

A. Tansman – Variations on a theme by Scriabin

Notes

While Segovia did in fact publish his edition of the piece, the most commonly played version is the one edited by *Alvaro Company* (Tansman, *Variations sur un thème de Scriabin*, 1972). Everything there is of course playable on 6-string guitar and offers a valid substitution to the manuscript, that is unplayable. The manuscript is however available (Tansman, *Variations sur un thème de Scriabin*, 1972), and we can find there a lot of problems that can be solved by an 8-string guitar. In some places, **the use of a 7th string is really obvious**. You can find a low D written even though the piece is supposedly written for a 6th string tuned in E, and some chords necessitate two 6th strings to be able to play some notes simultaneously. It therefore offers a great opportunity for the 8-string guitar. Below you can find an example of the solutions found by the editors : sometimes the chords are reorganized or octaviated, and when necessary some notes are simply deleted, which can lead to the loss of colors and ideas that the composer initially wanted.

From manuscript (Tansman, *Variations sur un thème de Scriabin*, 1972)

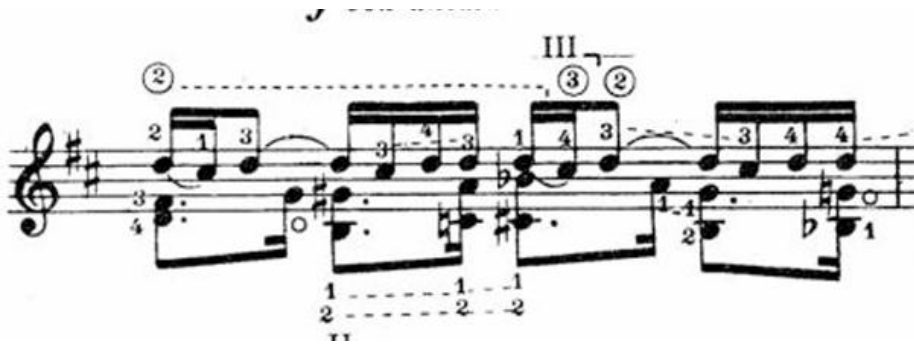


Here, you can see the lowest note of the chords is a low D ; the only way to play that note on a 6 string guitar is to tune the 6th string (E) to D. However, the whole piece has been written in a way that you need the open E bass to be able to play the piece, and 2 notes are only playable on the 6th string (low D and low G).

From edition by Alvaro Company (Tansman, *Variations sur un thème de Scriabin*, 1972)



Here, we can see the solution found by the editor has been to rise the whole chords one octave higher so that the low D is now a medium D and the G can be played elsewhere.



In this simplified version (first line), we can see that the bass has simply been dropped, and even some top notes, that are playable, were taken out – Var. III : bar 39

Tuning

7 = D / 8 = B

Possible improvements

In Variations III, IV, V and VI, there are new possibilities specifically offered by the 2 extra basses, without any need to change the original text.

- Variation III - 1) : in those multiple examples, the 7th string tuned in D allows that low D to be played at that exact pitch with a 6th string still tuned in E, as in the editions the chord has to be rearranged. This stays valid for the whole section (multiple occurrences).
- Variation IV - 2) : in those multiple examples, the 7th string tuned in D allows that low D to be played at that exact pitch with a 6th string still tuned in E, as in the editions the chord has to be rearranged. That stays the same for the chords with a low Eb.
- Variation IV - 3) : here, the use of the 7th string takes a new turn, as playing a chord with both a low D and low G (or G#) is impossible on a 6-string guitar even if the 6th string is tuned in D, as both those notes are only playable on the 6th string. The use of a 7th string here allows new unheard harmonies on a classical guitar with both notes sounding simultaneously.

- Variation V - 4) : in this specific case, the ornamentation causes the problem, but is technically possible on a 6-string guitar, if played on 2 strings. However, to have a coherent progression with the following ornamentations, which are played on one string (2nd) with slurs, it should also be played on one string. The stretch between D and E and the 2nd string is close to impossible for the fingers 3 and 4 (other fingers being taken by the rest of the notes), and I therefore found a solution using the 8th string in B. By playing the whole passage with a full barré in positions VII, then VI and V, it is possible to find a much more convenient stretch for the ornamentation on the 3rd string while also being able to play the bass on the 8th string. This might lead to another problem for some people, as the full barré on 8 strings requires a certain size and strength of the left hand, could not be adapted to every physiology.
- Variation VI - 5) : in those multiple examples, the 7th string tuned in D allows that low D to be played at that exact pitch with a 6th string still tuned in E, as in the editions the chord has to be rearranged.

Alternatives

In this piece, there are no places where alternatives (using an octaviated bass) can be used as a way to clarify the musical intention or complete the playable notes. The extra basses can be used to enhance the harmonies and ‘improve’ subjectively the piece, but they will be an option chosen (or not) by the performer.

Interesting sections

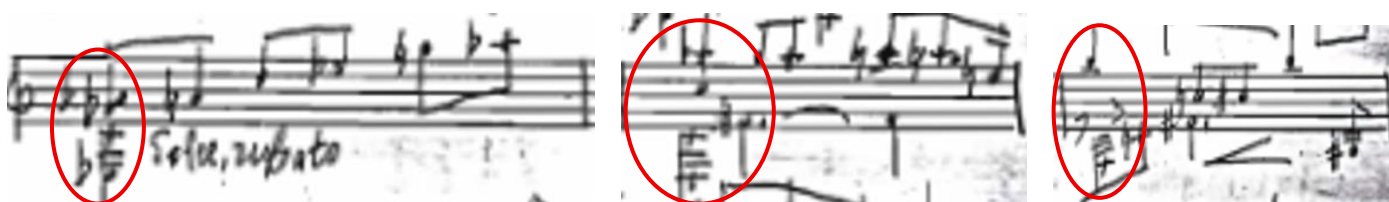


With 7=D, it is possible to play these examples with the open string, as there's no low D in the original 6-string tuning.





1) Variation. III : bars 39 ; 42 ; 46-49



With 7=D, it is possible to play these examples with the open string, as there's no low D (that also allows the Eb) in the original 6-string tuning.

2) Variation IV : bars 50-53 ; 54 ; 57 ; 65



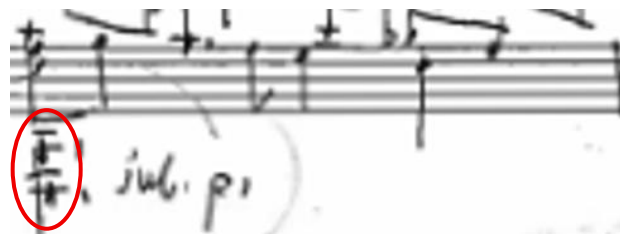
3) Variation IV : bars 71-73

Here, the 7th string in D allows to play the low D, and also to play the full chords, with the low G and G# played on the 6th string.



4) Variation V : bars 76-77

It is possible to play this with the correct and coherent ornamentation as a full Barré VI, so the bass is played by the 8th string.



With 7=D, it is possible to play these examples with the open string, as there's no low D in the original 6-string tuning.

5) *Variation VI : bars 92 ; 100*

Works Cited

Tansman, A. (1972). *Variations sur un thème de Scriabin*. (A. Company, Ed.)

Tansman, A. (1972). *Variations sur un thème de Scriabin*.