moved to Vienna and met Volkmann in 1854. The high esteem shared between the two north Germans remained until the end of their lives, such that even Brahms would remark that Volkmann always remained for Nottebohm, 'the only person with whom [he] was genuinely seriously and cordially connected'.[29] Prior to being engaged as editor of the Beethoven *Gesamtausgabe* for Breitkopf and Härtel in 1862, Nottebohm had begun his musicological career with publications on the Baroque keyboard suite. Initially published in 1855 and later edited in 1857, Nottebohm's articles expanded Becker's chapter on the subject in his *Die Hausmusik*.[30] Nottebohm regarded the suite as a significant historical genre and one of the most 'original creations'. In contrast to the later sonata, Nottebohm deemed the suite to be the first composite art form in history with its external features and sequence of characteristic dances corresponding to the small forms, as well as *individualisierende Richtungen* of pieces by Mendelssohn, Schumann and even Chopin.[31] Moreover, the unity achieved across the suite's dance movements found its best execution in J.S. Bach, who did not merely vary the thematic material of each movement, but developed the motives into entirely new content, such that their associations would be difficult to detect.[32] Volkmann's decision to blend genres of fantasy variation with the Baroque suite may well reflect in part Nottebohm's scholarship.

Another point of consideration is Volkmann's approach to historical performance. The textural brilliance emanating from the Finale's staccato markings recall the metallic plectrums of the harpsichord, an instrument that, at least in Austro-German lands, was regarded with disdain after the fortepiano's arrival in the final decades of the eighteenth century. The antiquated instrument held little fascination for Germany, unlike London and Paris where Moscheles's historical soirées on the harpsichord in 1837 sparked a revival. In 1855, the English pianist Charles Salaman presented a series of lecture recitals in London on the keyboard's

[29] Brahms wrote to Volkmann shortly after Nottebohm's death in November 1882: 'As I have always thought, you are after all the only person to whom Nottebohm was seriously and sincerely attached!'; *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters*, ed. Styra Avins and Josef Eisinger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 599.

[30] The fourth chapter of Becker's *Hausmusik* is titled 'Die Claviersuite'. That Volkmann and Nottebohm were both familiar with Becker's text is revealed in a letter dating in 1859 where the latter had loaned Volkmann's copy of Becker's *Hausmusik* to a mutual friend, see Hans Clauß, ed. *Gustav Nottebohms Briefe an Robert Volkmann: mit biografischer Einführung, Erläuterungen und anderen zeitgenössischen Zeugnissen* (Lüdenscheid: Rudolf Beucker, 1967): 24.

[31] Gustav Nottebohm, 'Über die Suite – ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Claviermusik', *Monatschrift für Theater und Musik* 8 (August 1855): 408–12.

[32] 'bei J.S. Bach ist überall das Bestreben bemerkbar, in den Themen die größte Mannigfaltigkeit und Verschiedenheit zu entwickeln, so dass bei ihm jede derartige Zusammengehörigkeit der Sätze wegfällt und jeder Satz als ein in seinem eigenen Inhalte für sich bestehendes Stück erscheint'; see Nottebohm, 'Über die Suite – ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Claviermusik: zweite Folge' *Monatschrift für Theater und Musik* 7 (July 1857): 343.

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history and development. One anonymous correspondent found the lecture performances of great interest and was particularly pleased to hear Salaman perform the original *Blacksmith* variations on Handel's own instrument at the close of the concert. To his Viennese readers he posed: 'What had become of [our] old keyboards? Where are their ruins?'[33] Perhaps this article, in addition to Nottebohm's own discussion of the Baroque suite three months later in the same journal, encouraged in some part Volkmann's return to the century-old Air.

If Volkmann wished to offer an alternative route to musical historicism, attention to the retrospective Finale was largely eclipsed by the allure of the fantasy-like variations. The work won high praise, though few mentioned the Finale's replication of the late Baroque style. Pleased with Handel's revival, Hans von Bülow disclosed that the F minor and C-sharp variations were his favourites for their 'sublime' and 'original' qualities, thus underscoring his attraction to the work's Romantic underpinnings.[34] The Finale, however, merely struck the virtuoso as a festive splendour with long-winded (*langatmig*) flow, one which would not soon be replicated. In 1857, Eduard Hanslick offered a glimpse of Volkmann's contribution vis-à-vis contemporary variations, defining the work with superlative terms:

> The most significant [work] that has been brought by native forces in the field of keyboard music is probably Robert Volkmann's Variations on a Theme by Handel … [T]he treatment of variation in recent times has become richer and freer … Works such as Schumann's C sharp minor Variations (op. 13) and Variations for Two Pianos, the variations by Brahms [Op. 21 from 1857], Volkmann and others show how much this form has gained freedom of movement and characteristic deepening. We indeed see the extreme of this freedom occasionally striking in Volkmann: the variations are all too removed from its theme. Whereas in the past every variation was so anxious to retain the number of bars and the harmonic outline of the subject such that the listener felt burdened with the monotony of this faithfulness, the new school emancipated itself too boldly from the theme and hardly allowed it to resonate for many pages. Instead of being the real reason for the whole performance, the theme becomes a mere pretext for the orator to indulge in the most remote things.[35]

Neglecting the finale entirely in his review, Hanslick thus emphasized Volkmann's pioneering of a new level of the fantasy variation.

Liszt, to whom Volkmann had dedicated his Piano Trio, Op. 5, six years earlier, joined the chorus of delight for the composer's *Blacksmith* variations:

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[33] 'Was wird eigentlich aus den alten Clavieren, und wo bleiben zuletzt ihre Trümmer? Man hört nie, dass sie zu Brennholz verbraucht würden, und doch werden sie selbst in den kleinsten Winkelstädten von neu fabricirten verdrängt. Tausende von neuen Pianofortes werden jährlich verschickt, vor denen sie Raum machen müssen. In welchem Eckchen von Europa stecken nun die Claviere, auf denen wir unsere Großmütter die Sonaten von Pleyel spielen hörten?' Anon., 'Correspondez', *Monatschrift für Theater und Musik* 5 (May 1855): 267–8.

[34] Hans Volkmann, *Robert Volkmann: sein Leben und seine Werke* (Leipzig, 1903): 70–71. Volkmann had met von Bülow in Pest during the latter's first concert tour there in the summer of 1853, where he had performed the composer's Piano Trio, Op. 5. Bülow later issued a modernized edition of the 'Air' movement by Schirmer for American audiences, complete with detailed phrasings, fingering, articulations and dynamics in 1880.

[35] Eduard Hanslick, *Aus dem Concertsaal: Kritiken und Schilderungen aus den letzten 20 Jahren des Wiener Musiklebens* (Vienna, 1870): 137.

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> I should like to express to you herewith guiltily, my sincere thanks not only for the friendly token of your sending of your 'Variationen über ein Thema von Händel', but especially for my joy at this excellent and in all its essentials, as well as in its entire form, exceptionally successful work. In my opinion, it is a long time since such a rich, imaginative, original and beautifully formed piano piece has been published and I have played it frequently and with true passion to my young Weimar pianists … . If it is not inappropriate for me to single out details from such a completely rounded work, I would especially mention the *Meno mosso* on page 7, the magnificent *masculine* march (in C major), the following Variation (in F minor), then the charming Prelude (pages 12 and 13 with the coda in C-sharp minor) – finally the *entire Finale*, in a word, everything. Bravo my honored friend – You have produced a splendid work which praises its creator more than he thought himself capable.[36]

Not everyone was convinced by the artistic licenses taken by Volkmann in his treatment of Handel's Air. The work furrowed the brow of Arrey von Dommer, critic of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, as he was unable to 'discover in it a clear reason for what Volkmann has developed from [the theme]. I have not succeeded in clearly understanding the actual development of the variations and their internal relations to each other and to the main idea.'[37] Nonetheless, the work's popularity continued into the early twentieth century, as even the young pianist, Béla Bartók, performed the work on tour.[38]

IV

In 1861, Brahms's *Variations on a Theme by Handel* (in B-flat) emerged from his self-directed studies of fugues, canons and early music: a separate route from previous homages to Handel and the Baroque. Discreetly (and probably deliberately) choosing a lesser known 'Air' from Handel's second collection of *Suites de Clavecin* from 1733 (Harpsichord Suite No. 1 in B-flat major, HWV434), Brahms distanced himself from the popular *Blacksmith* lineage, perhaps in a bid to redefine the Handelian tradition. Whether Brahms knew of Volkmann's variations is unclear, although a letter to Clara Schumann in 1856 is revealing: 'When you see Volkmann, write me about it. He is very talented. Do you know his B-flat minor Trio and A minor Quartet?'[39]

Realizing the relative obscurity of the Air theme, Brahms directed his publishers to the exact page number in Chrysander's second volume of the Handel

[36] Liszt, *Liszt Letters in the Library of Congress*, 216.

[37] 'ich bin nicht im Stande, darin eine deutliche Veranlassung zu dem, was Volkmann daraus entwickelt hat, zu entdecken … Es ist mir nicht gelungen, den eigentlichen Entwickelungsgang der Variationen und ihre inneren Beziehungen zu einander und zum Hauptgedanken klar zu verstehen'; *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 46/17 (8 May 1857): 201–2.

[38] David Cooper, *Béla Bartók* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015): 34.

[39] 'Wenn sie Volkmann sehen, dann schreiben Sie mir doch davon. Der hat doch viel Talent, kennen Sie sein B moll-Trio und A moll-Quartett? Lassen Sie sich das Trio von ihm vorspielen'; Berthold Litzmann, ed., *Clara Schumann – Johannes Brahms: Briefe aus den Jahren 1853–1896* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1989): vol. I: 174. Brahms and Volkmann did not meet until 1867 when the former made his début in Pest. Brahms had asked Nottebohm to introduce him to Volkmann; Adam Gellen, *Brahms und Ungarn* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 2011): 229.

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Ex. 10a Handel, Suite No. 1, HWV434, 'Air', bars 1–8



Ex. 10b Brahms, *Handel Variations*, Op. 24, bars 1–8

Gesamtsausgabe.[40] Brahms preserved intact the embellishments of Handel's theme, and interwove visions of the past and present across 25 variations: strict canon at the octave and in contrary motion (var. 6) and invertible counterpoint (var. 8) are answered by chromaticism and polyrhythms (var. 9); hollowed fifths and sixths in the tenor recall echoes of the *Waldhorn* (vars. 7, 12, 17, 18); canon (var. 16) is preceded by a Hungarian *Csardas* (vars. 13 and 14); and an idyllic Siciliano (var. 19) and Baroque musette (var. 22) pave the way towards a Beethovenian fugal climax. Notwithstanding this wide range of styles, Brahms scrupulously preserved the binary structures and formal outlines of Handel's original variations. Handel's theme and five variations consists of two repeated four-bar phrases, in which

[40] Brahms to Breikopf & Härtel (1 April 1862); Johannes Brahms, *Briefwechsel* (Berlin, 1921; repr. Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1974): vol. XIV: 65.

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the first ends on an imperfect cadence (Ex. 10a), imitated by Brahms's variations (Ex. 10b).

The second begins on the dominant and modulates back to the tonic, a scheme which similarly dictates Brahms's variations. Twenty-four of Brahms's 25 variations are cast in two repeated four-bar sections (or two eight-bar sections); the exception is Variation 15, which appends an additional bar to the second phrase.

As Elaine Sisman has elucidated, Brahms's adherence to the original structure was based on the conviction that the variations should be strict and pure with priority given to the bass (a reference to a fixed structure).[41] His rubric had been deduced from models given by the 'ancients', no less than Bach, Handel and even Beethoven. Disparaging his contemporaries' use of the fantasy-variations with their deviations from the theme, Brahms instead furthered the aesthetic experience from his predecessors by returning to the original Baroque approach to variation form:

> In a theme for [a set of] variations, it is almost only the bass that actually has any meaning for me. But this is sacred to me, it is the firm foundation on which I then build my stories … If I vary only the melody, then I cannot easily be more than clever or graceful, or, indeed, [if] full of feeling, deepen a pretty thought. On the given bass, I invent something actually new, I discover new melodies in it, I create.[42]

Subjecting the works of Schumann, Herzogenberg and Nottebohm to the category of fantasy-variations, Brahms could well have described Volkmann's variations as such, as his variations indeed diverge from the theme into a barely recognizable 'fantasy'.[43] Yet if Brahms knew of Volkmann's work, he could have recognized that there was a limit to how far Volkmann was willing to return to the eighteenth century. Brahms thus advanced the Baroque into the foreground of his creation, modernizing techniques of fugal writing, imitation, canon and historic genres for the present. His inclusion of the fugue similarly surpassed the historicity of his predecessors. In light of the contrast with Volkmann's work, it is no wonder that Brahms was adamant about publishing his *Liebslingwerk*, one which he was confident would spearhead new aesthetic direction for the variation form. Letters to Breitkopf & Härtel reveal the composer's uncustomary persistence despite the publishers' initial reluctance to print the work. With its eventual publication in 1862, Brahms thus established a new lineage embracing the two pillars of German musical history from Bach and Beethoven, one which would cast new horizons for future composers.

V

The success of Brahms's neo-Baroque variations rested on the inclusion of a fugue, as well as the return to formal-outline variations.[44] The fugue, apart from residing

[41] Elaine Sisman, 'Brahms and the Variation Canon', *Nineteenth-Century Music* 14/2 (1990): 132–53.

[42] Letter to Adolf Schubring, February 1869; Johannes Brahms, *Briefwechsel* (Berlin, 1915; repr. Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1974): vol. XIII: 217–18; English translation provided in Sisman, 'Brahms and the Variation Canon', 134.

[43] Johannes Brahms, *Briefwechsel* (Berlin, 1907): I: 7–8; cited in Sisman, 'Brahms and the Variation Canon', 135.

[44] One composer directly influenced by Brahms's *Handel Variations* was Josef Rheinberger (1839–1901). After meeting Brahms in 1864, the composer dedicated to him

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Table 3 Select Variations and Fugues, post-1862

Date	Composer	Work
1864	Carl Reinecke	*Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel*, Op. 84
1877	Antonín Dvořák	*Symphonic Variations*, Op. 78
1883	Ferruccio Busoni	*Variationen und Fuge in freier Form über Chopin's C moll Präludium*, for piano
1885	Ignaz Paderewski	*Variations and Fugue on an Original Theme*, Op. 11
1890	Emanuel Moór	*Variations and Fugue on a Hungarian Theme*, Op. 24
1897	Ernst von Dohnányi	*Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Emma Gruber*, Op. 4
1903	Ignaz Paderewski	*Variations and Fugue*, Op. 23
1903	Max Reger	*Variations and Fugue on an Original Theme in F-sharp minor*, Op. 73, for organ
1904	Max Reger	*Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Bach*, Op. 81
1904	Max Reger	*Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Beethoven*, Op. 86 for two pianos
1912	Sergey Lyapunov	*Variations and Fugue on a Russian Theme*, Op. 49
1923	George Chadwick	*Theme, Variations and Fugue* for organ and orchestra
1941	Igor Markevitch	*Variazioni e fuga su un tema di Haendel*
1945	Benjamin Britten	*The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra: Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Purcell*

primarily in the domain of organ literature, had largely disappeared after its placement in multi-movement works from the classical Viennese school of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Brahms's reinstatement of the 'child of ancient aberration', particularly with its motivic economy, use of inversion, augmentation and transposition, altogether capped by a powerful Beethovenian rhetoric in its grand design, stood at the end of a lineage of similar variation sets: Bach's *Passacaglia and Fugue* in C minor (BWV 582) and Beethoven's *Eroica* Variations, Op. 35, and *Diabelli* Variations, Op. 120, for example. This combination of Baroque forms was consequently taken up by a number of musicians in the latter third of the nineteenth century (see Table 3).

Emanuel Moór's *Variations and Fugue on a Hungarian Theme*, Op. 24 (c. 1890) affords one case study of a later composer clearly in the shadow of Brahms's work. For Moór, Brahms's variation and fugue offered one genre to showcase his grasp of the prevailing Austro-German model, while advocating for his national heritage.[45] Born in the Kingdom of Hungary four years before the 1867

his *Zwei Klaviervorträge*, Op. 45 (1870), wherein the second piece ('Capriccioso') sets the chorus 'O calumny, on virtue waiting' from Act 2 of Handel's *Alexander's Balus*. The theme came from the newly published volume of Chrysander's *Handel Ausgabe* (XXXIII Alexander Balus, July 1870) and was consequently set to music in autumn of that year; see Josef Gabriel Rheinberger, *Briefe und Dokumente seines Lebens*, ed. Harald Wanger and Hans-Josef Irmen (Vaduz: Prisca, 1984): vol. IV: 10–11.

[45] Born in the Kingdom of Hungary four years before the 1867 *Ausgleich*, Moór numbered among Volkmann's students in the late 1870s. Upon completing his training in organ, piano, and composition, Moór continued studies with Bruckner (presumably organ) and Anton Door (piano) in Vienna, see Dorothy Gershing, *Emanuel Moór: (1863–1931): eine Einführung in Leben und Werk des Pianisten, Komponisten und Erfinders; Vortrag und Konzert am 19. April 2005 im Henrik-Moor-Saal* (Fürstenfeldbruck:

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Ausgleich, Moór spent his teenage years as a student of Volkmann at the Budapest Academy in the 1870s. After years of teaching and concertizing as a pianist, Moór turned to composition. As documented by the Australian-English pianist, Max Pirani (1898–1975), Moór purportedly met Brahms during a visit to Budapest and Austria in the latter half of 1889:

> Between these excursions to his native land, he made the acquaintance of Brahms, who took great interest in the young composer, looking over many of his larger works. Anita [Moór's wife] described Brahms as being 'perfectly charming' to Moór, who spent several mornings with the master. The latter unbent to the extent of dining with the Moórs in Vienna … It was with no little reluctance that the Moórs tore themselves away from Austria; in cementing family ties, and in widening Moór's professional orbit, the visit of a few weeks had accomplished more than had been anticipated.[46]

Although the Brahms literature contains no evidence or mention of such a meeting, Brahms indeed toured Budapest each summer from 1886 to 1891, with the exception of 1889 which was spent in Bad Ischl. If Moór missed the composer in Budapest, his visit to Budapest was not without gain: David Popper performed Moór's Cello Sonata, Op. 22, and the composer dedicated his Third Violin Sonata in A major, Op. 23, to Jenö Hubay.[47] Both musicians were among the most intimate members of Brahms's Hungarian circle between 1886 and 1891, offering a plausible connection between Moór and Brahms. Furthermore, a proof-copy of the Moór's Violin Sonata Op. 23, later published by Breitkopf und Härtel, located in the Westminster Public Library in London, contains a revealing note that the markings in 'blue pencil' were made by Brahms in Vienna, 1889 (Fig. 1). If such a claim had been concocted by either Pirani or Moór himself, it is clearly evident that Brahms was a lionized figure worthy of emulation.

Presumably months, if not weeks, after meeting with Brahms, Moór began drafts of his *Variations and Fugue on a Hungarian Theme*, Op. 24, in December 1889.[48] Comprising a 26 bar theme, 13 variations and fugal finale, the work conflates the rhapsodic, Hungarian-Gypsy *verbunkos* style within formal-outline variations culminating into a neo-Baroque fugal finale.

The variations begin with a pianissimo E in the low bass, imitating both Volkmann, Moscheles and indeed, Handel's use of the introductory note (Exx. 11a–d). The intonation perhaps signals an aural division from preceding material (the original multi-movement suite of Handel and Volkmann's improvisatory introduction), although Moscheles and Moór's variations are independent sets. Nonetheless, its appearance denotes the common thread shared among these variations.

The shift from Handel is immediately made apparent by the choice of a Hungarian theme (Ex. 12). Moór's subject consists of three six-bar phrases, with

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Kester-Haeusler-Stiftung, 2005). Also cited in Monika Kornberger's article 'Moór, Emanuel' in *Oesterreichisches Musiklexikon* online, www.musiklexikon.ac.at/ml/musik_M/Moor_Emanuel.xml (accessed 15 June 2021).

[46] Max Pirani, *Emanuel Moór* (London: P.R. Macmillan, 1959): 26.

[47] Both Hubay and David Popper were members of the Budapest Quartet and premiered with Brahms his Piano Trio in C minor, Op. 101, as well as the Violin Sonata in D minor, Op. 103 in 1888.

[48] These drafts are located in the Westminster Public Library in London.

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Ex. 11a **Moór, *Variations and Fugue on a Hungarian Theme*, Op. 24, bars 1–2**



Ex. 11b **Volkmann, *Variations on a Theme by Händel*, Op. 26, bars 41–42**

a final eight-bar conclusion. The first six-bar phrase, 'A' (bars 2–7), is followed by a second phrase, 'B' (bars 8–13), which is characterized by a sudden modulation to the relative major. The second and third phrase are alike, with the second iteration (bars 14–19) returning to E minor. The fourth phrase (bars 20–27) A′ appends an additional two bars to close the theme. Thus, two 'A' sections in tonic E minor flank middle sections (B) in the major key, creating a mirrored, ABBA form (Table 4). Although Moór does not identify the specific melody, the ABBA form was frequently used in Hungarian folk tunes.[49]

Moór follows this structural pattern for each of the subsequent 13 variations, all of which are exactly 26 bars. Harmonically, the variations also adhere to the minor to major scheme, with the exceptions of Variations 7 and 8 (both in E major) and the Variation 10, which is highly chromatic.

Within this framework, Moór grafts elements of his personal style with the Gypsy *verbunkos* style. As a virtuoso pianist,[50] Moór displays difficult octave runs and consecutive double intervals in rapid motion. The characteristic Gypsy augmented seconds (raised fourth and seventh scale degrees) radiate a distinct

[49] Benjamin Suchoff, *Béla Bartók*: *A Celebration* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2004): 136.

[50] Moór was among the earliest pianists recorded on phonograph during Theo Wangemann's travels in Europe. Hired by Thomas Edison, Wangemann also recorded Brahms in Vienna on 2 December 1889. Moór's recording of a Hungarian melody can be heard online: www.nps.gov/edis/learn/photosmultimedia/prince-bismarck-and-count-moltke-before-the-recording-horn.htm (accessed on 21 July 2021). The website suggests the excerpt may be the Variations, Op. 24 performed, but it must have been a different Hungarian theme.

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Ex. 11c **Moscheles, *Variations on a Theme by Handel*, Op. 29, bars 1–2**



Ex. 11d **Handel, Keyboard Suite No. 5, HWV430, Air, bar 1**

modal quality throughout the entire work, particularly in Variation 12 (Ex. 13). Moreover, Variation 9 features the *lassú*, the somber Hungarian dance characterized by double dots (Ex. 14).

Moór may have noted that the centre of Brahms's variations (variation 13) was the *Csardas*, the Hungarian national dance wherein the dignified *lassú* is followed by the wild *friska* (Ex. 15). Brahms's sombre dance is cast in plaintive, declamatory sixths in the minor mode, which Jonathan Bellman describes as the crying, vocal character of Hungarian folk tunes.[51] Restatements of the theme in the major mode – also common in Hungarian vocal music – are used as well, in addition to melodic ornamentation, evocative of the spontaneously improvised quality of a Gypsy orchestra.

Earlier drafts reveal that Moór initially conceived an improvisatory passage, *Lento capriccioso*. The reason for its exclusion in the publication is unclear, although it may have hindered the regular six-bar phrase structure (Fig. 2).

Variation 8, one of the major-key variations (Ex. 16), temporarily sheds references to the Gypsy style and instead borrows Brahmsian gestures: the ubiquitous two-against-three cross-rhythms, melodies in the tenor register and framing the melody in thirds, fifths and sixths, suggesting horn calls found also in variations 7, 12 and 17 of Brahms's *Handel Variations*.

In the concluding fugue we find Moór's attempt to master the difficult climax that crowned Brahms's own variations. To be sure, a Baroque fugue appeared anachronistic, if not incompatible with the free, improvised nature of the Gypsy style. Yet here Moór transformed his theme so that it could conjure up the Baroque. Marked *non legato*, the subject begins with octave leaps in the tonic

[51] Jonathan Bellman, *The Style Hongrois in the Music of Western Europe* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993): 111.

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Ex. 12 **Moór, *Variations and Fugue on a Hungarian Theme*, Op. 24, bars 1–26**

Table 4 **Moór, *Variations and Fugue on a Hungarian Theme*, Op. 24 – Tonal Organization of Theme**

	A	b	b	A′
	i: E minor	major	major	i: E minor
bars	1–7	8–13	14–29	20–27

followed by the dominant, gestures alluding to the theme's opening octave motion (Ex. 17). Moór's three-voice fugue – a nod to Beethoven's *Eroica* finale, also in three voices – begins with a theme that follows the same intervallic contours of Beethoven's theme.

Moór's subject follows the Baroque practice of starting the subject with long rhythmic durations before yielding to a semiquaver *fuga* ('flight'). The angular melodic contours of the tail and countersubject – specifically the recurring minor sixth interval – situate the listener in the eighteenth century. Especially striking is that the tonal answer beginning four bars later is transposed to the *subdominant*, rather than the expected dominant (Ex. 16). Surely Moór was familiar with the prescribed convention of dominant answers, but again, he may have been looking at some historical examples. Rare as they are, subdominant answers do occur, for example, in Bach's *French Overture in B minor*, BWV 831; Beethoven's String Quartet, Op. 131; and the second of Schumann's seven *Klavierstücke in Fughettenform*, Op. 126.

This seeming *faux pas*, however, allows the answer to circle back to the tonic – given the subject's preference for the dominant harmony. As the English theorist Ebenezer Prout argued in his treatise on fugues (1891):

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Ex. 13 **Moór, *Variations and Fugue on a Hungarian Theme*, Op. 24, bars 314–329**



Ex. 14 **Moór, *Variations and Fugue on a Hungarian Theme*, Op. 24, bars 245–621**

> Whenever, in a subject which ends in the key of the tonic, particular prominence is given to dominant harmony, especially near the beginning of the subject, the answer may be in the subdominant key, in order to conform to the important general principle that dominant harmony in the subject should be replied to by tonic harmony in the answer.[52]

After an episode of non-thematic material, Moór's working out of the fugue begins with a restatement of the subdominant answer, followed by a second entry on the

[52] Ebenezer Prout, *Fugue* (London: Augener, 1891): 26–30.

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Ex. 15 **Brahms, *Handel Variations* Op. 24, bars 113–116**



Ex. 16 **Moór, *Variations and Fugue on a Hungarian Theme*, Op. 24, bars 210–219**

mediant, G. Then, both the subject and answer are presented in augmentation before an unexpected climax in C major – undoubtedly alluding to the contrasting major key taken from the B section of the original theme. Thus, Moór continues to preserve the overarching harmonic scheme even in the fugal finale. A break in the counterpoint shifts to brilliant passagework in the triumphant major tonality before lapsing again into counterpoint with the subject appearing in bass octaves at the coda. The subject then gives way to a dominant pedal point, over which a 'stretto' (bars 443–444) condenses the subject and answer's octave motifs into two bars. Finally, the closing bars restate an altered and augmented subject in a chordal fashion, and like Volkmann's example, conclude with the familiar yet archaic Picardy third (Ex. 18).

The *fuga obbligato* strictness and rigour of Brahms's neo-Baroque fugue with its economic use of two-note motifs contrasts with Moór's free approach. In Brahms's case, every rhythmic and intervallic motif of the fugue, including the episodes, uses material derived from the subject or countersubject, altered in inversion, augmentation, transposition, or doubling of the theme in thirds, sixths and octaves. In Moór's case, the fugue features augmentation of the subject, but the intervening

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Ex. 17 **Moór, *Variations and Fugue on a Hungarian Theme*, Op. 24, bars 366–370**



Ex. 18 **Moór, *Variations and Fugue on a Hungarian Theme*, Op. 24, bars 443–457**

episodes betray a tenuous grasp of the original subject material. Nonetheless, though Moór's inspiration depended on a Hungarian theme, the fugal subject and its working out suggest a young composer attempting to pattern his music after successful models within the canon.

VI

The comparison of these variations before and after Brahms's *Variations on a Theme by Handel* demonstrate two sides of a narrative. The individualism of Volkmann's variations compared to Brahms's Op. 24 reveals gradual striving towards originality based on close study of tradition. Continuing in the popular tradition of the *Blacksmith* tune, Volkmann straddled two separate aesthetics: on one side, the Romantic fantasy variation, and the other, the rhythmic, textural and timbral parameters of the late Baroque. While the Finale of his work displayed unprecedented fidelity to tradition, the allure of the earlier fantasy variations overwhelmed these historicist achievements. With Brahms's set in 1861, neo-Baroque expression reached new heights, with canonic and fugal writing in addition to a broad range of Baroque styles. By infusing his 25 variations with these techniques within the strict variation model of Bach and Beethoven, he demonstrated an unprecedented recommitment to history and revalidation of the Baroque for his own time. Brahms's choice of an obscure tune from a separate collection of Handel's keyboard suites established distance between him and his predecessors, and his close study of the Baroque produced a composition that freely and effectively juxtaposed the eighteenth-century past with the musical present.

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Looking forward, the rigour of Brahms's variations brought composers such as Moór to re-evaluate tradition. Tracing the historic lineage from Bach and Beethoven to Brahms through the fugal finale, Moór found Brahms's *Handel Variations* a strong model, rather than the free variation approach of his teacher Volkmann. Although the rigour of Moór's fugal finale does not measure up to that of Brahms, the entire work is indicative of the influence Brahms held for future composers, and by extension, how the 'Brahmsian fog' spread beyond its Viennese centre.[53] In Moór's footsteps followed Carl Reinecke, Ferruccio Busoni, Ignaz Paderewski, Ernst von Dohnányi, Max Reger and the Russian Sergey Lyapunov, all of whom produced variations and fugues. Other, non-keyboard examples would include Dvořák's *Symphonic Variations* (1877), George Chadwick's *Theme, Variations and Fugue* for organ and orchestra (1923) and, considerably later, Benjamin Britten's *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* (1945) and *Gemini* Variations for flute, violin, and/or two pianos, Op. 73 (1964). Far from a complete list, these examples attest to the secure establishment of Brahms's *Handel Variations* for posterity. Although these works by Volkmann and Moór have since fallen from the repertoire, they nevertheless offer insights into revisiting history in order to comprehend the ever-changing present.

[53] See Walter Frisch, 'The "Brahms Fog": On Analyzing Brahmsian Influences at the Fin de Siècle', in *Brahms and His World*, rev. ed. Walter Frisch and Kevin Karnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009): 117.

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