

Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924) — *Toccata: Preludio, Fantasia e Ciaccona*, BV 287 (1921)

Preludio — *Quasi Presto, arditamente*

Fantasia — *Sostenuto, quasi adagio – Meno vivace – Andante tranquillo – Più tranquillo – Animando assai*

Ciaccona — *Allegro risoluto – Un poco stretto – Più stretto*

Busoni prefaced the score of the *Toccata* with a foreboding remark, '*Non è senza difficoltà che si arriva al fine*' (It is not without difficulty, that one comes to the end), a paraphrased quote by Italian Renaissance composer, Girolamo Frescobaldi. The *Toccata* is Busoni's final major work for the piano, and is one of his most advanced pieces, both technically and musically.

Imposing, precise, and darkly coloured; the *Toccata* was composed during Busoni's years of declining health as he returned to live in Berlin, after waiting out WWI, in Switzerland. Busoni's preoccupation with his magnum-opus, the opera *Doktor Faust*, is clear. Like many of Busoni's late works, motifs from the opera, permeate the *Toccata*.

The concept of the *toccata* (from the Italian *toccare* 'to touch') is rooted in the times of the Renaissance and Baroque. Busoni was noted for his neoclassicist and neoromantic musical developments, and here, successfully unites both archaic and modern, in what results as a virtuoso piece, with substantial intellectual qualities.

The *Preludio* is a virtuoso spectacle, showcasing Busoni's clear mastery of the instrument, even in declining health. Marked *Quasi presto, arditamente* (Almost fast, boldly), the *Toccata* begins with a resolute chordal melody, wide hand crossings, much *staccatissimo* and with little pedal; utilising fragmentary thematic material from Busoni's earlier opera, *Die Brautwahl*.

The second section, *Fantasia*, is in seven contrasting sections. Busoni's neo-romantic style comes into full effect, yet continuing to subtly alter the texture; from notes played in unison, to a fragmented fugato.

The third and final section, *Ciaccona*, utilises a sturdy chromatic theme in Sarabande rhythm for the basis of the Chaconne, and is of virtuoso character throughout. Busoni's treatment of the theme is extensive, yet not extravagant; inversion, diverse textures and moods, form the concluding section.

Busoni dedicated the *Toccata* to Isidor Philipp (1863–1958), a pianist and close friend.