



NAXOS

ROMANTIC
PIANO

ANTON
URSPRUCH

Piano Works

5 Morceaux • Cavatine und Arabeske
Variationen über ein eigenes Thema

María Linares



Romantic Piano • 6

Anton Urspruch (1850–1907)

Anton Urspruch was born on 17 February 1850 in Frankfurt am Main, and died on 11 January 1907 in Frankfurt am Main. Urspruch's family had embraced the arts with distinction, his paternal grandfather was an actor, and his grandmother was a singer who probably performed under Mozart's direction. Anton's father, Carl Theodore was a jurist and an editor, working for the *Frankfurter Journal*, and his mother came from a family of Jewish cantors, converting to Christianity in 1844. Urspruch was educated at the municipal grammar school in Frankfurt, showing an aptitude both for painting and music. His music education was first entrusted to highly regarded Frankfurt pianist Martin Wallenstein followed by conductor and composer Ignaz Lachner, Music Director at the Frankfurt Stadttheater.

Urspruch became acquainted with composer and music educator Joachim Raff in Wiesbaden during the 1860s and this association proved pivotal for the young composer-pianist who henceforth benefitted from the teaching and guidance of one of Romantic music's great luminaries. Not only did Raff help to shape Urspruch's compositional outlook but he also introduced Urspruch to Franz Liszt. With superb timing in relation to his own musical development, Urspruch studied with Liszt in Weimar from 1871. In that year he wrote, 'With Liszt I experienced a level of acceptance which I could not have imagined even in my wildest dreams. He liked my compositions exceptionally well and he likes me just as much as a pianist. I am his daily guest, and we make music together for hours; on Monday we played no less than six complete hours.' Urspruch continued to visit Liszt in Weimar every summer until 1875, during which time he certainly became one of Liszt's favourite protégés, often being fondly referred to by Liszt as Antonio.

With contacts made through Liszt, Raff and others, Urspruch was establishing a career as a composer-pianist and the years leading up to 1878 included the appearance of the *Fantasiestücke, Op. 2* for piano, and the *Lieder, Opp. 3, 4 and 5*. He was also fortunate to witness Richard Wagner in Weimar at the preliminary rehearsals for the opening of the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth.

During 1878, in a happy development for Urspruch, Joachim Raff was appointed Director of the newly established and well-funded Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt, beating both Brahms and Rheinberger for the post. Urspruch was amongst a stellar list of staff engaged by Raff, including pianist Clara Schumann and singer Julius Stockhausen and he remained there teaching piano and composition until Raff's death in 1882. Despite Clara Schumann's best efforts, Urspruch and a number of other staff subsequently left the Hoch Conservatory in response to the new Director Bernhard Scholz's reforms. They helped form the staff of a new rival institution, the Raff-Konservatorium, and Urspruch continued to teach composition there throughout his final years. Among his students were the Scottish pianist Frederic Lamond, the Swiss pianist Anna Roner and the Prussian-born American conductor Alfred Hertz.

In 1881 Urspruch had married Maria Emilie (Emmy) Cranz, daughter of Hamburg music publisher Alwin Cranz and there were four daughters Theodora, Antonia, Fanny and Maria. Urspruch's *Symphony in E flat* appeared the same year, dedicated to his future wife, while his *Piano Concerto, Op. 9*, also in E flat, had been dedicated to Joachim Raff in 1878. A variety of instrumental works appeared in later years, including the *Sonata for Piano and Violin in D minor, Op. 28*, (1892), and the *Sonata for Piano and Cello in D major, Op. 29* (1893) dedicated to Clara Schumann. However, voice and choral music became more strongly represented as the years passed. Including the *Hymnus Ave maris stella, Op. 24* for mixed choir, orchestra and organ (1889) and *Die Frühlingsfeier: Ode von Klopstock, Op. 26* for tenor solo, chorus and orchestra (1891). Stage works included *Der Sturm*, an opera in three acts freely after Shakespeare (1888) and *Das Unmöglichster von Allen*, a comic opera in three acts (1897). In these later years Urspruch's strongly embedded Christian beliefs underpinned his campaign for the revival of Gregorian Chant in the Roman Catholic Church, to which he devoted considerable energy, writing *Gregorian Chant and the Choral Question* (1901) and commencing a large-scale four-part choral work with orchestra *Die heilige Cäcilie. Eine Handlung in 5 Akten*, which remained unfinished at his death.

Despite his study and warm friendship with Liszt there is little in Urspruch's music that shows him following Liszt or any of the Weimar circle, let alone Wagner, in the development of his musical style. Urspruch's comment that 'You can't understand modern music if you don't understand Bach... But you won't understand Bach if you don't know Palestrina, and you won't understand Palestrina without the Gregorian Chant' indicates his essentially conservative outlook and it is unsurprising he favoured the Mendelssohn, Schumann, Raff, Brahms axis of development rather than the root and branch changes advocated by Liszt, Wagner and their followers. His music is characterised by great melodic and harmonic invention, sturdy construction and finesse, but is often discursive, necessitating lengthy modulations to ensure the material remains strictly anchored within tonal limits. Given the period following his death in 1907 featured such radical voices as Mahler, Strauss, Debussy, Stravinsky and Schoenberg it is small wonder his work was soon forgotten in the 20th century's almost feverish search for new sensations and ideas, not to be resurrected until 100 years later.

Urspruch's grave lies in the Frankfurt Main Cemetery. In 2009 an Anton Urspruch Gesellschaft was formed, based in Münster, Westphalia, with the intention of promoting research and performances in connection with his life and music.

Cinq Morceaux pour le Piano, Op. 19

Published by Crazz, Hambourg, 1885. *À son maître*
Fr. Liszt hommage de son élève reconnaissant.

On the cusp of turning towards a greater emphasis on large-scale vocal works, these short but emotionally packed piano pieces were written by Urspruch at the end of a lengthy output of piano, chamber works and songs. The keyboard figuration is complex throughout allowing for modulatory twists and turns and melodic counterpoint between the hands. The writing is sturdy and tonally colourful, and they stand at the apex and final flowering of purely Romantic pianistic utterance in Europe.

Air

One of the simplest in construction and keyboard figuration, this monothematic work announces the serene Mendelssohnian main melody in E major followed by a reiteration in E minor leading to a stormier development section. The main melody then returns in E major followed by a gently reminiscent coda. Unlike some others in the group, this work would have been playable by good amateur pianists of the day.

Impromptu

Balletic elegance permeates the *Rondo* structure. The main theme in B major is repeated, followed by a modulatory episode that inverts the theme. The main theme then returns in B major, much embellished, followed by a second contrasted episode, marked *Sciolto* (with freedom) in E flat minor which unsurprisingly takes time to modulate back to B major for the final appearance of the main theme, followed by a coda. Pushing traditional tonality to its limits, Urspruch would doubtless have been untroubled at the frequent, if brief, allusions to other works. Thus, the final bars of this piece seem to reminisce those of Chopin's *Étude in A flat, Op. 25, No. 1*, while listeners may also recognise the running left hand accompaniment from Chopin's *Prelude in G major, Op. 28, No. 3*, which occurs towards the end of the second episode.

Romance

The slow *cantilena* quality of the opening gives the impression of two solo voice parts in mutual counterpoint. The key of E flat major continues with a second theme coloured with wave-like accompaniment that builds towards highly dramatic declamations and key-shifts. The final return of both the first and second themes in E flat major is unadorned and simply stated.

Caprice

The main theme in B flat major is treated with suitably capricious and lengthy modulation. The theme is then repeated with an elaborated melodic line before the music launches into a development section in F sharp major. The main theme's return in B flat major is marked by its announcement in the left hand before it appears in the right hand. The whole movement exudes a high level of vivacious energy and marks it out as a challenging concert piece rather than drawing room music for amateurs.

Fantasia

Technical hurdles abound in this turbulent canvas that also demands concert hall surroundings. Echoes of Bach *Fantasias* infuse the opening with chromaticism setting the mood for the following material. The restless main theme in G minor sits atop an undercurrent of rushing semiquavers, with roles reversed in a repeat with the left hand stating the tune in powerful octaves. Modulation and chromaticism abound as the music subsides into a *tranquillo* B major middle section, but drama soon asserts itself with a return of the main G minor theme. The tension then evaporates with a *tranquillo* coda that briefly catches fire in the final bars.

Variationen über ein eigenes Thema für das Pianoforte, Op. 10

Published by Breitkopf und Härtel, Leipzig, 1878.

Meinem lieben freunde Rafael Joseffy gewidmet.

Published in the year he was appointed to the staff of the new Hoch Conservatoire, the same year as his successful *Piano Concerto in E flat major*, these variations represent Urspruch at the commencement of his career as a confident well-established German composer and pianist, aged 28. Brahms' *Variations on an Original Theme, Op. 21* from 1858 when Brahms was 24, would have been an enticing model for Urspruch, written by a composer he greatly admired. Dedicatee Rafael Joseffy was a fine Hungarian Jewish concert pianist with whom Urspruch would have been familiar when both were studying with Liszt in Weimar and on other occasions.

The 24 variations form an extensive canvas, originating from a theme which is more complex than Brahms' and accommodates the sort of constructional ingenuity in which Urspruch revels. Variations 1 to 11, for all their changes of mood, form a fairly cohesive sequence approximating almost to a first movement which remains in the key of A major and retains a 4/4 time signature. With variations 12 to 17 Urspruch moves to A minor and F sharp minor, using both 4/4 and 12/8 time signatures and explores the darker tonalities of a slow movement perhaps. The remaining variations 18 to 24 return to A major and create a strong feeling of a *Finale* movement. Variations 20 and 21 amount to a *Scherzo* section, using a 12/8 time signature and a vigorous dance-like theme in the manner of Schumann in celebratory mood. Variations 22 to 24 form a continuum with echoes of a Beethoven *Finale* such as the last movement of Beethoven's *Sonata in C minor, Op. 111* with its extended trills and high-pitched right-hand figuration. All the first ten variations end with a strong tonic chord, moving without interruption into the next variation. However, variation eleven ends with a cadenza-like flourish and a pause before the A minor *Adagio* Variation 12, the first of the minor group, which sounds almost Bachian at times. The *Dolce* Variation 18, a compositional tour de force featuring a canon in contrary motion in the two upper parts, heralds the final group of variations. Thereafter Urspruch's eye is on an elevated finish with due deference to Schumann and Beethoven.

Cavatine und Arabeske für das Pianoforte, Op. 20

Published by Cranz, Hamburg, 1885.

This set of two *morceaux de salon* would have suited amateur pianists of the day. The cavatine and arabesque, while originating elsewhere, had become popular forms for lighter salon music designed to immediately arrest the listener's attention with entertaining and easily recognisable thematic and harmonic structures. Urspruch nevertheless imbues both with his customary highly finessed and ingeniously assembled musical structure.

Cavatine

Written in in E major, this gives the impression of continuous song. It uses two main themes, the warmer main theme in E major alternates with a secondary, brighter, B major theme before a lengthy E major coda based on the main theme completes the work. The figuration is richly embroidered.

Arabeske

A simple three-part form is used for this delicately balletic work. The first section contains a main theme in A major moving to E major and then back to A again. The contrasted middle section, in D flat major, is altogether more melodically expressive. The final section reprises the opening section's balletic material in a more highly decorated manner.

Rodney Smith

María Linares



Photo: Gema Lu

Young Spanish pianist María Linares has performed across Europe, including at the CBSO Centre and Symphony Hall in Birmingham and the London Piano Festival at Kings Place in the UK; Iturbi Festival and Serenates Festival in Spain; the Teatro Comunale Rossini in Gioia del Colle in Italy; and Vaduz Town Hall in Liechtenstein. Since giving her solo debut recital at the age of twelve, she has appeared as a soloist with orchestras such as the Orquesta de Valencia, Jove Orquestra de la Generalitat Valenciana and the Joven Orquesta Leonesa at venues including the Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía, Teatro Principal de València and the Palau Altea in Alicante, with conductors Manuel Hernández Silva, Roberto Forés Veses and Daniel Gil de Tejada, among others. In addition to being named Music Ambassador for Spain by the Lang Lang International Music Foundation, she is currently being supported by the Munster Trust, Craxton Memorial Trust and The Musicians' Company. Linares is pursuing an Artist Diploma with Norma Fisher and Danny Driver at the Royal College of Music as a Constant & Kit Lambert Junior Fellow under a full scholarship. She previously studied for her Master's and Bachelor's degrees at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire with Pascal Nemirovski.

A native of Frankfurt, Anton Urspruch was a student of Joachim Raff, later becoming one of Liszt's favourite protégés. Urspruch's style was more aligned with Mendelssohn and Beethoven, however, and he proclaimed that 'you can't understand modern music if you don't understand Bach'. The *Cavatine und Arabeske* are delightful salon pieces, while the *Variationen* form an extensive canvas that revels in contrasting moods and constructional ingenuity. The short but emotionally packed *Cinq Morceaux* stand at the apex and final flowering of purely Romantic pianism in Europe.

Anton
URSPRUCH
(1850–1907)

	5 Morceaux, Op. 19 (pub. 1885)	30:42
1	No. 1. Air: Andantino	6:31
2	No. 2. Impromptu: Allegretto elegante	7:07
3	No. 3. Romance: Andante espressivo	7:13
4	No. 4. Caprice: Allegro	4:51
5	No. 5. Fantaisie: Allegro sostenuto	5:00
	Variationen über ein eigenes Thema, Op. 10 (pub. 1878)	26:43
6	Theme: Andante espressivo – Variations 1–6	4:49
7	Variations 7–11	2:23
8	Variations 12–13	3:42
9	Variation 14	1:37
10	Variations 15–17	2:27
11	Variations 18–19	2:40
12	Variations 20–21	3:25
13	Variations 22–24	5:40
	Cavatine und Arabeske, Op. 20 (pub. 1885)	10:20
14	Cavatine: Andantino dolce	5:26
15	Arabeske: Allegro amabile	4:54

María Linares, Piano

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