

Violin sonata op.6 no.7 'Au Tombeau'

The Sonata in F minor by Locatelli, is one of the pieces that caught the interest of the famous violinist and composer, Eugene Ysaÿe. This piece was written in 1737, while he was living and working in Amsterdam. This sonata is interesting from many aspects, especially in the way that it was transformed by Ysaÿe.

Ysaÿe's had a major interest in Locatelli. The famous and virtuosic Capriccios was one of the sets that Ysaÿe had learned during his childhood. In the Biography of Ysaÿe, that was written by his son Antoine, it clearly shows what Ysaÿe thought about Locatelli:

"On examining the works left by Locatelli (1693-1764), and more particularly his capriccios for solo violin, where technical features reflect the most daring Paganinian inventions, one is immediately convinced that this splendid violinist was both a solid musician and a poet!... Locatelli and the gentle Geminiani are in my opinion the most complete interpreters of heartfelt sentiment, of the emotions of the soul. There is 'romanticism' in their classicism, and the perfect accuracy of their composing does not exclude the deepest feelings.

The Locatelli sonata f minor Sonata is one of those works in which the composer inclined to express the saddest and most sorrowful images. I have reworked and harmonized it with devotion and have given it the title "the grave" (Au Tombeau) which seems most appropriate to arouse the truest interpretation of the work."

From the point of view of the original work, the key of F minor was rarely used by composers. It had a deep and sombre affect which was clearly intended by the composer. Next to that Locatelli did write out the cadenza's, which is another uncommon thing in the Baroque practice. Normally these type of cadenza's were improved on the stage by the performer, a practice that was common as well in the classic era of Haydn and Mozart.

The work is written in four movements, all in relatively slow tempi.

The first movement is a 'Lento assai e mesto'. The expressiveness of the sonata is set from the first notes. The violin part is written in a highly intricate way by Ysaÿe. Though the piano part has a lesser role in this sonata than was usual in the romantic period, it gives very important colours that are highlighted by the register in which Ysaÿe arranged the work, making it possible for both instruments to blend together like one instrument. In the major cadenzas that

are written in this first movement, which are inspired by the original written cadenza's by Locatelli, the violin is helped by the piano by long harmonic notes.

The second movement, a 'allegro, tempo Largo e con passione, is more based upon thematic-material than the first movement. It is not written as an attacca but Ysaÿe has hinted towards it with only separating the movements with an 'eight' pause. The piano often repeats what the violin does, rhythmically and has in the second part sections that hint towards fugato-material. At the end of this movement, Ysaÿe did write a attacca towards the third movement.

The third movement, Adagio: Lento, is an incredible beautiful work in which every note has a deep meaning. The whole movement is composed by Ysaÿe . The instruments are, like in the first movement, often in the same register and the violin often gets repeated melodically by the piano in the middle voices, an octave lower. The reason of the addition of this movement is unknown but it has been suggested that Ysaÿe wanted to keep the typical structure of the four movement baroque sonata, he did as well in his arrangement of Nardini's violin sonata.

The fourth movement of this Sonata is an 'Cantabile, Tempo di molto moderato'. Originally written by Locatelli as a variation form in which each of the six variations were repeated. It was not an uncommon practice in the baroque to have a variation movement as the last movement of a sonata. The form was often used to show off the virtuosity of the instrumentalists.

Ysaÿe chose only three of those, variation one, three and six. In his arrangement, the individual variations are not repeated. In most of this movement the basso continuo has a accompanying role but from the sixth variation, going from major back to minor, the piano has a more distinct role. The climax of this sonata has been changed by Ysaÿe quite a bit. Most of the climax was written by Locatelli as quarter notes but Ysaÿe adapted it to big arpeggios and the addition of triplets. making it very demanding for the violinist.