

Pachmann at Age Twelve

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A report has come down to us of the playing of the pianist Vladimir de Pachmann (1848-1933) at the age of twelve. Pachmann had related this incident to his secretary Francesco Pallottelli. The story has been told five times, so far as is known to me:

[1] Pallottelli (1916, p.16):

Un giorno, aveva allora 12 anni, suonando la doppia fuga in mi minore di Händel, meravigliò un signore che passava in quel momento sotto la sua finestra, e che volle sapere chi eseguisse così bene quel pezzo tanto difficile. La meraviglia del dottor Morgen, così si chiamava il passante, accrebbe quand'egli potè constatare che il perfetto esecutore era il piccolo Vladimiro.

[2] Cook (1916) (translation of Pallottelli, 1916, p.16):

One day when barely twelve whilst playing Händel's double fugue in C minor, he attracted the attention of a passing gentleman a doct. Morgon who became interested in knowing the name of the able performer of the difficult piece, and who was greatly astonished in learning that this perfect pianist was the youthful Vladimir.

[3] Pallottelli (1933, p.4):

Un giorno, aveva allora dodici anni, suonando la doppia Fuga in Mi minore di Händel stupì un signore che passava in quel momento sotto la sua finestra, che volle sapere chi eseguisse così bene quel pezzo tanto difficile. La meraviglia del Dott. Morgen, così si chiamava il passante, crebbe quando egli potè constatare che il perfetto esecutore era il piccolo Vladimiro.

[4] Pallottelli ms (c1933, p.6):

"The music anyway dominated all my life; after studying the violin with my father during some years, I dedicated myself to the piano with true passion, and, always under his guide, about twelve old, I played quite well, so that one day, while I was playing the Doppia Fuga in Mi minore (E flat) [sic] by Handel, a man, who was passing by my house, stopped to listen, and then would know who was the perfect player of a so difficult piece; great was the wonder of doctor Morgan, this was his name, music connoisseur, knowing that I, the little Wladimir, was the genial player of it, and he prognosticated for me the most flattering success.

[5] Mitchell (withdrawn, p.16 and footnotes 2 & 3 p.210):

One day when barely twelve whilst playing Handel's double fugue in C minor ² [E minor—*mi minore*—in the Italian text],³ he attracted the attention of a passing gentleman, a doct. Morgan who became interested in knowing the name of the able performer of the difficult piece, and who was greatly astonished in learning that this perfect pianist was the youthful Vladimir.

[Mitchell's footnote] 2. Handel's only fugue in C minor is the sixth of the six fugues or voluntaries, opus 3 (London, 1735). It is not, however, a double fugue.

[Mitchell's footnote] 3. Although this fugue was published as the first movement of the E minor suite, it was originally an independent work. The American pianist William Mason studied it with both Dreyschock (who had, in turn, studied it with Tomaschek) and Liszt.

In view of Pachmann's having later become a world-famous pianist, the correct identification of the piece he had played so early and so well is of some interest. In that connection we find the following in the five versions just quoted:

[1] Pallottelli refers to the Double Fugue of Handel in e minor, without identifying it further.

[2] Cook gives c minor.

[3] Pallottelli again gives e minor.

[4] Pallettoli's manuscript once again gives "Mi minore", though translating it as e-flat in error for e minor.

[5] Mitchell quotes Cook's c minor (p.16), parenthetically mentioning the discrepancy between this and the Italian text's e minor. In his footnote 2 (p.210) Mitchell reports the negative result of his having tried to find a double fugue among Handel's fugues in c minor. In his footnote 3 he refers to an e-minor Suite without identifying it, presumably the Suite for Harpsichord, HWV 429. (The relevance of Mitchell's remark about Mason is unclear.)

I now propose that the piece Pachmann played was not one of the works mentioned above, but instead Handel's Concerto Grosso in e minor for strings and continuo, op. 6 no. 3. I propose this because that piece contains a double fugue in e minor, and so far as I know Handel wrote no other double fugue in e minor and none in c minor, the only two keys that have been mentioned. (It follows that Cook's "c minor" is an error in his generally somewhat erratic translation.)

How could Pachmann have played this work? The answer is that an arrangement for piano two hands was made by Ludwig Stark (1831-1884) [6]. No copy of Stark's original work has survived, so far as I know, but a later "new instructional edition" of it by Sigfrid Karg-Elert has survived [7]. This work is still credited to Stark so, apart from instructional additions, Karg-Elert's score evidently remains that of Stark's arrangement.

It may be added that an apparently no longer extant version by Liszt (not an arrangement but only adding nuances and fingering) of a Handel Fugue in e minor [8] might have seemed to be another candidate for the piece Pachmann played, or for a version of that piece. However, that is ruled out because its title is just Fugue, not Double Fugue, whereas to be the piece Pachmann played it would have to be a double fugue and, as already mentioned, Handel's only double fugue in e minor is the one Stark arranged.

The Handel Concerto Grosso in its original form is well-known, and will be discussed here only briefly. Stark arranged just the first three of its five movements for piano.

The **Introduction** (Larghetto 3/2, 26 bars, e minor moving to the dominant) is in Handel's stately style with solid chords (Example 1).

The **Double Fugue** (Andantino 12/8, 34 bars, e minor) is modest in its intellectual basis, though effective enough in its orchestral realisation. The fugue is not doubled in the sense of presenting two separate fugal treatments of different subjects and then combining them; it is instead a single fugue whose subject is constituted by two simultaneous subjects, that is, it

has a two-voiced subject. The counterpoint of those two voices of the subject is simple, the main notes having the relation of either 3rds or 6ths and the counterpoint thus being invertible (Example 2). The joint subject is also short, covering just 6 dotted-quarter-note beats in 12/8 metre. Thus, although a “double fugue” may, as a term, have an academically impressive ring to it, that is not borne out in the present case. A detailed analysis will not be needed here; it is enough to mention that Pachmann could not have learned a great deal about fugue (in the sense of J. S. Bach) or counterpoint from this movement.

The **Toccata** (Allegro 4/4, 68 bars, e minor) does not feature tight control of form but instead emphasizes its surface effectiveness. It has many double-note passages and, at the end, double-octaves.

Thus it is quite likely that the passer-by was impressed not only by the Double Fugue itself but also by the Toccata that follows it (Example 3). (Incidentally, it will be noted that the name of the passer-by is given as Morgen, Morgon and Morgan in various reports.) It is to be hoped that an enterprising pianist will record this work, both on its own account and for the benefit of Pachmann enthusiasts.

REFERENCES

[1] Pallottelli, F. *Vladimiro de Pachmann*, Editio Novissima Roma, 1916 (in Italian).

[2] Pallottelli, F., *Vladimir de Pachmann*, Editio Novissima Roma, translated by W. G. Cook, 1916.

[3] Pallottelli, F. "Vladimiro de Pachmann", *La Nuova Italia Musicale*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 11 January 1933 (in Italian).

[4] Pallottelli, F. "My Thirty Years with Vladimir de Pachmann". Unpublished manuscript, c1933. (Original in Italian, also written out by Pallottelli in – just fair – English.)

[5] Mitchell, Mark. *Vladimir de Pachmann: A Piano Virtuoso's Life and Art*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2002 (subsequently withdrawn by the publisher and all remaining copies destroyed).

[6] Handel, *Introduktion, Doppelfuge und Toccata* (Introduction, Double Fugue and Toccata) in e minor, arranged for piano from Handel's Concerto Grosso in e minor, op. 6 no. 3 by Ludwig Stark, (publisher?, place?, date?).

[7] Handel, *Introduktion, Doppelfuge und Toccata* (Introduction, Double Fugue and Toccata) New instructional edition by Sigfrid Karg-Elert, Carl Simon, Berlin, 1908 (also Zurich, Hug; London, Novello; Vienna, Ludwig Doblinger; New York, G. Schirmer).

[8] Handel. Fugue in E minor, with indications of nuances and fingering by Liszt. Anthologie Classique, Schlesinger, Berlin; Vienna, Tobias (Carl) Haslinger, n.d. No copy of this work is known to exist.

