Notational Aspects of Camillo Togni's Early Piano Works (1937–1947): The Case of the *Sonata* op. 9 for Cello and Piano

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Camillo Togni's piano works from 1937 to 1947, long unknown to both performers and musicologists, have only recently been published by Edizioni Suvini Zerboni (Milano), coinciding with the release of my recording of his complete piano works (Naxos 2012–2020). Camillo Togni rarely spoke about the vast corpus of piano works that form the core of his musical apprenticeship. He never presented them to the public through concerts or recordings, nor did he propose them to his publisher despite the fact that they were very dear to him. Prior to his publication of *Tre Capricci* op. 38 in 1954, the period represented a solitary and reflective journey for Togni as he attempted to reconcile his sensibilities with the adoption of the twelve-tone system, and thus the works can be read as something like an intimate diary of the time.

In Italy, the twelve-tone technique struggled to gain acceptance, and Camillo Togni and Luigi Dallapiccola were its sole proponents. Togni, therefore, considered it appropriate not to publish his early work, which was dominated by a turbulent search among the vast repertoire of piano gestures that characterised the second half of the nineteenth century. This period was one of extraordinary technical and expressive growth where the dynamic and tonal possibilities of the piano were

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refined and expanded to such an extent that they imposed a 'sonic imagery' of unprecedented communicative power.

The young and talented composer-performer was fully aware of the magnificent catalogue of expressive possibilities that came with piano as he inherited it. This aesthetic attitude towards the instrument was not shared by Arnold Schoenberg, who was less fascinated by such 'pianistic reminiscences' and thus – especially in his early creative phase – was free to rethink the piano and render it essential, at times even 'harsh'. His *Drei Klavierstücke* op. 11 rejects the timbral resources of the Romantic piano without rejecting Romantic poetry, which was made clear by Ferruccio Busoni's concertante interpretation and opened a discussion about the role of the piano in 'New Music'. According to Busoni, musical concepts that rejected the use of broad resonances deprived the piano of its quintessential characteristic – that of an ever-living, ever-evolving sound body – and robbed it of much of its charm.

Camillo Togni's piano works from the creative decade 1937–1947 testify to his assiduous search for a 'modern' sound suitable for twelve-tone music. At the same time, they reveal a slow realisation of the impossibility of breaking with the past. Neither Busoni nor Togni could accept the 'breakthrough' mentioned above: their intense activity as performers had deeply rooted a strong 'physicality' in their piano writing, making them musicians who sought to strike a balance between strong intellectual passions. Busoni resolved the dilemma in his own way, managing the various 'resonant spaces' created by deliberately non-functional tonal areas with remarkable taste and wisdom. However, for Togni the twelve-tone technique would become a kind of 'moral duty', and the difficulty of thinking about the piano outside the significant dynamic-timbral achievements already discussed would lead him to renounce the instrument rather than violate it. His decision to 'reveal' himself as a composer with the *Tre Capricci* op. 38 is certainly a 'declaration of love' to the twelve-tone technique; the work is a manifesto of unresolved expressive issues, and Togni seems to be anchored to a melodicism lived with passionate drama in order to give voice to his deep inner experience. This attitude is reminiscent of Anton Webern. According to Peter Stadlen, the pianist who studied the *Variazioni* op. 27 with him in the months leading up to their premiere (1937), Webern 'clung to the melody, which he believed should be as eloquent as a spoken phrase'.[1]

The following compositions for piano are rare and spaced many years apart: the six *Capricci* date from 1954, 1956, 1957, 1969, 1987, and 1991, and represent the only piano work by Togni after 1947 – except for the *Omaggio a Bach* for two pianos (1951), giving the idea that this initial pianistic attempt was both modest and inhibiting to the author. His catalogue, however, includes various tonal

works and transcriptions that represent a sort of compositional divertissement, an indispensable 'breath of fresh air' for his artistic equilibrium. Each of the *Capricci* IV–VI attempts a new path. The IV *Capriccio* exploits exaggerated virtuosity as a 'decisive gesture' to unlock the emotional impasse. The V *Capriccio* clings to the hook of Bellini's duet 'Suoni la tromba e intrepido' from *I Puritani*, which Togni combines with the tender memory of his recently deceased mother: the two sources of inspiration reveal a touching sensitivity in his writing which is effective on the instrument. Finally, Togni experiments with aphorism in the VI *Capriccio* and *Aforisma* (1985), two perfect miniatures each lasting one minute. It is surprising to note that about twenty works are born in the decade 1937–1947 (with a duration of many hours of music), while Togni dedicates just over 20 minutes to his instrument in the remaining 45 years of his life.

In ensemble music, Togni's visionary ability to imagine instrumental mélanges – especially in the orchestra – allowed him to express himself in the twelve-tone method with full authenticity. His profound sensitivity to timbral research resulted in a compositional approach that exalts chamber dialogue. Returning to the piano, he could find satisfying solutions only by 'forcing' compositional parameters: virtuosity (IV *Capriccio*), exaggerated lyricism (V *Capriccio*), and compression of materials (VI *Capriccio* and *Aforisma*).

In view of this, it is inappropriate to speak of his works prior to 1947 (up to *Ricercare* op. 28B) as part of a path towards the twelve-tone method of composition. An emblematic case is the work that launched Togni's career as a composer, the *Variazioni* op. 27 for piano and orchestra, written in just three months and completed on 16 January 1946. Presented on 21 September 1946 at the Biennale di Venezia, IX Festival Internazionale di Musica Contemporanea, conducted by Bruno Maderna with Enrica Cavallo at the piano, the opus number clearly suggests an homage to Webern. Here we witness a linguistic retreat that recovers pianistic and expressive stylistic elements of the past. Despite Togni's compelling desire to successfully deploy the twelve-tone technique in a way that would positively overcome the internal division between rational thought and emotional impulses, at this crucial moment in his artistic journey, the issue seems yet to be resolved. Like other works of this period, the *Variazioni* op. 27 were abandoned to their fate of oblivion: not only was the piece never published or performed again after its premiere, but Togni gave the score (with Bruno Maderna's conducting notes) to his pianist friend Lya De Barberiis. Considered to be lost, the work was critically reconstructed in 2001 by Alberto Caprioli from a two-piano reduction that included detailed, if concise, orchestration indications. In 2015, I had the intuition to search the De Barberiis estate and fortunately discovered the manuscript.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NOTATION IN THE PIANO WORKS FROM 1938–1945

In light of the preceding premise, it is of great importance to analyse the development of Camillo Togni's personal form of notation in his piano manuscripts, from the *Fantasia a quattro voci e pedale* op. 8 (July – October 1938) to the *Sonatina* op. 26 (March – October 1945). This particular type of notation spans almost the entire creative decade of 1937–1947, with the exception of opp. 4–7 (before 20 July 1938, the date on which Togni began composing the *Fantasia a quattro voci e pedale* op. 8) and opp. 27, 28, and 28B, in which Togni returned to traditional notation. Particular reference will be given to the *Sonata* op. 9 for cello and piano, begun in 1938 and completed on 22 October 1939.

An author develops a notational system to meet specific musical needs, and often these notational innovations aim to highlight innovative aspects of his poetics. In his piano works, Togni has a need to express dense polyphonic writing, each voice rich in articulated phrasing, through a 'synthetic' notation developed on two-three stave systems. The intention is to facilitate piano reading by avoiding the use of four or five staves. Béla Bartók faced the opposite problem when, in his meticulous edition of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Das wohltemperierte Klavier* (*48 Praeludien und Fugen progressiv geordnet, neu eingerichtet, mit Fingersatz, Vortragszeichen und Anmerkungen versehen von Béla Bartók*, Budapest: Rozsnyai Karoly, 1908), he approached the realisation of some of the fugues with a four or five-stave layout, finding it impossible to express the complex phrasing, dynamic indications and fingerings he intended to suggest for Bach's text with the usual two- or three-stave systems. It is interesting to note how for the young and highly skilled pianist Bartók, grappling with the notational problems of Bach's text – in particular, clarifying the execution of various types of accents and staccato – served to define an effective and personal use of musical symbols that would then be found throughout his work.

In order to avoid a separate voice notation Togni adopted a personal form of notation aimed at synthesising structural and phrasing clues. The layout of the manuscript follows these criteria:

a) rare use of traditional phrasing slurs;

b) structural and phrasing indications are summarized in a sort of stenographic writing using continuous or semi-continuous beams that join sequences of quavers, semiquavers, demisemiquavers, hemidemisemiquavers. To incorporate longer note values (quarters, halves) into the graphic symbol, Togni effectively uses 'open lines';

c) this use of beams (which thus also function as phrasing slurs) articulates rhythmic groups that extend over several bars and involves abandoning the usual

division of homorhythmic note sequences into simple groupings by interrupting the beams (usually every two, three, four, six, or eight notes);

d) in the case of legato phrasing (FIGURE 1), the beams are continuous; in the case of staccato phrasing over the same span (FIGURE 2), the beams are semi-continuous, i.e., partially interrupted between notes – this practice also provides a good graphic description of the gesture required by the performer. Traditional notation is used for true staccato.

This notation is visually effective in highlighting the independent movement of the voices, and also helps to better distribute the lines on the staff. However, it is clear that it would not be appropriate to 'transcribe' this synthetic notation into traditional form, even if it were transferred to a system with more staves. The manuscript seems to provide a corpus of structural and phrasing indications that are difficult to separate. A performer who reads purely the phrasing indications would have to realise articulations so contrasting between the voices that they

FIGURE 1. Camillo Togni, *Fantasia a quattro voci con pedale* op. 8, autograph manuscript, bb. 11–12. Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia), Fondo Camillo Togni.

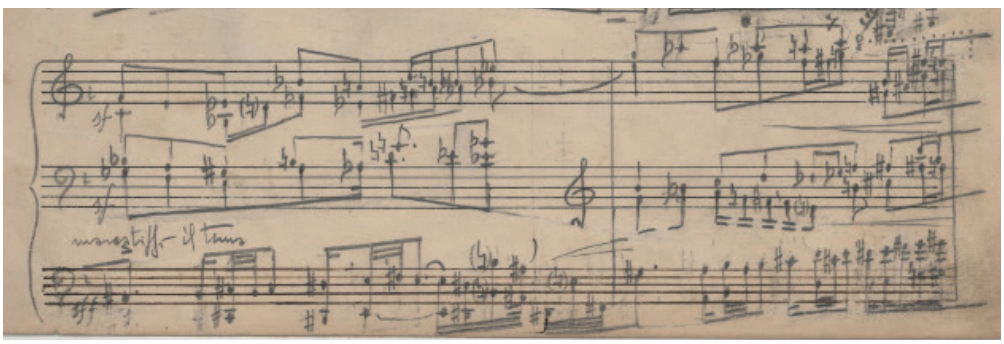
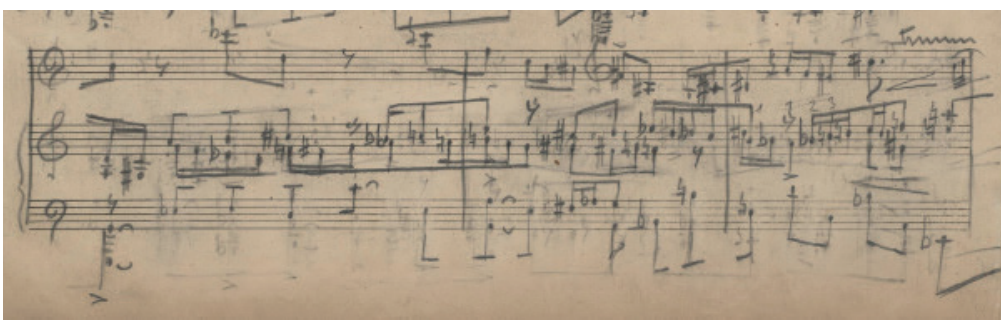


FIGURE 2. Camillo Togni, *Sonata* op. 9, 1st Movement, autograph manuscript, three measures before n. 1. Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia), Fondo Camillo Togni.



would be difficult to execute and ineffective on the instrument. Conversely, reducing the meaning of the notation to a purely structural function would result in the text becoming devoid of any phrasing articulation. It follows that Togni's notation provides an outline of phrasing and articulation indications that the author would have likely finalised in a 'fair copy' of the score.

HISTORICAL NOTES ON THE *SONATA* OP. 9 FOR CELLO AND PIANO

As in all of his works from 1938–1945, the above considerations are confirmed in the *Sonata* op. 9; the only case in which Togni elaborated his 'synthetic' notation into a traditional form is in the cello part from this piece. In her monograph on the composer, Daniela Cima notes that Togni often referred to op. 9 and op. 10 with enthusiasm, considering them to be his true first works.[2] The monumental structure of the *Sonata* op. 9 in four movements – *Grandioso e Sostenuto*, *Largo assai*, *Scherzo e Aria*, *Allegro energico (Rondò)* – with a total duration of about 50 minutes, makes it one of the longest and most complex works for cello and piano ever written. It was performed on 1 April 1940, at the Società dei Concerti of Brescia by the cellist Willy La Volpe with the composer at the piano. Alfredo Casella, who was Togni's teacher from 1939 to 1942, spoke highly of it, describing it as music of 'consistently extraordinary nobility'.[3] Casella praised Togni's 'truly masterful technical preparation' and the 'force of emotion' which he considered already distinctive and that would undoubtedly form the spiritual foundation of the young composer's future works. However, Casella also noted an 'excessively dense musical architecture' and a tendency towards dark atmospheres. The work is 'inspired in a modern way by the atmosphere of the great "oratories"'[4] and is undoubtedly influenced by the study of Bach's counterpoint with his first teacher, Franco Margola. This formal rigour is expressed in an extremely dense polyphony, 'uniformly compact',[5] functional in provoking a strong chromatic verticality, markedly atonal. Although some formal strongholds remain (for example, a sonata-form structure in the first movement), they are weakened by a continuous through-composed process of Brahmsian origin. Daniela Cima correctly identifies some formal links with Brahms' *Sonata* in E minor op. 38, a work based on the same austere style, starting with Bachian quotations – from *Die Kunst der Fuge*, Contrapunctus IV in the first movement, and Contrapunctus XIII in the finale.

The *Sonata* op. 9, while manifesting an 'unconditional love for grandiose and baroque architectures',[6] maintains a romantic mood rendered through the opulent sound of the piano part and often tense, harsh sonorities juxtaposed with broadly elegiac passages in the solo part. It substantially differs from the *Serenata* op. 10,

composed only a few months later, in which Togni retreats 'into the most intimate and marked solitude, subjecting the fruits of his enthusiasm for the music of the past to an entirely internal critique'.[7]

THE *SONATA* OP. 9 AND ITS NOTATION

The sources preserved in the Fondo Camillo Togni of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice are as follows:

a) the autograph score, written in the 'synthetic' notation he used for all the piano works of the period 1938–1945. The soloist's line is realised only in the violin and bass clefs, except for the Aria, episode b) of the third movement;

b) the autograph 'fair copy' of the soloist's part, in traditional notation, written in the usual three clefs (violin, tenor, bass) and prepared for the aforementioned performance on 1 April 1940.

The *Sonata* op. 9 is thus the only piece for which we have two autograph versions, allowing us to deduce the criteria Togni used to transcribe the 'synthetic' notation into the traditional notation for the score. A comparative analysis of the autograph 'fair copy' of the solo part and its first draft in the score reveals that the 'fair copy' is not a direct copy of the first score. Togni did not simply transpose the 'synthetic' indications of the first draft of the score into traditional notation, but he undertook an extensive revision: there are frequent indications of bowing (rare in the first score and sometimes contradictory between the two drafts), minimal variations in pitch and rhythm, and above all, new, very detailed indications of phrasing and articulation. The collation of the autographs led the editor to arrive at the following conclusions:

a) the autograph 'fair copy' rarely contradicts what is reported in the first draft: the structure of the phrasing is thus preserved; however, long phrasing slurs present in the first draft are often refined with more precise sub-phrasings – a practice entirely attributable to late-Brahmsian notation. Occasionally, different readings between the sources have been highlighted, probably for practical reasons to improve the effectiveness of the writing for the solo instrument;

b) the 'fair copy' of the solo part contains a large number of new articulations and phrasings: it is thus evident that the first draft of the score should be considered 'synthetic' or 'stenographic' and was subsequently meticulously detailed in this later testimony;

c) if one projects the results of these authorial revisions into a hypothetical complete 'fair copy' of the score – which, as with all the piano works of the 1938–1947 period, unfortunately Togni never produced – one imagines that the

piano part would have been both enriched and detailed, but also 'simplified': the structural indications present in synthetic form in the first draft would have been detailed and 'transposed' into coherent and effective piano writing. Indeed, however rich in phrasing and multiple articulations one might imagine it to be, a hypothetical second 'fair copy' draft of the score could not be an exact transcription of the 'synthetic' indications present in the autograph.

The existence of two versions of source material posed considerable challenges in my preparation of the edition published by Sugar Music – Edizioni Suvini Zerboni (catalogue number S. 14354 Z.).[8] On the one hand, the aforementioned considerations convinced the editor that it was appropriate to transcribe the piano part in the same graphic form proposed by the author; on the other hand, it was impossible to do the same for the cello part. The editor chose the 'fair copy' of the soloist's part as the primary source, and to incorporated it in full, except in the case of occasional copy errors or discrepancies between the sources. Although Togni copied with great care, occasional errors were quite common, since the fair copy uses the usual three clefs (violin, tenor, bass), while the cello line in the first draft of the score was typically written in only the violin and bass clefs. Errors in transposition and minor pitch variations between the sources were assessed and resolved on a case-by-case basis, with a record of the work carried out in the list of observations in the appendix.

FIGURES 3 and 4 reproduce some measures: FIGURE 3, from the manuscript of the first draft of the score; FIGURE 4, from the manuscript of the second draft of the soloist's part. A comparison of the two sources clearly shows the author's work in refining the phrasing.

FIGURE 3. Camillo Togni, *Sonata* op. 9, 1st Movement, n. 13, autograph manuscript. Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia), Fondo Camillo Togni.

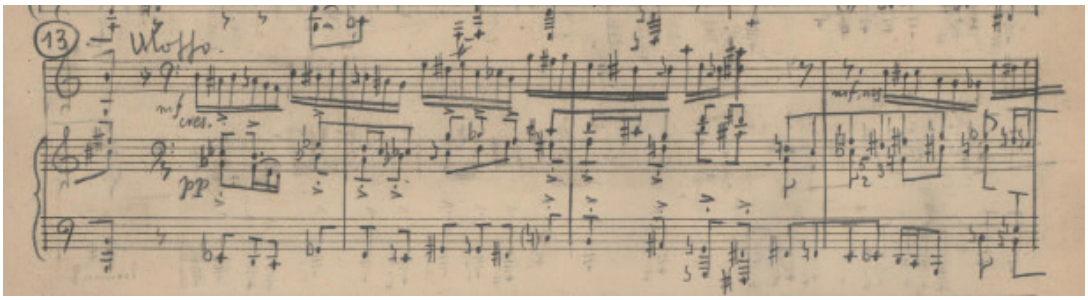
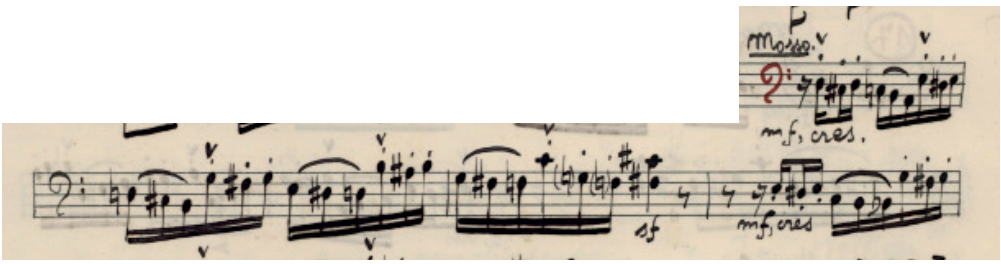


FIGURE 4. **Camillo Togni, *Sonata* op. 9, 1st Movement, fair copy of the cello part, n. 13. Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia), Fondo Camillo Togni.**

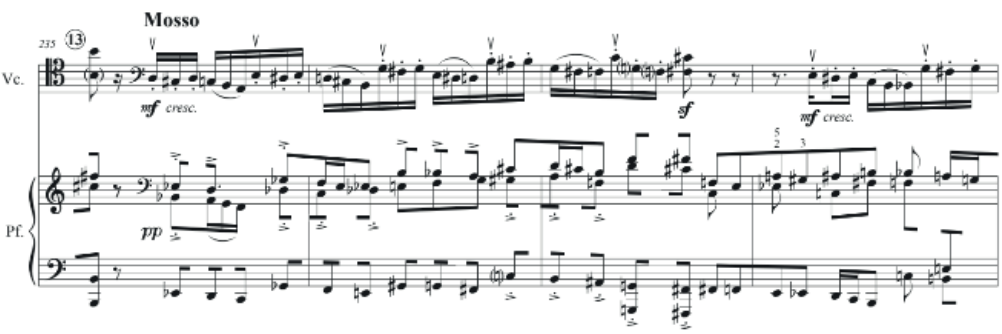


THE EDITION OF THE *SONATA* OP. 9

The printed score was prepared from two different sources: for the cello part, the traditional phrasing as reported in the 'fair copy' of the soloist's part (the second autograph draft) was adhered to, while the piano part was meticulously copied from the only existing source. In order to effectively convey Camillo Togni's new 'synthetic' notation, great care was taken in the graphic result. A comparison using the same bars can be seen in EXAMPLE 1: a) the first draft in the score (FIGURE 3); b) the 'fair copy' of the soloist's part (FIGURE 4); the printed score (EXAMPLE 1).

This article explains and provides justification for the editor's choices, which may be difficult to understand for performers and musicologists unfamiliar with the state of the sources of this piece. At first glance, the editor's work may seem incongruous or even questionable. Indeed, the printed text presents itself as a Janus-faced document, a text that expresses itself through a 'past' – the first draft

EXAMPLE 1. **Camillo Togni, *Sonata* op. 9, 1st Movement, n. 13, printed score. © 2021, by Sugar Music S.p.A. – Edizioni Suvini Zerboni, Milano S. 14354 Z.**



of the score – and a 'future', represented, in embryo only, by the second autograph draft of the solo part. It is the performers of the sonata who are entrusted with the task of translating the score into sound, with inventive courage and fervent imagination.

Notes

1 'si teneva aggrappato alla melodia che sosteneva dover essere eloquente come una frase parlata'. Cited by Enzo Restagno in the programme for the concert at the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino on 9 June 1983, w.p.

2 Daniela Cima, *Camillo Togni. Le opere*, Milano: Suvini Zerboni, 2004, p. 18.

3 'costantemente di una eccezionale nobiltà'. This and the following quotations ('preparazione tecnica davvero magistrale'; 'la forza del sentimento'; 'senza dubbio la base spirituale del mondo nel quale si muoveranno i futuri lavori di questo giovane'; 'architettura eccessivamente densa di musica') are taken from Alfredo Casella's letter of 30 December 1939, published as an epigraph in *Carteggi e scritti di Camillo Togni sul Novecento italiano*, Firenze: Leo S. Olschki (Fondazione Giorgio Cini – Studi di musica veneta. Archivio Camillo Togni, 1), 2001, p. 2.

4 'si ispira modernamente alla atmosfera dei grandi "oratori"'. Camillo Togni, text for the programme for the first performance of the *Variazioni* op. 27, IX Festival Internazionale di Musica Contemporanea, Biennale di Venezia, 21 September 1946, w.p.

5 'uniformemente compatta'. Casella, letter of 30 December 1939.

6 'incondizionato amore per le grandiosità architettoniche e barocche'. Togni, *Variazioni* op. 27 (see footnote 4).

7 'nella più intima e marcata solitudine, sottoponendo ad una critica affatto interiore'. Togni, *Variazioni* op. 27.

8 I would like to thank the Istituto per la Musica of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia) for giving me the opportunity to clarify the principles of my work on the revision of the *Sonata* op. 9. Special thanks are due to Angela Carone for reading the text and giving valuable advice on how to improve its clarity.