

Truth, Beauty and Imagination

An ordinary approach to understanding the Truth, Beauty and Imagination in a Literature, Nature and the Beauty in Living....

Thursday, February 29, 2024

Theme and Variations



By **Matias Travieso-Diaz**

1782

Rudolf Von Flüstervogel (“Rudi”) played the viola well but lacked stage presence: he caught nobody’s attention with his shy looks and his gray fishhook of a body. People kept meeting and forgetting Rudi time after time.

Rudi barely scratched a living teaching the viola to the children of the aristocracy. He had married Elise, a peasant woman who had given him two average children, a girl named Hanna and a sickly boy, Kurt. Elise complemented Rudi perfectly, for she was lively and resourceful, and her hard work kept the household together.

Rudi’s life centered on a passion for composing, and there lay his worst disappointment. Rudi had penned a few soporific works, all featuring the viola as a solo instrument or in a chamber ensemble. None had ever been performed.

In late 1781, Rudi made an effort to break into the Mannheim Orchestra’s ranks. He started a new composition: a duo for violin and viola. The idea for such a work came from his friendship with Carl Toeschi, the former concertmaster of the

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Atique R.

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Orchestra, who had moved to Munich to join the service of the Duke of Bavaria. Rudi was hoping to convince Toeschi to play the duo with him and parlay the success of the premiere into an invitation to join the Mannheim Orchestra.

Early 1783

As months passed, Rudi composed a traditional first movement, an Allegro in which he strove to provide interesting dialogues between the two instruments. A forgettable Andante Cantabile followed.

And then his meager inspiration hit a wall. He did not know how to end the piece. He started losing sleep and became distracted.

“I worry about you” commented Elise.

“I’ll never rest until I get this piece completed,” he bemoaned.

“Let’s hope something can be done about it,” replied Elise with concern.

One afternoon Rudi was on his knees, seeking divine inspiration, when he felt faint. The ground melted away and he fell into a cavity filled with a warm, viscous liquid that enveloped him. He wished he could stay there forever, and never come out.

Then a deep voice resounded, seemingly coming from far away: “You are a coward and deserve your miserable life. If your meager talent fails you, you must comb the world for a source to complete your music! Get up and find help!!”

Rudi came to and found himself lying on the floor of the room, aching and stiff. His mind had cleared up, and a new idea nested within. He would compose a theme and variations to end his duo; the variations would allow him and the violinist to perform virtuoso passages to entrance the audience. All he needed to do was write it.

Late 1783

By October he had a movement comprising a theme and six variations, each with a different character, plus a coda that brought the theme back transformed into a lively dance. He hoped the work would be well received.

He transcribed a copy of the duo and sent it by post to Toeschi in Munich. The response was enthusiastic. Toeschi undertook to send the draft to Christian Cannabich, his successor as concertmaster at the Mannheim Orchestra and now its director; he recommended that Rudi meet with Cannabich and secure a date for the premiere of the work.

It was November before Rudi was able to see Cannabich, who had studied the manuscript of the duo and liked the work. Nevertheless, he was not encouraging:

“Dear Herr Von Flüstervogel, your composition is good, in some parts wonderful, and I would be happy to perform it with you myself.” He paused for a moment, embarrassed. “But the Elector, our patron, has cut back on the orchestra's budget. We have a serious financial crisis in our hands.”

Poem

stories

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Truth &
Imagination

Dreaming Nest

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Rudi did not capture the significance of the news. “What ... what does that mean in terms of performing my duo?”

Cannabich explained: “We have been told that we can only perform new works if the concert in which they are presented is fully funded. Someone would have to sponsor the evening through a donation to the orchestra, equivalent to the salaries of the musicians.”

Rudi swallowed hard. “And how much would that be?”

“To fully fund one of our concerts a donation of about 1,000 florins would be necessary.”

One thousand florins! That was more than he possessed or ever expect to make in years. Cannabich wondered aloud: “Yet, the members of the orchestra are going hungry. Perhaps I could bring the question up to them and see if they would settle for half – maybe 500 florins would suffice.”

Rudi got up, defeated. “Let me get back to you” he said hoarsely, fighting back tears.

Later that day, Rudi wrote Toeschi apprising him of the situation. Toeschi’s response was: “I spoke to Duke Carl Theodore and he is willing to loan you 500 florins. You must repay it with interest and agree to come to Munich and perform the work with me, at his court. I enclose a bank note for that amount.”

January 1784

The winter of 1783-84 was severe. Heavy snowfall and frigid temperatures swept through Europe. Both of Rudi’s children got sick; by New Year, Kurt was feverish. The doctor concluded: “This boys’ lungs are weak; he has little strength left. I recommend you take him to some place warm, to wait out the winter. Perhaps in the spring he’ll be better.”

Elise’s mother had family in Sicily, and Elise contacted her to find out about those relatives. Within a week, she reported to Rudi: “I have a second cousin in Taormina. I’ll write her asking for her hospitality. In the meantime, we have to make preparations for the journey.”

“Preparations?”

“Our travel to Sicily will be expensive. We’ll need to provide for lodging, meals, transportation, plus other expenses.”

“What are we talking about?” asked Rudi in alarm.

“My sister here has agreed to take Hanna in so she does not need to come. My guess is that for the three of us, traveling to Sicily and returning in May will cost us 600 florins, if we are frugal.”

“And where are we going to find that money?”

“You just got 500 florins from the Duke of Bavaria. That plus about 100 florins I have saved should see us through the trip.”

“That’s not possible! That money is a loan to finance the debut of my duo. I can’t spend it on travel!”

“You’ll have to find a way!” replied Elise, for once raising her voice to confront her husband. “The life of our son is at stake!”

Rudi blinked: “I’ll see what I can do.”

He went back to Cannabich and begged: “Is there any other way that funding could be secured for that concert?”

Cannabich furrowed his brow. Then his face lit up:

“I have an idea.”

“What is it?”

“I have been in correspondence with Father Gregor Hauer. He obtained permission from the great Joseph Haydn to perform Haydn’s new cello concerto and is trying to find an appropriate venue to launch the work. Hauer just wrote inquiring about a potential concert with the Mannheim Orchestra. I have not replied yet.”

“And how does that help me?”

“I could write Hauer and request that he sponsor, at least in part, the concert where he would play Haydn’s new work. I am not sure if he has patrons who could subsidize his appearance. I would need to ask.”

“Would you please?”

“I will write him today inviting him to perform at Mannheim under financial conditions, but who knows how he will react.”

At first, Hauer rejected efforts to make him pay to play, but Cannabich played up the financial straits his ensemble faced, appealed to the artist’s generosity, and hinted that some other musician might be willing to split the cost of the concert. Hauer finally agreed to obtain 250 florins from his benefactors.

Cannabich showed the letter to Rudi: “I fear this is the best we will be able to do. Can you take your son to Italy on half of the Duke’s loan?”

“It will have to suffice.”

February 1784

Rudi had a difficult time trying to persuade Elise to travel to Italy on 350 florins. “Do you want us to starve?” she protested.

“That’s the best I can do” he replied.

“Fine!” she screamed. “You stay. I’ll take Kurt myself, alone!”

It was already early February and Kurt seemed worse with each passing day. Rudi relented: “Please be very careful.”

They departed by coach on the second week of February. Kurt was wrapped in blankets and was deathly pale. Rudi feared his son might not survive the trip;

tears streamed from his eyes as he waved farewell. Elise, her face set in an angry mask, did not wave back.

April 19-24, 1784

The concert in which Rudi and Gregor Hauer would perform would occur on Sunday, April 25. Hauer arrived in Mannheim on Monday evening, with time for a couple of rehearsals before the concert. Next day, he played the Haydn piece with the orchestra, and then sat in on the rehearsal of Rudi's duo.

Hauer was half asleep for most of the piece. When the last movement began, however, he perked up. At the end, Hauer approached Cannabich: "Herr Direktor, may I have a private word with you?" Cannabich escorted Hauer to his office and closed the door.

"How can I help you, maestro?" he asked.

"That duo you were rehearsing, who is the composer?"

"It was written by Rudolf Von Flüstervogel, whom you met today. Rudi is a local artist."

"It is the strangest thing. As you know, I am in residence in Salzburg, working for Prince-Archbishop Colloredo. Another employee of the Archbishop is Michael Haydn, the youngest brother of Franz Joseph Haydn. Well, last year Michael composed six duos for violin and viola at the Archbishop's request. You see, the Archbishop plays the violin and he wanted some pieces to play with his steward Count Arco, who is an amateur violist. Anyhow, I suffered through Michael Haydn's duos several times – and the finale of the last of the six is in the form of a theme and variations, identical to the music I heard today performed by you and Flüstervogel."

Cannabich blanched. "What are you saying? That Rudi stole the music from Michael Haydn?"

"I do not quite remember the first two movements, but the theme and variations I recall very well."

"What you are saying, Father Hauer, is very serious. We must get to the bottom of it right away."

Cannabich had a copy of the duo made and dispatched it post haste to Munich, where Michael Haydn was staying, with a brief, blunt inquiry: "Dear Michael, someone claims to have written this duo. Are you in fact the author?"

Michael Haydn's response, sent back by the same courier, stated: "There are many differences throughout the work, but the Theme and Variations in this composition is the same as in the one that bears my name. However, the work was written by Mozart, who allowed me to pass it as my own as a favor. Mozart's duos are vastly superior to anything I could ever write and I have no right to claim their authorship."

An exhausted courier returned late Saturday night, just in time to hand Haydn's response to Cannabich before the concertmaster retired for the evening.

April 25, 1784

At dawn, someone knocked on Rudi's door summoning him to the orchestra's offices at the Mannheim Palace. He rushed there, and was greeted by Cannabich, who laid down the accusations levelled against him. "Father Hauer is sure that the work you call yours is someone else's."

Rudi found the courage to respond energetically, though falsely: "Every note in that duo is mine. I spent almost a year writing it and I do not care what anyone says, this is my music, which cost me much sweat and tears. I will defend myself against these accusations until the day I die."

Cannabich responded coolly:

"Herr Von Flüstervogel, a lot of ill can occur if we pursue this matter in public. I shall just cancel the performance. I do not ever want to see your face again."

Rudi thought of arguing further, but turned around and slunk out of the palace.

Late 1784

Rudi used the remainder of the Duke's loan to take passage to Taormina to meet his family. He found Kurt in somewhat better health and his wife in a more amenable disposition. He refused to answer questions about what had transpired in Mannheim other than vowing never to return to the city. Elise interpreted his reticence as indication that his duo had been poorly received and did not press the point.

The family moved to Naples in July. Rudi auditioned for a position in the household of King Ferdinand. He was hired and became music tutor to the King's children. He taught them viola and violin, and threw in German as a bonus. He was well liked by all.

1793

Rudi was well settled in Naples when the news reached them of Mozart's death two years before. He was seized by melancholy, which he tried to disguise but Elise knew him too well and persisted in her questioning until he confessed.

"You may recall that, in 1783, I had been working in the composition of a duo for violin and viola, which I hoped would make me famous. I had written two movements but didn't know how to end the work. I was desperate."

"Yes, I remember the incident very well," replied Elise.

"Then, I had a vision," continued Rudi. "I heard a strong voice that directed me to look for models from which to draw inspiration to complete the duo. It was a message from Heaven and could not resist its command. I began looking, and in the library at the Mannheim Palace I found a manuscript that contained an

unidentified duo for violin and viola. The entire duo was wonderful, but it was the third movement, a Theme and Variations, that drew my attention, for it was just what I needed. I copied the movement and used as the finale of my duo.”

“I never knew who the work’s true author was until last year, when I bought in Florence the score of a duo in B flat by Mozart. In reviewing the score, I realized that Mozart was the composer of the work that I’ve been passing off as mine.”

“Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?” rebuked Elise.

“I’m ashamed, but not sorry for what I did. I was following directions from some power greater than I. I had to find a way to complete the work by whatever means possible. So, I stole. But at least, I stole from the very best.”

Elise looked at her husband for a long time. “And you really don’t know the source of the voice you heard?”

“It’s a mystery,” concluded Rudi. “Perhaps it was Mozart himself.”

Elise turned her head away from her husband so he would not see her smile.

About the author: Born in Cuba, Matias Travieso-Diaz migrated to the United States as a young man where he became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for nearly fifty years. Over one hundred of his short stories have been published or accepted for publication in paying anthologies, magazines, blogs, audio books and podcasts. A first collection of his stories, “The Satchel and Other Terrors” has recently been released and is available on Amazon and other book outlets. More details about him can be found [here](#):

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Only if you loved me, dear
If for the drop of a moment
If for once in a lunar year,
I would weave all my pain
Into the dreams of a...

When Blue Turns Gray

In an unfamiliar town
In a different pole
I saw her once again...
In the wake of a monsoon.
With the vapors
Of my dried out pain, ...



The Party (a Paranormal story)

1 Rein Morrison was against the idea of keeping the White palace as it had been for the last couple of centuries; standing tall and high...



The Gift of the Nature (A paranormal Story)

We used to call him Millin, the Silencer. Can't exactly remember who had given him the name, but whenever he is around in the middle of an...



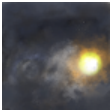
The Shallow Canal (A Paranormal Story)

1. After a week long wait, the dream was going to come true and she was in my boat now with no one else around. She was a beauty like a ...



Hello, Please Let Me Know...

With deep respect for Sir Lionel Richie and even deeper love for his masterpiece 'Hello...' it's just an attempted lyric as my version of the ...



Under the Same Moon

She was in her lawn Colored in the night, Asking the half Moon, "Can you see him?" He was alone In the twilight ...



Love and the Crescent Moon

I was lying on the dewy lawn All all alone, Watching the blooming Moon Swinging carelessly on the torn Fringes of long banana leaves. And ...

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