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.

Keywords
theme and variations, piano, russian folk song, Stravinsky, Firebird, music theory

Disciplines
Composition | Fine Arts | Music Theory

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Variations on a Russian Folk Song
for Solo Piano

I. Theme

\( \text{\textit{pp}} \)

Brian R. Denu
Maestoso

\( \frac{14}{4} \)

\( \frac{19}{4} \)

\( \frac{25}{4} \)
III. Molto grave e expressivo

\( J = 52 \)
IV. L'istesso tempo
triangles indicate clusters surrounding the indicated pitch or pitches, while squares represent a specific interval that outlines the desired cluster.
VI. Much less

150  \( \frac{3}{4} \) = 52

place a heavy object on the lowest register of the piano

repeat for about thirty seconds

let it ring until almost completely silent

142

137

rit.

153
VII. Hazy

\[ \dot{b}n \approx \sum \dot{b}n \]

remove heavy object from the piano

\[ j = 72 \]