



CHAMPS HILL
RECORDS

CHACONNE

Sofya Gulyak
piano

Bach | Casella | Handel | Busoni | Liszt | Nielsen | Gubaidulina



I FOREWORD

The inspiration to record the chaconnes came to me a few years ago. I already had a couple of chaconnes in my repertoire and wanted to find more – and I've really enjoyed pulling together this programme which focuses on one genre, but features music from a diverse range of musical eras. I am particularly excited to include some unique and less familiar pieces that are rarely performed. I would like to express my gratitude to Mary and David Bowerman for the opportunity to record again at Champs Hill, to Patrick Allen for his excellent work, and to everyone at Champs Hill who helped me turn a mere idea into reality.

Lolita Gulyak

TRACK LISTING

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 1 | JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750) / FERRUCCIO BUSONI (1866–1924)
Chaconne in D minor BWV1004 | 14'58 |
| 2 | GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685–1759)
Chaconne in G major HWV435 | 10'04 |
| 3 | GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL / FRANZ LISZT (1811–1886)
Sarabande and Chaconne from Handel's "Almira" S.181 | 13'14 |
| 4 | FERRUCCIO BUSONI
Toccata: Prelude, Fantasy and Chaconne BV287 | 10'02 |
| 5 | CARL NIELSEN (1865–1931)
Chaconne Op.32 | 09'14 |
| 6 | ALFREDO CASELLA (1883–1947)
Variations on a Chaconne Op.3 | 06'37 |
| 7 | SOFIA GUBAIDULINA (b.1931)
Chaconne | 09'15 |

Total playing time: 73'24

Produced, engineered and edited by Patrick Allen
Photographs by Irina Gryzunova
Mastered by Dave Rowell
Recorded from 30th March to 1st April 2016 in the Music Room, Champs Hill, West Sussex, UK

Executive Producer for Champs Hill Records: Alexander Van Ingen
Label Manager for Champs Hill Records: Joanna Wilson

PROGRAMME NOTE

While some sources suggest that the chaconne was originally a lively dance imported to Europe from South America in the 16th century, as a compositional form it became most firmly established early in the 18th century, during the so-called Baroque era. Among the chaconne's distinguishing features are its use of a ground bass – that is, a bass line which is constantly repeated with changing or evolving harmonies built upon it – and its being, typically, in triple time. Perhaps the most celebrated example is JS Bach's *Chaconne in D minor*, originally the final movement of his *Second Partita for Solo Violin*, and today an established pinnacle of the violin repertory. Indeed, it is so substantial a movement that often it is performed as a self-standing work. Lasting a little over a quarter of an hour, Bach's *Chaconne* is based on a descending motif – D-C-B flat-A. So skilful is Bach's harmonic and contrapuntal dexterity – all the more striking for being achieved on a single-stringed instrument – that the piece evolves naturally into three parts: an intense opening section in the home minor key, then a more sweet-toned major section, and finally a return to the minor in a more reflective style.

What we have here, though, is not the work as Bach originally conceived it, but its transcription – or rather, re-invention – by the great pianist-composer Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924). As a boy Busoni received his earliest music education from his father, Fernando, a Tuscan clarinetist of raw talent and of uncertain temper. Yet, either through pure luck or a stroke of insight amounting to genius, Fernando – whose own favoured repertoire, the composer recalled, included “fantasias on *Il Trovatore* and the *Carnival of Venice*” – realised that his musically talented son would thrive on a diet of Bach, this “in a country [said Busoni] in which the master was rated little higher than Carl Czerny”. When Busoni gave his first public recital, not yet aged ten, in Vienna on 8 February 1876, he was warmly praised by the critic Eduard Hanslick, who claimed that Busoni's own works demonstrated “a remarkably

serious, masculine mind, which indicates a dedicated study of Bach". The following year Busoni encountered Franz Liszt, another composer noted for his Bach transcriptions, who admired the boy's talent.

Yet it was not until Busoni was in his twenties that he was first moved to transcribe Bach for the piano, so beginning a series of transcriptions eventually published as the Bach-Busoni editions. The initial impulse for making this transcription, it appears, was a suggestion by his pupil Kathi Petri (mother of Egon Petri, who would become another Busoni pupil) after they had heard a Prelude and Fugue performed on the organ at Thomaskirche, Bach's old haunt in Leipzig. According to Busoni's first English biographer, Edward J Dent, the experience – both of that performance and of making his first Bach transcription – had a profound effect on Busoni's own piano playing, as he now cultivated a particular sound: "it can be said unhesitatingly that the louder Busoni played the more beautiful the sonority of his tone became". In short, Busoni strived to evoke the majestic sound of the organ, and not only in his transcriptions of Bach's organ works.

By the time Busoni made his now much-celebrated arrangement of Bach's *Chaconne* in 1893, he was convinced that Bach's intentions could not be fully realised by the apparently meagre resources of a solo violin (even though it was precisely for that instrument that Bach composed the work!); Busoni therefore re-imagined the work as if it had been written for organ, then transcribed that hypothetical version for piano. Not only does Busoni's version spell out some of Bach's implied harmonies, and increase the music's sonority by, for instance, transferring much of it down an octave or spreading chords across the bass clef, but it also increases its virtuosic element with rapid octave passagework and other pianistic effects. The result is a stunning display of sonorous virtuosity that has firmly established itself in the repertoire of pianists around the world.

One might be tempted to consider the *Chaconne in G major* by George Frideric Handel (1685–1759) as performed here a more 'authentic' work. First published as a single-movement 'suite' in a pirated edition printed in London in around 1727, the G major *Chaconne* has since been identified by most scholars as an early work, probably dating from Handel's years working in Hamburg in the first decade of that century. It is something of a Cinderella among Handel's keyboard works, recently dismissed by one scholar as "an overlong and obviously early Chaconne", and without even a definitive version; indeed, the work appears to have originally been intended as a work for harpsichord and orchestra, though no full orchestral score has survived of that version. Yet Handel himself continued to perform it as a concerto well into his successful London career. And as a solo keyboard work, notwithstanding its snooty dismissal by musicologists, it has been beloved by several pianists, including Edwin Fischer and Sviatoslav Richter. Certainly the charm of its increasingly sparkling variations is heightened by the not unexpected but nonetheless highly effective pathos of its contrasting minor-key *Adagio* ninth variation.

We stay with Handel for the next piece, albeit as re-imagined by Franz Liszt (1811–86). The Hungarian's *Sarabande and Chaconne from Handel's opera Almira* (those dances originally appearing in reverse order early in the opera) was written in 1879 for his English student Walter Bache. Liszt had last made a transcription of Baroque repertoire some twelve years earlier: but whereas that transcription of Bach's *Fantasy and Fugue in G minor*, BWV 542, had been faithful to the text, Liszt's treatment of Handel in this late work is much more free, using Handel's *Sarabande* as a basis for his own variations and achieving a level of late-Romantic sonority that anticipates Busoni's style of 'transcription'. Curiously, in Liszt's reworking it's the *Sarabande*, rather than the chaconne, which through use of a repeating bass line sounds more typical of the chaconne form; the so-named '*Chaconne*', which in Liszt's re-invention is

introduced with a fragmentary and somewhat furtive rising bass line, appears closer to the lively dance form originally imported from South America.

Busoni composed his *Toccata (Preludio, Fantasia and Ciaconna)* in 1920 when he was in his mid-fifties. Already in seriously declining health, he headed the score with a near-quotation from Frescobaldi: 'Non è senza difficoltà che si arriva al fine' – 'One does not reach the end without difficulty'. Whether this was meant as a reflection on his own physical and emotional state, the motto also appears a fair echo of this virtuosic work's character – sparkling and with a touch of the diabolical. Possibly, too, the *Toccata* had some autobiographical significance for Busoni, since it includes quotations from two of his own works: the *Prelude* is derived from a theme from *Die Brautwahl*, his first completed opera originally staged – unsuccessfully – in 1912; then the following *Fantasy* includes a lyrical theme from *Doktor Faust*, an opera Busoni was yet to complete even by the time of his death in 1924. The concluding *Chaconne*, though with something of the expressionist flavour of the Second Viennese School, also has something of the nightmarish quality of the turba choruses of Bach's *St John Passion*, as well as some of the most hair-raising moments of virtuosity in all Busoni's work.

Bach's *Chaconne* for solo violin was a direct inspiration for Carl Nielsen's *Chaconne*, Op.32, composed in 1916 (so predating Busoni's *Toccata* by almost four years). As it happens, the Danish composer had met Busoni in Leipzig in 1891 – about two years before Busoni made his arrangement of Bach's *Chaconne* – and the two composers corresponded over the next thirty years. In that same year, Carl Nielsen (1865–1931) met his future wife, the sculptor Anne Marie Brodersen. Though on one level it was a meeting of creative minds, the marriage soon came under strain as Brodersen spent long periods away from home, and Nielsen was susceptible to other women in her absence. Late in 1916 Nielsen took a break away from his strained marriage for

the Christmas holiday, and on 19 December wrote to his eldest daughter, Irmelin: "I have begun the first days of my holiday by embarking on a large-scale Chaconne for piano, which I am already well along with... I think this piece will grow strong and big over Christmas; just for now it greatly amuses me to give my fantasy free rein within these fixed periods (8 bars in a moderate 3/4 metre). You must know Bach's beautiful Chaconne for solo violin. If I could reach up to his shoulders with mine for piano!" Though most critics at the first performance of Nielsen's first piano work in 16 years were bemused by its arcane manner, the work has since been recognised as one of his most important piano works.

Alfredo Casella's *Variations on a Chaconne* is an even earlier work, written relatively early in the Italian composer's career. Born in Turin and said to be a direct descendant of the madrigalist Casella of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Casella (1883–1947) studied piano with his mother from the age of four. By the age of eight, he had mastered all of Bach's 48 *Preludes and Fugues*. In 1896 he entered the Paris Conservatoire, where he studied composition under Xavier Leroux and Gabriel Fauré, and piano with Louis Diémer, who was noted for his interpretation of old keyboard music, and as editor of a two volume collection of French harpsichord works, *Clavecinistes Français*. Given Casella's training, it is no surprise to find a deep connection to Baroque forms not only among his early works but also throughout his composing career. *Variations on a Chaconne*, composed in 1903, clearly manifests the influence of Bach, quite besides making use of the 'Folia' theme often used in Baroque music (and also used by Rachmaninov in his so-called *Corelli Variations*).

Born in the Tatar town of Chistopol, Sofia Gubaidulina (b.1931) grew up in the city of Kazan. Aged five, she received her first piano lessons with Ekaterina Leontieva, a teacher who lived across the street from the Gubaidulina family. Leontieva introduced the young Gubaidulina to the works of Bach, Mozart and Beethoven, and

by the age of eight she had made sufficient progress to perform in a Bach festival. By the age of ten, Gubaidulina had decided to become a composer.

After graduating from the Kazan Conservatory, Gubaidulina attended the Moscow Conservatory where she studied composition under Nikolay Peiko, and then undertook post-graduate work with Vissarion Shebalin from 1959. In 1962, while still pursuing her post-graduate studies, she composed her *Chaconne* at the prompting of the Georgian pianist Marina Mdivani. As Gubaidulina recalled, Mdivani “had a powerful chord-playing technique as well as a lively temperament at her disposal” – both qualities reflected in her *Chaconne*. Gubaidulina later dismissed this work as a ‘student work’; yet, though not fully manifesting Gubaidulina’s mature style, it is a powerful and masterful work. It starts with a clear statement of its eight-bar theme (in duple time rather than the genre’s usual triple time); after a series of variations, the piece evolves into a toccata, and then a fugue which in style may appear to owe more to Shostakovich (a staunch champion of the young and ‘wayward’ Gubaidulina) than to Bach, before the final return of the opening theme.

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I BIOGRAPHY

In September 2009 Sofya Gulyak was awarded the 1st prize and the Princess Mary Gold Medal at the 16th Leeds International Piano Competition – the first woman in the history of the competition to achieve this distinction. Since then she has appeared all over the world to great acclaim. Her recital programs are frequently reviewed in superlatives, and her concerto appearances with major orchestras are noted in glowing terms by the world’s music press. Sofya has been praised for her “tremendous precision and coloration ... exquisite soft playing ... with delicacy” and described as a “Rach star” (*Washington Post*). Sofya Gulyak’s résumé includes prizes from many prestigious piano competitions: she is a 1st prize winner of William Kapell International Piano Competition in the USA, Maj Lind Helsinki International Piano Competition, Tivoli Piano Competition in Copenhagen, Isang Yun International Piano Competition in South Korea, San Marino Piano Competition, winner of Busoni Competition in Italy and prize winner of Marguerite Long Piano Competition in Paris. Recitals and concert appearances all over the globe have been numerous, in such venues as La Scala Theatre and Sala Verdi in Milan, Hercelessaal in Munich, Salle Cortot, Salle Gaveau and Salle Pleyel in Paris, Grand Hall of Moscow Conservatory, Konzerthaus in Berlin, Gewandhaus in Leipzig, Kennedy Center in Washington, Palais de la Musique in Strasbourg, Hong Kong City Hall, Shanghai Grand Theatre, Tokyo Opera City Hall, Osaka Symphony Hall, Musashino Cultural Centre in Tokyo, National Hungarian Opera in Budapest, National Forum of Music in Wrocław, Finlandia Hall in Helsinki, Bridgewater Hall in Manchester, Teatro Municipal and Cidade des Artes in Rio de Janeiro, Auditorium Manzoni in Bologna, Salle Molière in Lyon, Walt Disney Hall in Los Angeles, King Theatre in Rabat, Kursaal in Bern and Tivoli Concert Hall in Copenhagen.

Sofya Gulyak has appeared as a soloist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Finnish Radio Symphony, St. Petersburg Philharmonic, Rio de Janeiro Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Hallé Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra dell’Arena di Verona, Orchestra Filarmonica di Bologna,



Budapest Philharmonic, Enescu Philharmonic, Stavanger Symphony, Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, Slovak Radio Symphony, Helsinki Philharmonic, Copenhagen Symphony, Ulster Symphony, Orchestre National de France, Shanghai Philharmonic, Wroclaw Philharmonic, Oulu Philharmonic, Leipzig Philharmonic, Pensacola Symphony, Tatarstan Symphony, Philippines Philharmonic, Morocco Philharmonic and others. The festivals in which Sofya Gulyak has participated include Klavier Ruhr Festival, Chopin Festival in Duzniki-Zdroj, Festival de Sceaux, International Keyboard Festival in New York, International Strasbourg Festival, Busoni Festival, Harrogate Festival, Kraków Piano Festival, New Zealand Piano Festival, Ravello Festival, Festival Chopin in Paris, Shanghai International Piano Festival and many others.

Sofya Gulyak is a native of Kazan (Russia) where she studied in a Special Music College under Nailya Khakimova, and then in Kazan State Conservatoire under Professor Elfiya Burnasheva. After that she continued her studies at the Piano Academy Incontri col Maestro (Imola, Italy) with Boris Petrushansky and at the Royal College of Music in London with Vanessa Lata arche. Sofya Gulyak attended as a jury member the international piano competitions in Italy, Serbia, France, Greece and USA, and was invited to teach master classes in China, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Hong Kong, Mexico, USA and Germany.

She is a professor of the piano at the Royal College of Music in London. Her playing has been broadcast on radio and TV in Russia, Poland, France, Italy, Germany, USA, Finland, Denmark, Serbia, New Zealand, Brazil, Mexico, United Kingdom (BBC3 and BBC4) and other countries.

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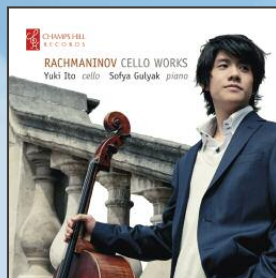
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