

Review**Chagrin Valley Chamber Music:
Pianist Emanuela Friscioni (February 17)**

by Guytano Parks



Variations on a theme. That form has intrigued and inspired composers since the beginning of musical time. Expression through exploration and experimentation with tone, texture and effects as musical instruments (especially the piano) developed opened up endless possibilities for the composer. Pianist Emanuela Friscioni performed three such works by Mozart, Bach-Busoni and Schumann on Sunday, February 17 on the Chagrin Valley Chamber Music Concert Series at Valley Lutheran Church in Chagrin Falls.

The *Sonata*, K. 331 in A major is Mozart's only piano sonata which utilizes a theme with variations rather than the standard Sonata Allegro form for its first movement. Friscioni played it with lovely tone and a fine sense of classical style and proportions. In the opening *Andante grazioso* (performed without repeats), Friscioni's *cantabile* approach allowed the music to breathe, her phrasing leaving plenty of room for details of articulation and dynamics. The six variations which followed, all in A major except for the third which is in minor, unfolded beautifully. Running scale passages, accidentals, repeated staccato notes plus unexpected accents and dynamic changes peppered and at times camouflaged the original theme.

The lovely and gracefully played *Menuetto* featured a trio which delved into deeper, darker expression while at other times the pianist's left hand crossed over into the piano's upper register, brightly ringing out like delicate little bells. The work's final movement, *Alla Turca* is chock full of percussive effects emulating the Turkish Janissary bands of the day. Making the most of the contrasting rhythmic and running passages and the changes in tonality from major to minor, the pianist pulled out all the stops for a spirited finale to one of Mozart's most famous works.

Bach's *Chaconne in D minor* — from the Partita No. 2 for solo violin transcribed for the piano by Busoni — is monumental. From the imposing sarabande-like opening theme through all of its formidable transformations in 29 brief variations, it never ceases to make a profound impression. Busoni explicitly stated that he has treated his effects "from the standpoint of organ tone." Requiring not only a complete mastery of piano technique, intelligence and imagination well beyond the ordinary is needed in order to perform this piece successfully. Friscioni was quite up to the task, producing an astonishing amount of

grandeur and tonal variety with a "weight from the shoulders through the arms and into the keyboard" technique (despite the church's small grand piano). The variety of sonorities which were heard truly could be likened to that of a mighty pipe organ and all of its registration possibilities. With plenty of *con fuoco animato* sections, also striking in this performance were the quieter *dolce tranquillo* moments.

A somber presentation of the theme's descending C-sharp minor arpeggio set the stage for the twelve etudes and nine variations which followed in Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes, Op 13*. Here again the pianist produced a full, rich sound of orchestral proportions with great variety of tone and texture. Dotted rhythms presented as part of a melody, an underlying bass line, or woven into the texture are ever-present throughout this extremely technically demanding work. No matter the thorniness or complexity of the writing, Friscioni's projection of the melody was always clear and expressive. There was an inevitable, diabolical drive to the march sections and a yearning and impassioned quality to others. The final heroic pages summing up everything that came before brought the work to a close in a declamatory display of brilliance.

A standing ovation and prolonged applause brought the pianist back for an encore: Scriabin's *Nocturne Op. 9, No. 2* for the left hand. It was a revelation of beauty and deep expression, further illustrating Emanuela Friscioni's wonderful sense of balance and tonal coloration.

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