Variations on a Russian Folk Song

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Variations on a Russian Folk Song

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Abstract
This piece for solo piano demonstrates a wide range of techniques utilized in twentieth century composition. The theme is taken from the Finale of Igor Stravinsky’s ballet "The Firebird", which itself is based on a Russian folk song. Each subsequent variation focuses on one or more compositional technique.

I. Theme
II. March (chords by thirds, extended triads)
III. Molto grave e expressivo (chromaticism)
IV. L’istesso tempo (ten-tone row)
V. Fast and light (twelve-tone row, secundal harmony)
VI. Much less (minimalism, extended techniques)
VII. Hazy (quartal harmony, modal melody)
VIII. Finale (spectralism)

The order of the variations partly reflects a chronological motion of harmony through the twentieth century, but also demonstrates a building of large-scale tension, releasing that tension, then focusing on the aftermath of that release. The final variation creates a symmetry within the form of the piece, with chords rising into the uppermost register of the piano, just as the piece began.

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Variations on a Russian Folk Song
for Solo Piano

I. Theme

\( \frac{d}{\text{pp}} \)

Brian R. Denu
III. Molto grave e expressivo

\( \mathfrak{j} = 52 \)
V. Fast and light

\( \frac{d}{\text{beat}} = 160 \)
triangles indicate clusters surrounding the indicated pitch or pitches, while squares represent a specific interval that outlines the desired cluster.
VI. Much less

150  \( \frac{\text{mf}}{4} \)  
place a heavy object on the lowest register of the piano

153  \( \frac{\text{sim.}}{4} \)  

repeat for about thirty seconds

let it ring until almost completely silent

137  \( \frac{\text{f}}{4} \)  

142  \( \frac{\text{fff}}{4} \)  

150  \( \frac{\text{mf}}{4} \)  

153  \( \frac{\text{sim.}}{4} \)  

\( \text{rit.} \)
remove heavy object from the piano