

The Gift  
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**Abstract:** This paper, invoking Mauss, will describe a series of musical gifts given to and by Paul Wittgenstein (1887-1961), celebrated one-armed pianist.

In 1915, after losing an arm in the war, Wittgenstein was given a remarkable gift: His teacher, the blind organist and composer Josef Labor (1842-1924), presented Wittgenstein with three newly-composed works for a one-armed pianist. Wittgenstein promptly reciprocated Labor's gift by performing these works near Prague. Far more significantly: Wittgenstein's response to Labor's gift was not limited to playing these works. A gift "receives its meaning... from the response it triggers" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 5), and Wittgenstein answered Labor's gift by devoting the rest of his life to being a one-armed concert artist. Wittgenstein's long career can be seen as reciprocation for Labor's original gift. But Wittgenstein has given us a gift, as well. Wittgenstein was "intrigued with how genius would handle this unusual problem" (Flindell, 1971 p. 114), and between 1923 and 1950, he commissioned works from numerous composers (R. Strauss, Britten, Prokofieff, others), the most important of which was by Ravel.

Ravel's concerto not only demands breath-taking virtuosity from the soloist (most of the Wittgenstein repertoire does this), but also involved structural complexities not found in the standard repertoire (Kingsbury pp. 56-59). However: Ravel rather intensely disliked Wittgenstein's manner of playing, and in 1936 Ravel assigned his concerto to a two-handed pianist. Nowadays, the "Wittgenstein repertoire" is mainstream repertoire. This repertoire is Wittgenstein's answer to Labor's original gift, but it is also Wittgenstein's gift to us all.

**Key Words:** Paul Wittgenstein, Maurice Ravel, one-handed pianists

I will speak to you about the *hau*... The *hau* is not the wind that blows, not at all. Let us suppose that you possess a certain article (*taonga*) and that you give me this article. You give it me without setting a price on it. We strike no bargain about it. Now, I give this article to a third person, who, after a certain lapse of time, decides to give me something as payment in return (*utu*). He makes a present to me of something (*taonga*). Now, this *taonga* that he gives me is the spirit (*hau*) of the *taonga* that I received from you and that I had given to him. The *taonga* that I received for these *taonga* (that I received from you) must be returned to you" (Mauss, 1990, p. 11).

In this essay I will recount a few events from the music history of 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe. In this incident, a horrific bodily impairment (dismemberment – loss of the right arm) was transformed from a disability into a cultural gift.

Sometime in the fall of 1915, Leopoldine Wittgenstein, a 65 year old widow in Vienna, welcomed her son home from the war. His Holiness, Pope Benedict XV, had arranged for an exchange of war prisoners, and one of these newly-released prisoners was her 28 year old son Paul. Now, release from prisoner-of-war status can only be "good news" for the individuals

involved, and such it certainly must have been for Paul Wittgenstein.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the circumstances of his capture by the Russian army relate to a rather calamitous fact: Paul Wittgenstein had not been captured on the battlefield, but in a Polish hospital, where his right arm had just been amputated. Frau Wittgenstein's boy was returning to his hometown not just as a released POW, but as a war casualty. Notwithstanding the horrific carnage that was about to envelop Europe over the next three (let alone, the next thirty) years; this homecoming-of-the-maimed can only have been a traumatic event.

Paul's father Karl had been a highly successful industrialist, and the Wittgensteins were a wealthy family. As a small child, Paul had played piano duets with his mother, a highly accomplished pianist who became his first music teacher. Later, Paul went on to study music theory with a respected Viennese organist-pianist-composer by the name of Josef Labor, and piano with the nonpareil piano teacher, Theodore Leschetitzky (now famous for having been the teacher of such giants as Ignaz Paderewski and Artur Schnabel). Young Paul had also played piano duets with Richard Strauss, for this great composer was a frequent visitor in the Wittgenstein home, as were Clara Schumann, Johannes Brahms, Gustave Mahler, Edward Hanslick, and other illustrious figures of the Vienna music scene.

At the age of twenty-six – that is, just a few months before he packed off to war – Paul Wittgenstein had played a debut concert in Vienna, performing a concerto by the Irish composer John Field, and another by his teacher, Josef Labor. His debut had been sufficiently successful as to portend a career as a concert artist. The war – the amputation of his right arm – would put an end to all that.

Perhaps, but perhaps not, for Paul Wittgenstein was about to be given an extraordinary gift. As soon as the young soldier-pianist returned home,<sup>2</sup> his former teacher started composing a series of full-scale compositions for a one-armed pianist. Josef Labor composed a sonata for piano and violin, a piano quartet (i.e., for piano, violin, viola, and cello), as well as an orchestral concert-piece, all for a one-armed pianist (Flindell, 1971, p. 126f). The impact of Labor's remarkable gift was felt immediately. As Wittgenstein would say, many years later, "I immediately determined upon the plan of training myself to become a one-armed [left hand] pianist, or at least to attempt it."<sup>3</sup>

Josef Labor was at that time in his mid-seventies; for almost all of those years, he had been blind. Well may one conjecture as to the thoughts that an aging blind musician might have entertained on the subject of the calamity that had just befallen his prize pupil. In any event, by the early months of 1917, with the war still raging, Paul Wittgenstein had already performed several Labor works in recitals in two small cities in Bohemia (Teplice, 12/19/16; Kladno, 1/9/17) and, apparently, elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

Wittgenstein's wartime one-armed recitals were not unprecedented. In May of 1915, while the newly-amputated Paul Wittgenstein was still being held in a Siberian war-prison, there had been in Berlin a lecture recital by a celebrated one-armed piano virtuoso from Budapest – a Hungarian nobleman named Geza Zichy. The audience for Zichy's 1915 lecture-recital was made up entirely of war casualties, and Zichy's lecture was an inspirational "pep talk" addressed to the wounded soldiers. I do not know whether or not the Wittgenstein household in Vienna, or

perhaps Josef Labor, knew about Zichy's performance before these German war veterans in Berlin, although such seems entirely plausible. It is all but certain that the Wittgenstein household would have known of Zichy's career, and that, upon learning of Paul's war injury, the significance of Zichy's career would have taken on great importance.<sup>5</sup>

Count Geza Zichy (1849-1924 – one year older than Frau Wittgenstein) had lost his right arm at age 14 in a hunting accident. He took up serious piano study only after his amputation, apparently as part of a rather grimly-gritty determined youthful resolve to completely overcome his adversities. He eventually became the protégé of Franz Liszt, and concertized widely throughout Europe for many years. For more than forty years (1875-1918), Zichy was director of the national conservatory in Budapest, and during that period he also composed and produced five full-length operas. From 1891 to 1894, he held an authoritative administrative position at the Royal Hungarian Opera and, although this was a fairly brief period, it was significant for having precipitated the resignation of Gustav Mahler, who was then music director of the Royal Hungarian Opera -- as well as a personal friend of the Wittgenstein family. In a word, Zichy was a "bigshot." His concertizing had drawn raves from another friend of the Wittgenstein family, Edward Hanslick, probably the most influential critic in Europe. Hanslick had once written –

“The most astounding thing we have heard in the way of piano playing in recent times has been accomplished by a one-armed man – Count Geza Zichy...his lightning-like jumps, skips, and glides and his polyphonic legato playing were so extraordinary that his listeners could scarcely believe their ears and eyes” (quoted in Edel, 1994, p. 27).

This Hanslick review (very much truncated here!) had come in response to an 1882 Zichy recital in Vienna. In 1882, Frau Wittgenstein would have been 32 years of age, and already minding four children. She was hobnobbing with Hanslick and others of the Viennese musical elite, and it is inconceivable that she would not have known about a musical celebrity such as Zichy. It seems unthinkable that later, when her own son became an amputee himself, she and her friends around her would not be thinking of the career of Geza Zichy as a model.<sup>6</sup>

Special mention must be made of the fact that Josef Labor's musical gift to the young amputee included a *Konzertstücke*, a concert-piece, for piano solo with full symphony orchestra. This was not a little sonatina for piano solo, not something that Paul Wittgenstein would play at home by himself, or in front of the family. Josef Labor's gift was an unmistakable career-challenge. And while it is possible that Paul Wittgenstein would have required no urging to continue with his piano playing, it is also possible that he would have chosen another direction for his life. Consider, for example, this observation by the cellist Pablo Casals, who suffered a near-catastrophe while mountain climbing on his first concert tour of the US, in 1901:

“Suddenly one of my companions shouted, ‘Watch out, Pablo!’ I looked up and saw a boulder hurtling down the mountainside directly toward me. I jerked my head aside and was lucky not to be killed. As it was, the boulder hit and smashed my left hand – my fingering hand. My friends were aghast. But when I looked at my mangled bloody fingers, I had a strangely different reaction. My first thought was, ‘Thank God, I’ll never have to play the cello again’” (Casals, 1970 p. 105)

I have no way of knowing what if any thought Paul Wittgenstein may have given to his imperiled career as a piano virtuoso on the day his arm was shattered by Russian bullets, or on the day when the surgeons removed it altogether. I have no way of knowing whether Wittgenstein might have had thoughts similar to those of Casals, fourteen years earlier. In light of what Casals said, however, it should be clear that such thoughts were not impossible, but/and that Labor's gift of full-length compositions would have cast any such thoughts in a most unacceptable light. Such can be the power of the giving of gifts. And there remains the truly extraordinary historical fact that barely a year after returning from the war, Paul Wittgenstein did indeed perform in public, as soloist with symphony orchestra, on December 19, 1916, and again with a chamber-music ensemble on January 9, 1917 -- playing with the only hand he still had.

However, Wittgenstein was not yet finished with his reciprocation of Josef Labor's gift. In response to Labor's gift, Wittgenstein would not limit himself to the playing of just those pieces. Wittgenstein's response would be an entire career as a one-armed pianist. In 1918, however, even after having performed Labor's gift compositions, the career prospects for a one-armed pianist were either slim or none. There were some pleasant musical miniatures by Camille St. Saëns, Max Reger, and a few others, but neither the quantity nor the quality of the one-hand repertoire was such as to indicate a concert career.

Wittgenstein set about to remedy that fact in two ways. One thing that Wittgenstein did was to make his own transcriptions, re-arranging standard works into solo pieces for a one-armed pianist. With these as a basis, he generated a career as a one-armed concert pianist. As such, Wittgenstein performed in the "normal" concert venues of Europe. Although he certainly was a sensation, he equally certainly was *NOT* a freak-show. The following eyewitness/earwitness testimony is typical:

"I was about 12 years old when I heard Paul Wittgenstein play for the first time. I was sitting with my father in our subscription seats in the rear of the Wiener Musicverein Saal. After the concert, my father asked me if I had noticed anything unusual about the pianist. I had not. He told me then that the pianist had only played with his left hand. I could not believe it" (quoted in Flindell, 1971, p. 113).

The other career-building tactic that Wittgenstein used was to draw on his own considerable financial wealth and to commission the composition of large-scale works from leading composers of the era. Wittgenstein's many commissions must also be understood as responses to the original Labor gift of 1915. Herein lies the significance of Pierre Bourdieu's observation that appears at the head of this chapter, "The gift receives its meaning from the response it triggers." Herein also, it seems to me, is a response to the observation of Theodore Edel, who in his discussion of Geza Zichy remarks that "it seems rather strange that Zichy did not use his wealth to enrich his repertoire with commissions from great colleagues, as Paul Wittgenstein would later do" (Edel, 1994, p. 29). As Marcel Mauss observed in *The Gift* (2000), the obligation to reciprocate for the receipt of a gift is an extremely powerful cultural force. The cultural difference between Zichy and Wittgenstein may well be understood in terms of the fact that Wittgenstein's disability was, but Zichy's was not, the focus of the presentation of an important gift.

Some of Wittgenstein's composers – Hans Gál, Eric Korngold, Franz Schmidt, Serge Bortkiewicz, and Alexander Tansman – are largely forgotten, and unknown to today's audiences. Others – Benjamin Britten, Richard Strauss, Sergei Prokofieff, Paul Hindemith, and Maurice Ravel – are canonized composers with an enduring reputation. Of these, Ravel is unquestionably the most important to the present discussion, because his “Wittgenstein Concerto” has itself become a standard repertoire item of the concert-world. Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche* is regularly performed and recorded by “normal” two-handed piano virtuosos (such as Casadesus, De Larrocha, Entrement, Katchen, and Zimmerman), as it is generally considered to be one of Ravel's greatest and most unusual works.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, the list of composers who wrote works for Wittgenstein is noteworthy also for several names that are absent. It is no accident, for example, that Wittgenstein *did not* commission one-handed repertoires from Arnold Schoenberg, or Igor Stravinsky, or Bela Bartok. Wittgenstein's musical tastes were decidedly romanticist, and the intensely dissonant styles of these arch-modernist composers were alien to Wittgenstein. It is significant that, although he did commission works from Hindemith and Prokofieff (both of whom were fairly modernistic), in each ~~both~~ case, he rejected these works and they were never played.

Wittgenstein's musical preferences are indicated in this entry for Serge Bortkiewicz in *The New Grove* –

“Bortkiewicz's piano style is rather typical of the Post-Romantic Russian tradition: based on Liszt and Chopin, nurtured by Tchaikowsky and Russian folklore, virtually unaffected by 20<sup>th</sup> century trends in Europe. His workmanship is meticulous, his imagination colorful and sensitive, his piano writing idiomatic...” (Schwartz, 1994).

Unfortunately, the phrase, “virtually unaffected by 20<sup>th</sup> century trends,” carries with it the invidious implication that composers such as Bortkiewicz failed to partake of the major cultural events of their own times, essentially because they continued, in the twentieth century to adhere to a romanticist musical idiom. Thus Schoenberg, who lived from 1874 to 1951, is considered a genuine “twentieth century composer” because his harmonic style was invented in the twentieth century, while the younger Bortkiewicz (1877-1952) is likely to be thought of as a musical anachronism, as one whose musical creativity was not in keeping with the spirit of the times. This sort of historiological ideology tends to diminish the historical significance of Wittgenstein's career, since he eschewed, by and large, the more striking stylistic innovations of composers such as Schoenberg, Bartok, Stravinsky, Berg and Webern.

If, in the context of academic music history, Wittgenstein's career is not treated as a “freak-show,” it is, nevertheless, treated as a musicological sidebar, as something standing to one side of the mainstream of music historical evolution. It occurs to me that this is misleading for two reasons. First, it implicitly treats “music” as an absolute, autonomous, and self-directed domain *having its own history*, a history that in the twentieth century was fixated on the evolution of harmonic styles in an increasingly dissonant fashion. Second, it elides the very

important element of cultural disruption that was, in point of historical fact, caused by the events of Paul Wittgenstein's career.

It is not only axiomatic, but also paradigmatic, that musicologists think of an event such as the tumultuous premier of *Le Sacre de Printemps* as defining moments of twentieth century music history. Such jarring works as *Le Sacre*, or Bartok's *Allegro Barbaro*, or Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, are typically characterized as era-defining works, largely in connection with the spirit of cultural disruption – *epater le bourgeois* – that they created. Alongside such a standard, the career of Paul Wittgenstein is likely to be thought of merely as a curiosity, a personality-story with only a minimum of “musical” significance, and this, because Wittgenstein's musical taste was “conservative,” and not in keeping with the harmonically “progressive” developments of “the twentieth century.”

In spite, or perhaps, rather, in light of this, it is important to state directly that Wittgenstein's career created its own cultural upheaval, identifiable on at least two counts. First, the concert-going public was amazed. Second, the experts didn't know what to make of it. But, hello: Confused amazement might well be taken as the characteristic trait of the cultural response to *Le Sacre* and *Pierrot*.

As for the audience's amazement, I will be brief, and confine myself to the general observation that Wittgenstein's concerts were universally accepted as “serious” music, and consistently left listeners with the impression that they were listening to a two-handed pianist. The above-quoted remark of the twelve-year-old piano student who didn't even notice Wittgenstein's disability is, I think, ample testimony, even if it came from a young girl. A young girl is only a young girl, but twelve-year-old girls can be extremely curious and observant, and a twelve-year-old piano student who is in a Vienna concert-hall is not a babe in arms. This, however, only leads to my second point, for if that young girl didn't know what to make of things, she was not alone. Consider, for example, this commentary from the music pages of *The New York Herald Tribune*:

“Doubtless the greatest tribute that one could pay to Paul Wittgenstein, the famous one-armed pianist, is a simple statement of the fact that after the first few moments of wondering how in the devil he accomplishes it, one almost forgets that one was listening to a player whose right sleeve hung empty at his side. One found oneself engrossed by the sensitiveness of the artist's phrasing, the extent to which his incredible technique was subordinated to the delivery of musical thought” (quoted in Flindell, 1971, p. 117).

There are, today, numerous recordings of Wittgenstein's performances, and there should be little question but that this reviewer's incredulity about “how in the devil he accomplishes it” is misplaced: Wittgenstein's pianistic technique was markedly limited. The period between the two world wars was an era when pianistic giants walked the earth; our *Herald Tribune* reviewer would most assuredly have been familiar with the piano playing of Moritz Rosenthal, Serge Rachmaninoff, Josef Lhevinne, and Joseph Hoffman, each or any of whom could have tied at least one hand behind his back and still played circles around Paul Wittgenstein. And I didn't yet mention Leopold Godowski, the super-virtuoso sometimes called “the apostle of the left

hand,” in connection with his many transcriptions and compositions for the left hand alone.<sup>8</sup> Far, far more significant in this commentary is the reviewer’s reference to “a player whose right sleeve hung empty at his side.” Surely, the reviewer’s familiarity with the likes of Rachmaninoff and Lhevinne had not prepared his critical sensibilities for *this!*

In fact, the above *Herald Tribune* quotation comes from a review of a Wittgenstein performance of the Ravel concerto, and it should be said directly that Ravel’s concerto, rather like some of the major works of the dissonant modernists (*Le Sacre*, or *Pierrot Lunaire*), created a furor-sensation that included its own quotient of confusion and misunderstanding. For example, it is a point of considerable mystique that the Ravel concerto creates the illusion that the pianist is playing with two hands. As has already been mentioned, the illusion of twohandedness was a characteristic of Wittgenstein’s performances generally, but the impact of Ravel’s concerto was to introduce this issue anew, as though the salient accomplishment of Ravel’s concerto was the illusion of two-handedness. As though arguing in favor of this canard, none other than Alfred Cortot, who was perhaps the most celebrated French pianist of that epoch, re-wrote the entire solo part for two hands! Hastily should it be said that as soon as he learned about it, Ravel expressly forbade its performance, but Cortot’s venture bears witness to the mystique of the Ravel concerto, in which a one-armed pianist does what another pianist would do with two.<sup>9</sup>

There was one particularly important contemporary observer who noted the shortcomings of Wittgenstein’s piano playing, Ravel himself. After being disappointed by Wittgenstein’s rendition of his concerto, Ravel went to considerable lengths to dissociate himself from Wittgenstein, and eventually appointed a different two-handed pianist<sup>10</sup> as the preferred exponent of the piece. The Ravel-Wittgenstein quarrel provides the juicy gossip that musicologists love to whisper:

*Wittgenstein*: I am an old hand as a pianist, and what you wrote does not sound right.

*Ravel*: I am an old hand at orchestration, and it *does* sound right (quoted in Long, 1971, p. 59).

Although, as I have indicated, Wittgenstein’s pianistic technique was not so advanced as that of some others, it is apparent that Ravel’s primary misgivings were oriented more toward his style, and particularly toward his penchant for making alterations in the composer’s text. A major point of conflict between Ravel and Wittgenstein was on the matter of whether or not the performer must always adhere precisely to the dictates of the score, or whether the performer has the authority to make ad libitum changes:

*Wittgenstein*: Performers must not be slaves!

*Ravel*: Performers *are* slaves (*ibid*).

Ravel’s insistence that “performers are slaves” means that as far as Ravel was concerned, the performer is obliged to strictly (slavishly) obey the written indications of the score, and is forbidden the license to improvise or make modifications, emendations, and elaborations. The urgency of this issue, the reason this engendered conflict with Wittgenstein, is that in the era of

pianistic romanticism, many performers took it to be their prerogative to make modifications in their work.

Why would this have been such a sticking point for Ravel? Why couldn't Ravel simply let Wittgenstein "do his own thing?" The most obvious answers relate to the fact that literalistic interpretations of musical scores was very much in ascendancy at the time, and also that Ravel's compositional style was characterized by extremely detailed refinement of particulars (Stravinsky famously characterized Ravel as a "Swiss Watchmaker").

There is, however, an intriguing paradox here. Maurice Ravel had received a commission from Paul Wittgenstein, a romanticist virtuoso struggling to transcend the limitations of his disability (and not to be a "slave" to circumstances). Ravel was meticulously anti-romanticist and decreed that the soloist must indeed be a "slave." Nevertheless, Ravel composed a work that, more than any other establishes the soloist (slave?) as the triumphant conqueror of the musical event.

From the viewpoint of a music analyst, the most salient trait of the Ravel Concerto for Left Hand pertains not the one-hand/two-hands illusion; it is the formal structure of the work. Alone in the European art music repertoire, the Ravel Concerto for Left Hand is characterized by a solo part that, by the end of the work, has unquestionably become dominant over the orchestra (which in this case happens to be a very large orchestra). This formal-structural characteristic makes Ravel's concerto unique within music history. To be sure, the illusion of a two-handed pianist is an important factor within this organizational pattern, but it is important to realize that, in comparison, no concerto for a two-handed pianist features an orchestra part that is structurally subordinated to the soloist, as is the case with the Ravel Concerto for Left Hand.

This calls for at least a bit of analytical elaboration. The Ravel concerto is in one movement comprised of three sections; the first and third of these are slow-moving and in triple meter, the second is a rapid, tarantella-like passage in duple meter. By no stretch of the analytical imagination can this rapid middle section be understood as a "development section," and the one movement of this piece cannot be understood as being "in sonata form." On the other hand, the first and last sections do indeed relate to each other rather in the fashion of the "exposition" and "recapitulation" of a genuine sonata-form movement (thus: the final section includes re-statements of all the tunes that had been heard in the opening section, and the re-statements of these various tunes show different key-relationships than had been heard earlier). The closing section of the Ravel concerto, however, contrasts stunningly with a typical concerto recapitulation: In Ravel's concerto, the soloist alone plays the lion's share of the "recapitulation," while the players in the orchestra sit by quietly. It is not the entire ensemble, but the soloist who single-handedly (!) moves the piece toward its conclusion. The orchestra returns only very briefly at the very end. One will find nothing comparable in the concerti of Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, etc. No, the hallmark of concerto organization has always been that of symmetry, or equipoise, between the opposed forces of the soloist and the orchestra. Only in Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand is this principle of sociomusical equipoise superseded by a stunning outburst from the soloist, which unquestionably dominates the orchestra yet without subjugating it.



It is hardly a coincidence that the only concerto in which this is so should be one that was composed specifically for a one-armed war casualty. And Ravel's writing for the one-armed soloist is, without question, nothing short of astonishing. But Ravel has done something that is quite different from writing a part that will generate the illusion of a two-handed pianist!

In the score, Ravel has rather whimsically written the word "cadenza," over the extraordinary piano solo that re-states the main themes in the concluding section. This passage, however, is no ordinary cadenza. For one thing, the word, "cadenza" entails the notion of "cadence," and there is no semblance of a cadence here. If this is a "cadenza" at all, it is one in which the soloist emerges to shove everyone else, large ensemble and conventional soloists alike, out of the way for one of the most outlandish displays in music history.<sup>11</sup>

In this, Ravel's one-handed cadenza is not unlike the cadenza in the first movement of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto #5, the work that inspired the above-quoted remark from the musicologist Susan McClary (1987). In her discussion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Brandenburg, McClary argued that that cadenza introduced a sociological – indeed, a *political* – perspective, which McClary characterized as the "revenge of the continuo player."<sup>12</sup>

I find McClary's observations on the 5<sup>th</sup> Brandenburg to be entirely plausible, and yet this Bach cadenza is significantly less revolutionary than that of Ravel in the Concerto for Left Hand. The "outlandish" cadenza in the 5<sup>th</sup> Brandenburg comes not at the end of the piece but at the end of the first movement, and is followed by two very substantial movements in which are restored any uncertainties regarding the appropriate solo-ensemble balance. The cadenza in Ravel's Concerto for Left Hand, however, comes at the end of the work.<sup>13</sup>

In 1915, Josef Labor had given a musical gift that was dedicated to the proposition that a one-armed war casualty should be able to play the piano. In 1930, Ravel composed a concerto in which a one-armed war casualty could play a piano solo that surpassed anything previously written for two handed pianists. Then, in 1936, Ravel presented that same concerto to a two-handed pianist, in order that two-handed pianists might be able to do what the one-armed soloist had done. Is this the apotheosis of reciprocity? Perhaps not, although it does strike me as a remarkable chain of cultural events.

We have all been magnified by this exchange of gifts.



These works comprised Josef Labor's musical gift to Paul Wittgenstein, 1915:

- 1) Concert-piece in the form of Variations
- 2) Piano quartet in c minor
- 3) Violin & piano Sonata in E Major

A list of Wittgenstein's many counter-gifts: Works for one-armed pianist Commissioned by Paul Wittgenstein

1923 – Franz Schmidt, Concertant Variations (composed: performed in 1925)  
 1923 – Eric Wolfgang Korngold, Concerto in C# (composed: performed in 1924)  
 1924 – Paul Hindemith, Concerto (composed)  
 1924 – Eric Wolfgang Korngold, Piano Quintet (published)  
 1924 – Richard Strauss, *Parergon* (composed: performed 1926) \*  
 1926 – Franz Schmidt, Piano Quintet (composed: performed 1929)  
 1926 – Richard Strauss, *Panathenaenzug* (composed: performed 1928) \*  
 1927 – Rudolf Braun, Concerto (performed)  
 1928 – Hans Gal, Piano Quartet (performed)  
 1929 – Eduard Schütt, *Paraphrase* for Piano and Orchestra (performed)  
 1929 – Sergei Bortkiewicz, Concerto (performed)  
 1930 – Maurice Ravel, Concerto (composed: performed 1931)  
 1930 – Eric Wolfgang Korngold, 4tet-suite (published)  
 1931 – Sergei Prokofieff, Concerto (composed: performed 1956)  
 1932 – Josef Labor, Divertimento in c (performed)  
 1932 – Franz Schmidt, Piano Quintet in B-Flat (composed)  
 1933 – Ernest Walker, Variations for Piano Left Hand and Chamber Ensemble, (composed)  
 1934 – Franz Schmidt, E-flat Concerto composed (performed 1935)  
 1935 – Ernest Walker, Prelude (composed: performed 1950)  
 1936 – Josef Labor, Concert Piece in f (performed)  
 1936 – Walter Bricht, *Faust Fantasy* (composed)  
 1937 – Walter Bricht, *Lied ohne Worte, Albumblatt, Perpetuum mobile* (composed)  
 1937 – Walter Bricht, *Die Fledermaus* fantasy (composed)  
 1938 – Franz Schmidt, Pno 5tet in A (composed)  
 1938 – Franz Schmidt, Toccata in d (composed)  
 1940 – Benjamin Britten, Diversions (composed: performed 1942)  
 1943 – Alexandre Tansman, concert piece (composed)  
 1950 – Franz Schmidt, Variations on a theme by Labor (5tet with piano) (performed)

\* -The two works composed by Richard Strauss are frequently said to have been commissioned, but Mathias von Orelli points out that “needless to say, Strauss was doing his friend a favor with this composition [the *Parergon*], and received no payment;” presumably, this is also the case with Strauss’ *Panathenaenzug*. Such may also be the case with some of the other works in this list. Additional research is called for.

This list is compiled from Flindell, 1971.

Also listed, but with no date:

Bortkiewicz, Concert-Fantasy, Piano & Orchestra  
 Braun, *Perpetuum Mobile; Serenade*  
 Gál, Piano Quintet Godowski, *Gypsy Baron* Paraphrase  
 Labor, Concert-piece in b  
 Labor, Piano Quintet in e  
 Labor, Piano Quintet in D

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Paul Wittgenstein (1887-1961) was the older brother of the celebrated philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951).

<sup>2</sup> Or, perhaps, sooner: Pretty certainly, Josef Labor would have known about the amputation almost as soon as it happened, and it seems fairly likely that he would have begun composing while Paul Wittgenstein was still being held in prison.

<sup>3</sup> Flindell, 1971, p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> Flindell 1971, p. 126. Flindell's article does not state that these Labor compositions of 1915 were his own gifts to Paul Wittgenstein. As far as I know, it is not impossible that Josef Labor composed these works in response to a commission from, say, Leopoldine Wittgenstein, although to me this seems somewhat less likely. To me, at least, there seems only a trivial distinction to be made between a series of gift-exchanges that began within the pianist's family and a series that began with his teacher. Here's a research project for an enterprising Austrian sociomusicologist!

<sup>5</sup> Information on Zichy's Berlin lecture-recital in 1915 can be found in Edel, 1994, p. 26

<sup>6</sup> Biographical information on Geza Zichy relies on Edel, 1994, and Weissman, 1980

<sup>7</sup> I have included a listing of the Wittgenstein repertoire on pp. 30-31.

<sup>8</sup> As Theodore Edel notes, the phenomenon of normal, two-handed pianists who made a specialty of performing with the left hand alone goes back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Edel, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Two parenthetical points should be added: (1) although the solo part of Ravel's concerto is indeed difficult, it is certainly not unplayable; (2) moreover, it can confidently be said that re-arranging the solo part for a two-handed performer would not reduce the difficulties.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Février, 1900-1979.

<sup>11</sup> McClary, 1987, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> In Ravel's *other* piano concerto (two-handed, in G Major), Ravel equally whimsically writes the word "cadenza" over a passage that is obviously not a cadenza at all, but is the soloist's re-statement of the "second theme" in the recapitulation of a rather strict sonata-form movement.

