

J.S Bach (1675–1750)—Toccat​a and Fugue in d minor, BWV 565, ca. 1708 (transcribed by Ferruccio Busoni, 1900)

With its iconic first notes, Bach's Toccata and Fugue in d minor is perhaps one of the most famous pieces in the 'classical' repertoire. First published in 1833, due to efforts by Felix Mendelssohn in his process of the Bach-revival in the 19th century, it has remained a popular piece since its publication. Mendelssohn described the piece as "at the same time sophisticated and something for the people."

The first major performance was given in 1840 by the great composer, Mendelssohn; the piece was very well received, particularly by Schumann and Liszt, two great authorities on music in the 19th century.

Since the 1970s, some academics have challenged the authorship of the work, as no manuscript score survives and there are features in the music which would have been unusual for Bach's organ writing at the time.

The first known transcription of this piece for piano was made by Carl Tausig, which on gained substantial fame. **Ferruccio Busoni** was an Italian pianist, composer and teacher, perhaps one of the most highly skilled pianists in the world during his lifetime. Busoni is now most known for his transcriptions of Bach. However, his original compositions are extensive and highly individual.

This transcription calls for the full resources of the piano and pianist, in order to imitate the monumental sound capable on the organ. This is largely created by the addition of extra octaves and a fuller harmony. Busoni creates the effect of different stops on the organ by controlling the density of the texture, and using different dynamic levels, and a wide range of timbral colours.

The **Toccata** is a free opening section, characterised by Busoni with the addition of extra octaves and larger chords, containing up to thirteen notes played simultaneously. The toccata concludes with a cadence in d minor.

The subject of the **Fugue** consists entirely of semiquavers and has an implied dominant pedal note with in it. Busoni chooses to leave the exposition of the fugue largely as in the original, except with one small counter-melody added. As the fugue progresses, Busoni starts to write large amounts of double notes and octaves to enrich the sound in replication of the organ's sound, thus increasing the virtuoso demands for the pianist. Immediately after the final statement of the subject, the fugue resolves with a fortississimo B-flat major chord. A multi-sectional coda follows marked *Recitativo*. The last bars are played *Molto Adagio* and ends unusually with a minor plagal cadence. The overall effect of this piece is a pianistic recreation of Bach's most iconic work, with an imaginative yet intellectual influence from Busoni.

Eden Walker, Spring 2014