

## PREFACE

### Biographical Note

César Cui has been underrated as a composer for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and this in spite of having been at the forefront of Russian music for over 50 years. His oeuvre encompasses 106 works with allocated opus numbers and over 30 works without, and includes sacred and secular vocal music, chamber music, opera, orchestral music, and numerous piano miniatures. The lack of attention his compositions have received compared to the other members of the *Moguchaya kuchka* – known in English as the ‘Mighty Handful’ or ‘Russian Five’ – is surprising. He was held in high esteem by many of his contemporaries and colleagues. Balakirev dedicated his first piano sonata to him. Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and the great music critic Stasov all held a high opinion of Cui’s opera *Angelo*. Both Tchaikovsky and Liszt highly praised his opera *William Ratcliff*<sup>1</sup>. In fact one of the very last works Liszt penned was a transcription of Cui’s Op. 12 – *Tarantelle* for orchestra.

Apart from his musical activities, Cui was also a Lieutenant General of the Imperial Russian Army, a renowned expert on fortifications - holding a full time teaching position as Professor of Fortification at the Academy of Military Engineering, where members of the royal family, including the future Tsar Nicholas II, were amongst his students.

Cui was an accomplished man of letters, being corresponding member of the *Académie Française* and the *Académie royale des sciences, des lettres et des beaux-arts de Belgique*. He was also a prolific music critic and essayist, writing the very first book on Russian music and composers “*La musique en Russie*” in 1880 and contributing over 700 articles to European and Russian periodicals. Musically he held a succession of important posts, being Chairman of the Mariinsky Theatre opera selection committee and Director of the St. Petersburg branch of the Russian Musical Society.

### Variations - Preludes Op.104

This is the first ever publication of one of the most important piano works by César Cui, and the last major work composed by a member of the ‘Russian Five’. It is the last work Cui actually notated (subsequent works, such as Opp. 105 and 106 were dictated by him as he was by then unable to write due to blindness), and is also his largest cyclical work for the piano (the 25 Preludes Op. 64 are larger in volume and variety owing to the sheer number and variety of keys, but do not build a single structure as does Op. 104).

The Variations were first mentioned by Cui in a letter to M.C. Kerzina dated 19<sup>th</sup> April 1916. He writes: “I have a sketch of a theme with variations for piano, I have just started ordering them. Perhaps this will be my Op.100. And [what] then?”<sup>2</sup>

Cui had just completed Mussorgsky’s unfinished opera *Sorochintsï Fair* (composing by his own admission two fifths of it) and orchestrating it. He was also working on the first complete edition of his collected critical articles, of which there were more than 700 that were to be published by the sons of his late colleague and friend Rimsky-Korsakoff.

<sup>1</sup> A.F. Nazarov, *Цезарь Антонович Кюи* [César Antonovich Cui] (Moscow, 1989), 62 and 103.

<sup>2</sup> I. L. Gusin, ed.: *Ts.A.Kyui: Izbrannie Pis'ma* [Selected Letters] (Leningrad, 1955), 466 (Letter number 693).

The next documented mention of the Variations is also in a letter to Kerzina dated 20<sup>th</sup> May 1916. Cui writes that he is correcting proofs of the *Sorochintsï Fair*, and "...looking through and bringing the theme and 18 variations in order. This will probably become my Op.100."<sup>3</sup> This is the first time the number of variations is mentioned. The letter also informs us of his worsening eyesight which progressed so rapidly as to leave him unable to read or write by November of the same year (letter to Kerzina from 11th November 1916)<sup>4</sup>, although he was still able to distinguish large objects and go for walks.

The last surviving written reference to the Variations is in a letter dated 16<sup>th</sup> January 1917, when Cui offers the publisher A.K. German his last compositions<sup>5</sup>.

Op.100 is now listed as "Feodor and Elena" from Pushkins Songs of the Eastern Slavs, for voice and orchestra.

Op.101 Seven Choir-Duets for women's and children's voices.

Op.102 Vocal Arabesques, Romances.

Op.103 Theme and Variations for piano

As can be seen from the title page reproduced on page v, the variations were later re-christened with "- Preludes" added in pencil, and the allocated Opus number changed again, the final full title being *Thème et Variations-Preludes pour Piano*, Op.104 1916. This change of title has practical implications – it can be argued that Cui intended to demonstrate the duality of this work: it is simultaneously a cycle and a collection of pieces that can stand on their own individually.

The Variations-Preludes are essentially character pieces that use various compositional and pianistic techniques and are remarkable for their sincere expressiveness and broad emotional spectrum. In this cycle, Cui achieves a balance between the detail of the miniature and the dramatic effect of the cycle as a whole.

## Sources

This edition is based on two sources. Both sources are autographs in the manuscript section of the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg.

The principal source is the Fair Copy,  
(A) RNL estate 413, C. Cui, No. 89.

The secondary source is the Working Copy,  
(B) RNL estate 413, C. Cui, No. 269.

The first three pages of the Fair Copy (Title page, Theme, beginning of Var.1) and one page of the Working Copy (beginning of Var.6) are reproduced after the Preface.

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<sup>3</sup> Gusin, 468. (Letter number 698).

<sup>4</sup> Gusin, 471. (Letter number 704).

<sup>5</sup> Gusin, 474. (Letter number 711).

## Order of Variations

The order of variations in **B** is completely different to that of the fair copy. Not one variation retained its place in **A**, and only two sets 12-13 (originally 11-12), and 5-6 (originally in reverse order in **B**) retained their pairing. The order of the sets in **A** and **B** is given below.

Fair Copy (A)	Working Copy (B)
Theme	Theme
1	3
2	17
3	6
4	5
5	8
6	14
7	X*
8	9
9	11
10	16
11	12
12	13
13	4
14	18
15	10
16	7
17	15
18	1**

\*X refers to a lyrical variation (Andantino) of 56 bars in the remote key of D flat major that did not make it into the Final Copy. It is reproduced in the critical report published as a supplement to this edition.

\*\* The last variation in **B** was originally the current Var.2. It was subsequently crossed out and the current Var.1 took its place. The ending of Var.1 was re-worked twice in **B** to conform with its role as the ultimate variation of the cycle. This variation, along with its extended coda was then placed at the beginning of the cycle in **A**.

This drastic re-working has completely changed the character of the set. Just how profound the change of order can change the perception of the final work is most clearly illustrated by comparing the effect of two variations: Var.1 – the original rather sombre ending of the set to the current lightweight ending of Var.18.

## Structure and Key Relationships

This set of Variations is of the Free Variation type, which evolved in the late romantic period from the character variations common to the late Classical and early Romantic periods. In the Free Variation type, the structure of the theme does not play a decisive role in the structure of the variations. Everything is subordinated to free development, the theme serving the composer as a spring-board for his imagination.

However Cui provides the variations with a substantial structure where every 3<sup>rd</sup> variation adheres closely to the harmonic structure of the theme, and the melodic outlines clearly follow those of the theme.

The cycle itself can be clearly divided into two or three sections:

Two sections: Theme – Var. 8; Var. 9 – Var. 18.

Three sections: Theme – Var. 6; Var. 7 – Var. 11; Var. 12 – Var. 18.

These divisions are important to the performer out of practical considerations, i.e. when

deciding which variations to string together for dramatic effect, where to pause longer to let the audience process the music, and not least where to take a break – an important issue in any large scale work. Cui has not notated *fermatas* over final bar lines in any of the variations, but variations 1, 3, 6, 8 and 12 do have a *fermata* over their last notes.

The individual variations themselves can be said to represent one of several archetypes: the virtuosic, lyrical and dance.

The following table provides an overview of the cycle. It illustrates the structural relationship between the theme and the variations as well as the proportions within the cycle. It shows the key, time signature, tempo indication and the number of bars of each variation.

	<b>Key</b>	<b>Time signature</b>	<b>Tempo indication</b>	<b>Number of Bars</b>
<b>Theme</b>	d minor	C	<i>Allegretto</i>	21
<b>1</b>	d minor	C	<i>Andantino</i>	33
<b>2</b>	F major	C	<i>Allegro non troppo</i>	28
<b>3 (s)</b>	d minor	9/8 (3/4)	<i>Allegretto</i>	22
<b>4</b>	G flat major	C	<i>Andantino</i>	45
<b>5</b>	G major	C	<i>Allegro giocoso</i>	39
<b>6 (s)</b>	d minor	5/4	<i>Moderato</i>	25
<b>7</b>	G major	3/4	<i>Allegretto</i>	55
<b>8</b>	E flat major	C	<i>Moderato poco maestoso</i>	72
<b>9 (s)</b>	d minor	C	<i>Allegretto</i>	22
<b>10</b>	b minor	C	<i>Andante</i>	28
<b>11</b>	D major	3/4	<i>Allegro</i>	64
<b>12 (s)</b>	d minor	C	<i>Moderato</i>	25
<b>13</b>	B flat major	C	<i>Allegro</i>	38
<b>14</b>	d minor	3/4	<i>Allegro</i>	99
<b>15 (s)</b>	F Major	C	<i>Moderato</i>	34
<b>16</b>	D major	6/8	<i>Allegro</i>	67
<b>17</b>	B flat major	6/8	<i>Allegretto</i>	50
<b>18</b>	D major	2/4	<i>Allegro</i>	133

The approximate duration of the cycle is 38 minutes

I sincerely hope that this edition will contribute to the revival and a re-evaluation of César Cui's piano works and of his standing within the 19<sup>th</sup> century musical world, as well as increasing the available literature for the piano and in doing so being of use to the ever increasing number of professional pianists, teachers, students and scholars.

May it also bring the pleasure of discovering neglected works to music lovers.

Kirill Monorosi  
Sydney,  
December 2011

C. Cui.

Thème et Variations - Prélude.

pour

Piano.

Op. ~~100~~ 104

1876.

*Allegretto. ♩ = 80.*

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation. At the top left, the tempo and metronome marking are written as "Allegretto. ♩ = 80.". The score is organized into two systems, each consisting of two staves. The first system contains approximately 12 measures of music, featuring a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as "p" (piano) and "f" (forte). The second system continues the piece with similar notation, including a section with a "2" marking above the notes, possibly indicating a second ending or a specific fingering. The handwriting is clear and professional, typical of a composer's manuscript.

Handwritten musical score for the first system, consisting of two staves. The notation is dense with rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes. Dynamic markings such as *mf* and *f* are present. The system concludes with a double bar line.

*Andante*  
*choderato* = 69

Handwritten musical score for the second system, consisting of two staves. The notation is dense with rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes. Dynamic markings such as *mf* and *f* are present. The system concludes with a double bar line.

Handwritten musical score for the third system, consisting of two staves. The notation is dense with rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes. Dynamic markings such as *mf* and *f* are present. The system concludes with a double bar line.

