

Our 25th Year

Steinway Society



Alessio Bax and Lucille Chung



Jon Nakamatsu



Heejae Kim



Anna Dmytrenko



Albert Cano Smit

THE BAY AREA

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Piano Concerts

September 2019–January 2020

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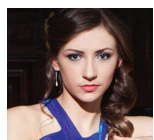
PIANO CONCERTS 2019–2020



Jon Nakamatsu

Saturday, September 21, 2019, 7:30 p.m.

McAfee Performing Arts and Lecture Center, Saratoga



Anna Dmytrenko

Sunday, October 27, 2019, 2:30 p.m.

Hammer Theatre, San Jose



Heejae Kim

Sunday, November 17, 2019, 2:30 p.m.

Independence High School, San Jose



Albert Cano Smit

Sunday, December 8, 2019, 2:30 p.m.

West Valley College, Saratoga



Alessio Bax and Lucille Chung

Saturday, January 11, 2020, 7:30 p.m.

Hammer Theatre, San Jose



Daria Rabotkina

Sunday, February 9, 2020, 2:30 p.m.

Hammer Theatre, San Jose



Alexander Sinchuk

Saturday, March 21, 2020, 7:30 p.m.

West Valley College, Saratoga, San Jose



Juho Pohjonen

Saturday, April 18, 2020, 7:30 p.m.

San Jose Woman's Club, San Jose



Federico Colli

Saturday, May 16, 2020, 7:30 p.m.

West Valley College, Saratoga

President's Letter



Dear Friend of Steinway Society,

We are delighted that you are joining us for our Silver Anniversary Season! We are presenting nine incredible concerts this year, and are sure that you will love the musical experiences that lie ahead.

If you have not yet subscribed, visit steinwaysociety.com, where we are offering new subscription-package options.

We hope that you will join us for all nine concerts of our 25th Anniversary Season. We think you will agree that our Artistic Committee has brought some of the world's best pianists to our stage.

This season opens with the first American to win the Van Cliburn Competition in over three decades, San Jose native **Jon Nakamatsu**, who brings us a passionate program of Chopin, Schubert, and Brahms. In October, Ukrainian-American pianist **Anna Dmytrenko**, who demonstrates "keyboard mastery and elegant refinement," performs great works by Rachmaninoff and Beethoven. The following month, **Heejae Kim**, "a pianist of passion and sensitivity," will bring us music of Rachmaninoff, Mussorgsky, and Schumann. In December, **Albert Cano Smit** will bring to life compositions that span the range from Bach to Prokofiev, demonstrating his "remarkable ability to make melodies sing." Closing out the first half of this exhilarating season with Schubert, Debussy, Stravinsky, and their own arrangements of Piazzolla favorites, **Alessio Bax** and his wife, **Lucille Chung**, are a duo you won't want to miss.

Steinway Society's mission is to inspire appreciation and love for classical piano music. Invite your friends and family to join us! To learn more, and for opportunities to contribute to our ongoing legacy, visit our website, and follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (@steinwaysociety).

It is because of your ongoing support that we have been able to bring great concert pianists to the Bay Area for 25 years. We depend on your continued support so that we may do so for the next 25. All that we do depends on you. Thank you for your dedication to the arts. We look forward to seeing you soon.

Kathy You Wilson

President, Board of Directors

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Jon Nakamatsu

**FRIEDA ANN MURPHY MEMORIAL CONCERT
SPONSORED BY MTAC, SANTA CLARA BRANCH**

San Jose native and Stanford graduate Jon Nakamatsu achieved international attention with his 1997 Gold Medal triumph at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. Extensive recital appearances include Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and the Kennedy Center, as well as premier venues in Europe, South America, and the Far East. His CD featuring Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and the *Concerto in F* hit #3 on Billboard's classical music charts. In 1999, Mr. Nakamatsu performed at the White House for President and Mrs. Clinton.

Jon Nakamatsuphoto, courtesy of the artist

PROGRAM

Chopin, *Impromptu in A-flat Major, Op. 29*

Chopin, *Impromptu in G-flat Major, Op. 51*

Schubert, *Four Impromptus, D. 899 (Op. 90)*

1. C Minor (Allegro molto moderato)
2. E-flat Major (Allegro)
3. G-flat Major (Andante)
4. A-flat Major (Allegretto)

INTERMISSION

Brahms, *Sonata No. 1 in C Major, Op. 1*

- I. Allegro
- II. Andante
- III. Scherzo: Allegro molto e con fuoco
- IV. Allegro con fuoco—Presto non troppo ed agitato)

PROGRAM NOTES

Impromptus

Frédéric Chopin (1810–49)

The title *impromptu* suggests—but does not mean literally—music made up on the spot. The term had been created in the early 19th century and used most memorably for Schubert's eight impromptus for piano. But one should be wary of that title, which implies an atmosphere of casual, almost improvisatory music-making—such an impression of spontaneity and ease is usually achieved by a great deal of work and revision on the part of the composer.

This was certainly the case with Chopin, who wrote four impromptus. The *Impromptu in A-flat Major* dates from 1837, when he had been in Paris for six years and had just come to know the novelist George Sand—their sometimes stormy relation would begin the following year. This impromptu is notable for its complexity and difficulty: Chopin revised the music repeatedly as he wrote it, and it demands a pianist of formidable technique. It also goes like a rocket: the marking is *Allegro*

assai, quasi presto, and the effect of the rippling triplets in both hands has been compared by many to the impression of sunlight sparkling off the surface of water. The middle section brings a change in rhythm and atmosphere. The restless triplets vanish, and in their place Chopin offers a noble if subdued melody that grows more animated as it proceeds; at its most dynamic, it takes on something of the quality of a cadenza and suddenly plunges back into the triplet rush of the opening. After all this sparkling energy, the close is surprisingly subdued.

Chopin composed his *Impromptu in G-flat Major* in the fall of 1842, dedicated it to one of his students, and published it the following year. This impromptu is one of the works that Chopin played at his infrequent public performances. It is in the expected ternary form, yet it has the spontaneous manner that should characterize a work called “impromptu.” The opening bears some resemblance to the opening of the famous *Impromptu in A-flat Major*: both begin with an energetic rush of triplets. Chopin marks the present work *Presto*; and it does move speedily, though without a suggestion of agitation. The transition to the central episode, in common time, is done quite subtly: Chopin has already begun to accent the original 12/8 meter as if it were 4/4, and the arrival of the middle section feels completely settled. This *sostenuto* central section is unusual because Chopin gives the noble melody entirely to the left hand, while the right accompanies; the transition back to the opening tempo is made just as subtly as the first transition.

Four Impromptus, D. 899 (Op. 90)

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Schubert wrote eight impromptus for piano during the summer and fall of 1827, probably in response to a request from his publisher for music intended for the growing number of amateur musicians who had pianos in their homes. This music is melodic, attractive, and not so difficult as to take it out of the range of good amateur pianists.

This program offers the four impromptus Schubert wrote late in the summer of 1827, only a year before he died; the first two were published that same year, but the final two did not appear until 1857. *Impromptu No. 1 in C Minor* is marked by unusual focus and compression. It is built largely on the quiet unaccompanied melody heard at the very

beginning, and then developed in quite different ways. This impromptu has no clearly defined trio section, but Schubert introduces beautifully contrasting lyrical secondary material. Especially remarkable are the harmonic progressions on the final page, where the music works its graceful way to an almost silent close in C major. *No. 2 in E-flat Major* is built on long chains of triplets that flow brightly across the span of the keyboard; the center section is stormy and declarative, and Schubert rounds the work off with a brief coda. In *No. 3 in G-flat Major* Schubert spins an extended, songlike melody over quietly rippling accompaniment; measure lengths are quite long here (eight quarters per measure) to match the breadth of his expansive and heartfelt melody. Throughout, one hears those effortless modulations that mark Schubert’s mature music. *No. 4 in A-flat Major* is built on a wealth of thematic ideas. The opening theme falls into two parts: first comes a cascade of silvery 16th notes, followed by six chords; Schubert soon introduces a waltz tune in the left hand. In the central section he modulates into C-sharp minor and sets his theme over steadily pulsing chords before the music makes a smooth transition back to the opening material and concludes brightly.

Piano Sonata No. 1 in C Major, Op. 1

Johannes Brahms (1833–97)

On October 1, 1853, the 20-year-old Brahms appeared at the Schumann home in Düsseldorf and began to play the piano. Robert listened for only a few moments before he summoned his wife, and the two of them were enthralled. That night Clara wrote in her journal:

Here again is one of those who comes as if sent straight from God. He played us sonatas, scherzos etc. of his own, all of them showing exuberant imagination, depth of feeling, and mastery of form. . . . It is really moving to see him sitting at the piano, with his interesting young face which becomes transfigured when he plays, his beautiful hands, which overcome the greatest difficulties with perfect ease (his things are very difficult), and in addition these remarkable compositions.

In a notice published later that month, Robert hailed the young composer: “Sitting at the piano he began to disclose wonderful regions

to us. We were drawn into even more enchanting spheres. Besides, he is a player of genius who can make of the piano an orchestra of lamenting and loudly jubilant voices. There were sonatas, veiled symphonies rather . . .”

The first work Brahms played for the Schumanns was his *Piano Sonata in C Major*, which he had completed in January of 1853, four months before his 20th birthday. Brahms published this sonata later that year as his Opus 1 even though several works written earlier were assigned higher opus numbers, and he was honest about his reasons: he was proud of this music and wanted his first published work “to appear in the most favorable light.”

In a famous remark, Brahms spoke of his anxiety over working in the shadow of Beethoven and of “how the tramp of a giant like him” haunted his efforts to compose a symphony. The very young Brahms was no less aware of the example of Beethoven’s piano sonatas, and everyone feels the similarity between the opening of Brahms’s *Sonata in C Major* and Beethoven’s *Hammerklavier* Sonata: the rhythm is identical, and the openings make the same broad and dramatic gesture. But the teenaged composer is already in possession of his own voice, and this sonata is unmistakably the music of Brahms rather than an imitation of Beethoven. It is a big-boned work in four substantial movements, and it stretches out to over half an hour in performance. Already evident are many of the trademarks of Brahms’s piano music: rolled chords, frequent use of the piano’s ringing high register, rhythmic complexities, a particular fondness for passages written in thirds, extensive octave and chordal writing, and moments of such power that they seem to confirm Schumann’s assertion that these early sonatas were really “veiled symphonies.”

The opening Allegro is in a broad sonata form: the dramatic beginning gives way to extensive and varied secondary material, which Brahms specifies should be both *dolce* and *con espressione*; much of the development, in fact, treats this lyric material before the movement pounds to its dramatic close. The second movement is in variation form, and Brahms uses as his theme a melody that he believed an old German folksong: he writes the words of the song into the piano score and

treats this line as if it were being sung by a soloist who is answered by a chorus. The four variations, all decorative, grow increasingly complex, and along the way Brahms breaks the metric flow down into such unusual units as measures of 3/16 and 4/16. This movement proceeds without pause into the Scherzo, appropriately marked *Allegro molto e con fuoco*, which gallops along in 6/8 meter. The relatively cheerful mood of its beginning is gradually left behind as the music approaches the end of the opening section, and again Brahms’s markings tell the tale. He moves from *feroce* to *fortissimo* and *molto pesante*, proceeds just as quickly to *staccatissimo e marcato*, and pounds home on a cadence marked *strepitoso* (“noisy”) that seems to end in the middle of nowhere on stark E-minor chords. The flowing trio section makes a similar progression, moving from its restrained and melodic opening through a powerful climax; a sudden rip down the scale plunges us back into the opening material and a da capo repeat. The finale is in rondo form, and its opening theme is a variant of the opening gesture of the first movement, now rebarred into 9/8 and featuring some wonderfully unexpected accents as it rips along. There are two major episodes along the way, and the sonata dances its way to an ebullient close on a lengthy coda, now in 6/8, that Brahms marks *Presto non troppo ed agitato*.

This youthful sonata had some distinguished performances in its early years, occasions when it would have been fun just to have been there and watch and listen. These include not only Brahms’s private performance for Robert and Clara Schumann, but also a performance of the first movement in Hamburg by the young Hans von Bülow in 1854, and—maybe best of all—the performance that Franz Liszt sight-read from Brahms’s manuscript when the young composer visited him at Weimar in the summer of 1853.



Anna Dmytrenko

Ukrainian-American pianist Dmytrenko began studying piano at age four. She has won multiple First Prizes in piano competitions and performed extensively throughout the United States and Europe, including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and Paris's Salle Cortot. Her recently released debut album features works by Medtner, Rachmaninoff, and Barber. Having received musical training in the Ukraine, at Juilliard, and the Royal Academy of Music in London, she is completing a Master's at the University of the Arts in Berlin.

Anna Dmytrenko photo, © Maria Fedoruk

PROGRAM

Rachmaninoff, *Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op. 42*

Rachmaninoff, *Five Preludes from Op. 23*

1. F-sharp Minor (Largo)
2. B-flat Major (Maestoso)
3. D Minor (Tempo di minuetto)
4. D Major (Andante cantabile)
5. G Minor (Alla marcia)

INTERMISSION

Beethoven, *Andante favori in F Major, WoO 57*

Beethoven, *Sonata No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111*

- I. Maestoso—Allegro con brio ed appassionato
- II. Arietta: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile

PROGRAM NOTES

Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op. 42

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

Just as Brahms's *Variations on a Theme of Haydn* are not really based on a theme by Haydn, so Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Corelli* are not really based on a theme by Corelli. The haunting melody made famous by Corelli was already several hundred years old when he used it in his violin sonata, Op. 5, No. 12, subtitled *Follia*, of 1700. That tune, more commonly known by its Spanish name, *La Folía*, appears to have originated in 15th-century Portugal. It was originally a fast dance in triple time and was danced so strenuously that the dancers seemed to have gone mad—the title *folía* meant “madness” or “empty-headedness” (it survives in our usage as “folly”). Over time, this dance slowed down and became the famous stately theme we know today; and as a basis for variations it has attracted many composers, Vivaldi, Marais, Bach, Lully, Geminiani, and Liszt among them.

Rachmaninoff composed the *Variations on a Theme of Corelli*, his final original work for solo piano, in Switzerland during the summer of 1931. Variation form seems to have been on Rachmaninoff's mind during this

period: his next work, composed three years later, was the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, a set of 24 variations for piano and orchestra on another quite famous theme. The *Corelli Variations* are extremely focused: Rachmaninoff offers 20 variations in the space of only 16 minutes. He opens with a straightforward statement of the theme in D minor (the key in which Corelli set his variations), and the variations proceed at different tempos and in different moods; something of the range of their variety can be made out from Rachmaninoff's markings: *misterioso*, *scherzando*, *agitato*, *cantabile*. An unusual feature of this set is that three of the variations (Nos. 11, 12, and 19) are marked as optional, and Rachmaninoff himself sometimes omitted various others during performances, depending on his mood. Following Variation 13, Rachmaninoff offers an unnumbered variation that he calls "Intermezzo" and which functions somewhat like a cadenza in a concerto. Full of mordents, arpeggiated chords, and unmeasured runs, it effectively blurs a sense of tonality, so that Variation 14—a return to the original tune, now in the key of D-flat major—sounds chaste and pure. This and the following variation, marked *dolcissimo*, form a nocturnelike interlude before the vigorous final five variations. The ending is particularly effective. Rachmaninoff concludes not with a bravura display but with one further variation, which he marks simply *Coda*. This quiet Andante finally fades into silence on pianissimo D-minor chords.

Rachmaninoff dedicated the *Variations on a Theme of Corelli* to his good friend (and frequent recital partner), the violinist Fritz Kreisler.

Five Preludes from Op. 23

Sergei Rachmaninoff

When Bach composed the 24 preludes and fugues of his *Well-Tempered Clavier*, he could have had no premonition how that number would imprint itself on future composers. Two decades later Bach himself wrote another cycle of 24 preludes and fugues, a century later Chopin wrote 24 piano preludes as his Opus 28, and early in the 20th century Debussy composed two books of 12 preludes each. At midcentury Shostakovich wrote a set of 24 preludes and fugues.

Rachmaninoff also wrote 24 piano preludes in all the major and minor keys, but he spread their composition out a little more over his career. His

Prelude in C-sharp Minor (1892) quickly became so popular that audiences wanted to hear nothing else, and Rachmaninoff waited 11 years before composing the 10 preludes, each in a different key, of his Opus 23 in 1903. He then paused for another seven years before completing his cycle of 24 preludes with 13 preludes in the remaining keys. He published that set as his Opus 32 in 1910.

Rachmaninoff first performed the 10 preludes of Opus 23 at a concert put on by the Ladies' Charity Prison Committee in Moscow on February 10, 1903. The preludes are brief and are often carefully unified around a melodic or rhythmic cell; many are in ternary form, with a modified return of the opening material. These preludes can also be extremely difficult to perform, with the music ranging from the brilliant and exuberant to the dark and introspective. Rachmaninoff did not feel that these preludes had to be performed as a set, and he himself performed (and recorded) individual preludes from the opus. This recital offers the first five preludes of the set.

Prelude No. 1 in F-sharp Minor features a steady accompaniment in the left hand, while the wistful main melody is heard quietly in the right; the music builds to a fortissimo climax, then falls away to conclude in the quiet manner of the beginning. The very difficult *No. 2 in B-flat Major* unleashes an explosion of sound. Marked *Maestoso* ("majestic"), it offers a chordal melody in the right hand above turbulent sextuplets in the left, and along the way Rachmaninoff writes chords that are rolled across a span of almost three octaves. The prelude drives to its close in a flurry of hammered octaves. Rachmaninoff gives *No. 3 in D Minor* the marking *Tempo di minuetto*, though this hardly feels like a classical minuet. Instead, the subdued opening is somber and precise, yet full of rhythmic energy, much of it coiled within the triplet in the left hand; Rachmaninoff calls for a repeat of this opening section before the music plunges into its vigorous second section. *No. 4 in D Major*, which Rachmaninoff marks *Andante cantabile*, does indeed sing, with the grand right-hand melody flowing along above triplet accompaniment. The music grows more complex, and soon Rachmaninoff is developing three separate strands: accompanying lines frame a melody in the piano's middle register. The prelude drives to a great climax on a shower of massive chords, then falls away to a quiet close. *No. 5 in G Minor* is one of Rachmaninoff's most

famous. Marked *Alla marcia*, it opens with an ominous vamp that is in fact the first subject; a dark and dreamy central episode leads to a gradual acceleration back to the opening tempo. The ending is particularly effective: the energy of the march dissipates, and the music vanishes in a wisp of sound.

Andante favori in F Major, WoO 57

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Between May and November 1803, Beethoven composed the *Eroica*, a symphony on a scale never before imagined. Nearly half an hour longer than his Second Symphony, Beethoven's Third thrust the conception of the symphony—and sonata form—into a new world, a world in which music became heroic struggle and sonata form the stage for this drama rather than an end in itself. It was a world of new dimensions, new sonorities, and new possibilities of expression; and with the *Eroica* behind him Beethoven began to plan two new piano sonatas. These sonatas, later nicknamed the *Waldstein* and the *Appassionata*, would be governed by the same impulse that had shaped that symphony.

Beethoven began the *Waldstein* Sonata in November 1803, immediately after finishing the *Eroica*, and completed it in December. Proud of the new work, he played it to a friend. The friend replied that he thought the middle movement—a spacious *Andante grazioso con moto*—was too long. Beethoven exploded, as he often did in the face of such criticism, but once he calmed down, he began to sense that his friend was right. And so he pulled the *Andante* out of the sonata and replaced it with a new central movement marked *Introduzione: Adagio molto*. The new movement, quite short, functioned as an expectant bridge between the tense first movement and the powerful finale, and it helped make the *Waldstein* even more focused and compact. In its new (and final) form, the sonata was published in 1805 and was promptly recognized as the masterpiece that it is.

But Beethoven remained fond of the rejected slow movement from the sonata. He played it at social gatherings in Vienna and eventually published it under the title *Andante favori* (“favorite andante”). Hearing this *Andante*, we quickly recognize two things: first, that it was all wrong as the central movement of that powerful sonata, and second, that it is lovely music, fully worthy of Beethoven's affection for it. His marking

grazioso con moto is exactly right: this is indeed graceful music, and it needs to keep moving. The principal idea, a rocking, dotted little tune in 3/8, returns throughout, and Beethoven embellishes it as it proceeds. He introduces several subordinate ideas, but the gentle opening melody always returns in ever richer colors and accompaniment. The music remains in character throughout—it never turns animated or tense—and eventually it reaches a poised and nicely understated conclusion.

No wonder Beethoven liked to play this music at parties.

Piano Sonata in C Minor, Op. 111

Ludwig van Beethoven

The years 1813–21 were exceptionally trying for Beethoven. Not only was he having financial difficulties, but this was also the period of his bitter legal struggle for custody of his nephew Karl. Under these stresses, and with the added burden of ill health, Beethoven virtually ceased composing in these years. Where the previous two decades had seen a great outpouring of music, now his creative powers flickered and were nearly extinguished; in 1817, for example, he composed almost nothing. To be sure, there was an occasional major work—the *Hammerklavier* Sonata occupied him throughout all of 1818—but it was not until 1820 that he put his troubles, both personal and creative, behind him and was able to marshal new energy as a composer.

When this energy returned, Beethoven took on several massive new projects, beginning work on the *Missa Solemnis* and making early sketches for the Ninth Symphony. And by the end of May 1820 he had committed himself to write three piano sonatas for the Berlin publisher Adolph Martin Schlesinger. Although Beethoven claimed that he wrote these three sonatas—his final piano sonatas—“in one breath,” their composition was actually spread out over a longer period than he expected when he agreed to write them. He finished the Sonata in E Major, Op. 109, immediately, but ill health postponed the other two. Notes in the manuscript indicate that Beethoven completed Op. 110 in December 1821 and Op. 111 in January 1822, but he was still revising them the next spring prior to their publication.

Beethoven's final sonata is in only two movements: a powerful opening movement in two parts and a concluding movement in theme-and-

variation form. Ernest Hutcheson notes that Beethoven's performance markings for these three sections offer not just indications of speed but also the clearest possible suggestions about interpretation. The markings translate: "majestic," "with energy and passion," and "very simple and singing."

The brief opening section—only 16 bars long—is largely static and serves to gather energy and prepare for the *Allegro con brio ed appassionato*, which leaps suddenly out of a quiet murmur of 32nd notes. The Allegro's opening three-note figure sounds as if it must be the beginning of a fugue theme, but while there are fugal elements in its development, Beethoven never treats the theme as a strict fugue. This movement, built upon the continual recurrence of the opening three-note figure, seethes with an energy almost brutal and slashing.

By complete contrast, the final movement is all serenity. Beethoven marks it *Arietta* ("little aria"), and the lyric theme that will serve as the basis for variation is of the utmost simplicity and directness. The theme is followed by five variations, and these variations are not so much decorations of the theme as they are the organic development of it. Each variation seems slightly faster than the one before it (though the underlying tempo of the movement remains unchanged), and the final variation—long, shimmering, and serene—serves as an extended coda to the entire movement. This final variation employs trills that go on for pages. Can it be that Beethoven—who had been deaf for years when he wrote these works—made such heavy use of trills so that he could at least feel the music beneath his hands even if he could not hear it?

When Beethoven's copyist sent this sonata to the publishers, they wrote back to ask if there was a movement missing—they could not believe that Beethoven would end a sonata like this. But this is exactly the form Beethoven wanted, and his final piano sonata ends not in triumph but in a mood of exalted peace.



Heejae Kim

Heejae Kim made her debut at the Prodigy Concert Series of South Korea's Kumho Asiana Cultural Foundation, and has concertized in Europe (Brussels, Leipzig, Paris, Barcelona), the UK, South Africa, and her native South Korea. She has won awards in 10 national or international piano competitions, and in 2015 won the Terence Judd Hallé Orchestra Prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition, where her performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 made her the audience favorite. A British critic described her as "a pianist of passion and sensitivity."

Heejae Kim photo, © Changan Son

PROGRAM

Rachmaninoff, *Selected Preludes from Op. 23 and Op. 32*

1. Op. 32, No. 1 in C Major (Allegro vivace)
2. Op. 23, No. 7 in C Minor (Allegro)
3. Op. 32, No. 5 in G Major (Moderato)
4. Op. 23, No. 5 in G Minor (Alla marcia)
5. Op. 32, No. 10 in B Minor (Lento)

Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*

1. Promenade
2. Gnomus ("The Gnome")
3. Promenade
4. Il vecchio castello ("The Old Castle")
5. Promenade
6. Tuileries (Children's Quarrel after Play)
7. Bydło ("Cattle")
8. Promenade
9. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks
10. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle
11. Promenade
12. Limoges: The Market (The Great News)
13. Catacombs (Roman Tomb)—Con mortuis in lingua mortua ("With the Dead in a Dead Language")
14. The Hut on Fowl's Legs (Baba Yaga)
15. The Great Gate of Kiev

INTERMISSION

Schumann, *Fantasia in C Major, Op. 17*

- I. Durchaus phantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen ("Perform Very Imaginatively and Passionately")
- II. Mäßig: Durchaus energisch ("Moderate: Very Energetic")
- III. Langsam getragen: Durchweg leise zu halten ("Solemnly Slow: Play Quietly Throughout")

PROGRAM NOTES

Selected Preludes from Op. 23 and Op. 32

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

When Bach composed *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, 24 preludes and fugues in all the major and minor keys of the chromatic scale, he could have had no idea how that concept would haunt subsequent composers. One of those haunted was Bach himself—two decades later he wrote another cycle of 24 preludes and fugues in all the keys. A century later, when Chopin set out to write preludes, he composed 24 of them in all the major and minor keys as his Opus 28. Over the following two decades Alkan wrote 24 etudes in all the keys, and in the years 1888–96 the young Scriabin wrote works in all the keys in his *24 Preludes, Op. 11*. At mid-20th century, Dmitri Shostakovich—just as haunted as his distinguished predecessors—also wrote a set of 24 preludes and fugues in all the keys. (Though Debussy wrote exactly 24 piano preludes, he made no attempt to employ all the keys.)

Sergei Rachmaninoff also wrote a cycle of 24 piano preludes in all the major and minor keys, but—rather than writing them all at once—he spread their composition out over nearly 20 years, and he appears to have come to that idea only gradually. In 1892, at age 19, Rachmaninoff achieved sudden fame with his *Prelude in C-sharp Minor*. He waited 11 years before composing the 10 preludes of his Opus 23 in 1903. Rachmaninoff then waited another seven before writing his final 13 preludes as Opus 32 during the summer of 1910, completing the cycle of keys in the process.

Rachmaninoff's preludes are generally brief and unified around a melodic or rhythmic cell; many are in ternary form, with a modified return of the opening material. They encompass a wide span of expression and difficulty. Some lie within the abilities of good amateur pianists, but most are extremely difficult technically, with the music ranging from the brilliant and exuberant to the dark and introspective.

Heejae Kim opens this recital with five preludes drawn from Opp. 23 and 32. The brief but ebullient *Prelude in C Major* (Op. 32/1) rides along great washes of sound, but comes to a surprisingly restrained close.

The *Prelude in C Minor* (23/7) whirls in perpetual motion from which bits of melody gradually emerge. This is complex music, full of hand crossings before the prelude arrives at its firm close. The *Prelude in G Major* (32/5) is all delicacy—here a limpid melody floats above rippling accompaniment, grows capricious, and finally comes to a shimmering close. Though Rachmaninoff is reported to have disliked Debussy's music, there are moments here that evoke the music of that composer. The *Prelude in G Minor* (23/5) is one of Rachmaninoff's most famous. Marked *Alla marcia*, it opens with an ominous vamp that is in fact the first subject; a dark and dreamy central episode leads to a gradual acceleration back to the opening tempo. The ending is particularly effective: the energy of the march dissipates, and the music vanishes in a wisp of sound. Longest of the preludes in Op. 32, *No. 10 in B Minor*, is regarded by some as the finest of the set. Rachmaninoff said that this music was inspired by Arnold Böcklin's darkly evocative painting *The Homecoming*. Dramatic and full-throated, this prelude drives to its climax on chords built of pounding triplets.

Pictures at an Exhibition

Modest Mussorgsky (1839–81)

In the summer of 1873, Modest Mussorgsky was stunned by the sudden death of his friend Victor Hartmann, an architect and artist who was then only 39. The following year, their mutual friend Vladimir Stasov arranged a showing of over 400 of Hartmann's watercolors, sketches, drawings, and designs. Inspired by the exhibition and the memory of his friend, Mussorgsky set to work on a suite of piano pieces based on the pictures and wrote enthusiastically to Stasov: "Hartmann is bubbling over, just as *Boris* did. Ideas, melodies, come to me of their own accord, like the roast pigeons in the story—I gorge and gorge and overeat myself. I can hardly manage to put it all down on paper fast enough." He worked fast indeed: beginning on June 2, 1874, Mussorgsky had the score complete only three weeks later, on June 22, just a few months after the premiere of *Boris Godunov*.

The finished work, which he called *Pictures at an Exhibition*, consists of 10 musical portraits bound together by a promenade theme that recurs periodically—Mussorgsky said that this theme, meant to depict

the gallery goer strolling between paintings, was a portrait of himself. Curiously, *Pictures* spent its first half-century in obscurity. It was not performed publicly during Mussorgsky's lifetime, it was not published until 1886 (five years after its composer's death), and it did not really enter the standard piano repertory until several decades after that. The earliest recording of the piano version did not take place until 1942. Even early listeners were struck by the "orchestral" sonorities of this piano score, and in 1922 conductor Serge Koussevitzky asked Maurice Ravel to orchestrate it. Koussevitzky gave the first performance of Ravel's version at the Paris Opera on October 19, 1922, and it quickly became one of the most popular works in the orchestral repertory. This recital offers the rare opportunity to hear this familiar music performed in its original version.

The opening *Promenade* alternates 5/4 and 6/4 meters; Mussorgsky marks it "in the Russian manner." *The Gnome* is a portrait of a gnome staggering on twisted legs; the following *Promenade* is marked "with delicacy." In Hartmann's watercolor *The Old Castle*, a minstrel sings before a ruined castle, and his mournful song rocks along over an incessant G-sharp minor pedal. *Tuileries* is a watercolor of children playing and quarreling in the Paris park, while *Bydło* returns to Eastern Europe, where a heavy oxcart grinds through the mud. The wheels pound ominously along as the driver sings; the music rises to a strident climax as the cart draws near and passes, then diminishes as the cart moves on. Mussorgsky wanted the following *Promenade* to sound *tranquillo*, but gradually it takes on unexpected power. *The Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks* depicts Hartmann's costume design for the ballet *Trilby*, in which these characters wore egg-shaped armor—Mussorgsky echoes the sound of the chicks with chirping grace notes.

"I meant to get Hartmann's Jews," said Mussorgsky of *Two Polish Jews, One Rich, One Poor*, often called by Mussorgsky's later title *Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle*. This portrait of two Polish Jews in animated conversation has the rich voice of Goldenberg alternating with Schmuyle's rapid, high speech. Listeners who know *Pictures* only in the Ravel orchestration will be surprised to find this movement followed by another *Promenade*; Ravel cut it from his orchestral version, which is a pity, because this appearance brings a particularly noble incarnation of that theme. *The Marketplace at Limoges* shows Frenchwomen quarreling

furiously in a market, while *Catacombs* is Hartmann's portrait of himself surveying the Roman catacombs by lantern light. This section leads into *Con mortuis in lingua mortua*: "With the dead in a dead language." Mussorgsky noted of this section: "The spirit of the departed Hartmann leads me to the skulls and invokes them: the skulls begin to glow faintly"; embedded in this spooky passage is a minor-key variation of the *Promenade* theme. *The Hut on Fowl's Legs* shows the hut (perched on hen's legs) of the vicious witch Baba Yaga, who would fly through the skies in a red-hot mortar—Mussorgsky has her fly scorchingly right into the final movement, *The Great Gate of Kiev*. Hartmann had designed a gate (never built) for the city of Kiev, and Mussorgsky's brilliant finale transforms the genial *Promenade* theme into a heaven-storming conclusion.

Fantasia in C Major, Op. 17

Robert Schumann (1810–56)

In 1835 the 25-year-old Robert Schumann learned of plans to create a Beethoven monument in Bonn and—fired with enthusiasm for the project—resolved to compose a piano sonata and donate all receipts from it to support the monument. He wrote to his publisher, suggesting an elaborate publication in which the score would be bound in black and trimmed with gold, and he proposed a monumental inscription for that cover:

Ruins. Trophies. Palms.

Grand Piano Sonata

For Beethoven's Monument

Yet when Schumann began composing this music the following year, his plans had changed considerably. He had fallen in love with the young piano virtuosa Clara Wieck, and her father had exploded: Friedrich Wieck did everything in his power to keep the lovers apart, forbidding them to see each other and forcing them to return each other's letters. The dejected Schumann composed a three-movement sonatalike piece that was clearly fired by his thwarted love: he later told Clara that the first movement was "the most passionate thing I have ever composed—a deep lament for you." Yet the score, published under the neutral title *Fantasia* in 1839, contains enough references to Beethoven (quotations

from the song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* at the end of the first movement and from the Seventh Symphony in the last) to suggest that some of Schumann's original plans for a Beethoven sonata remained in this music. And finally, to complicate matters even further, Schumann dedicated the score not to Clara but to Franz Liszt, who would become one of its great champions.

If the inspiration for this music is in doubt, its greatness is not: the *Fantasia in C Major* is one of Schumann's finest compositions, wholly original in form, extremely difficult to perform, and haunting in its emotional effect. Schumann was right to call this music a fantasy—it may seem like a piano sonata on first appearance, but it refuses to conform exactly to the rules of sonata form. The first movement, marked "Fantastic and passionate throughout," begins with an impassioned falling figure that Schumann associated with Clara. In the quiet middle section, which Schumann marks "In the manner of a legend," the music moves to C minor; yet the conclusion does not recapitulate the opening material in the correct key—the music returns to C major only after the reference to Beethoven's song from *An die ferne Geliebte*.

The second movement is a vigorous march full of dotted rhythms; Schumann marks it "Energetic throughout." Curiously, Clara—the inspiration for the first movement—liked this movement the best; she wrote to Schumann: "The march strikes me as a victory march of warriors returning from battle, and in the A-flat section I think of the young girls from the village, all dressed in white, each with a garland in her hand crowning the warriors kneeling before them." Schumann concludes with a surprise: the last movement is in a slow tempo—it unfolds expressively, and not until the final bars does Schumann allow this music to arrive—gently and magically—in the home key of C major.

The *Fantasia in C Major* is one of Schumann's finest works, yet within years of its composition, Schumann himself was hard on this music, calling it "immature and unfinished . . . mostly reflections of my turbulent earlier life." By this time, he was happily married to Clara and may have identified the *Fantasia* with a painful period in his life, yet it is precisely for its turbulence, its pain, and its longing that we value this music today.



Albert Cano Smit

Swiss-born pianist Smit won his first international competition at age 14, but it was the 2017 Naumburg Competition First Prize that vaulted him to international prominence. Since then, many more first prizes have been his. Of his 2018 San Francisco Performances recital the reviewer wrote, “The audience witnessed a genius at work.” His 2019 Fondation Louis Vuitton recital at the Frank Gehry–designed “glass cloud” in Paris was broadcast live globally. The reviewer enthused, “He brings us an original and cohesive vision that is captivating from beginning to end.”

Albert Cano Smit photo, © Wenqi Ke

PROGRAM

J. S. Bach, *Capriccio on the Departure of His Beloved Brother*, BWV 992

Schumann, *Kreisleriana*, Op. 16

- I. Äußerst bewegt (“Extremely animated”), D minor
- II. Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch (“Very heartfelt and not too fast”), B-flat major
- III. Sehr aufgeregt (“Very agitated”), G minor
- IV. Sehr langsam (“Very slow”), B-flat major/G minor
- V. Sehr lebhaft (“Very lively”), G minor
- VI. Sehr langsam (“Very slow”), B-flat major
- VII. Sehr rasch (“Very fast”), C minor/E-flat major
- VIII. Schnell und spielend (“Fast and playful”), G minor

INTERMISSION

Messiaen, *Selections from Vingt regards sur l'enfant-Jésus*

1. No. XV, Le baiser de l'enfant Jésus (“The Kiss of Baby Jesus”)
2. No. XII, La parole toute-puissante (“The Omnipotent Word”)

Chopin, *Nocturne in C-Sharp Minor*, Op. 27, No. 1

Prokofiev, *Piano Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major*, Op. 83

- I. Allegro inquieto—Andantino
- II. Andante caloroso
- III. Precipitato

PROGRAM NOTES

***Capriccio on the Departure of His Beloved Brother*, BWV 992**

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

The departure in 1704 of Bach’s older brother Johann Jacob to join the army of King Carl XII of Sweden as an oboist was a source of concern for the whole family. For the occasion, Bach—who was then 19—wrote his *Capriccio on the Departure of His Beloved Brother*, a charming and affectionate work. It is one of the few examples of programmatic music by Bach, for it depicts the actual departure of his brother on a carriage: each movement has a subtitle that describes the events. The opening

Arioso is subtitled “a coaxing by his friends to dissuade him from the journey.” The second movement “is a picturing of various calamities that might overtake him in foreign parts,” and Bach depicts these calamities by modulating into wrong keys. The *Adagissimo* “is a general lament of his friends,” and in the fourth movement “come the friends, since they see it cannot be otherwise, and take their leave.” The fifth movement—*Aria di Postiglione*—echoes the horn call of the carriage that will carry the brother away, and the final movement is a “Fugue in Imitation of the Postilion’s Horn.”

Kreisleriana, Op. 16

Robert Schumann (1810–56)

Few composers have been as well read as Robert Schumann, who found inspiration in a range of writers, from Shakespeare to Goethe to Jean Paul to Byron. One of the strongest literary influences on Schumann was the work of the German writer E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776–1822), author of novels and fantastic tales. Hoffmann named one of his sets of fantastic stories *Fantasiestücke*, and Schumann borrowed that title for several of his own works; but it was Hoffmann’s fictional character Johannes Kreisler who seems to have struck Schumann most strongly. A musician and critic (like Schumann himself), Kreisler was a perfect example of the literary concept known as *Zerrissenheit*: the artist-hero who is torn apart by the conflict between his idealized sense of order and the claims of the world he must live in; one of Hoffmann’s original working titles, in fact, appears to have been *Lucid Intervals of an Insane Musician*. Schumann, one of the most mentally tormented of all composers, saw in Johannes Kreisler a spiritual brother, and he borrowed the name *Kreisleriana* for this collection of eight piano pieces, which he specifically called “fantasies,” from Hoffmann’s cycle of musical writings of the same name.

Schumann wrote *Kreisleriana* in the spring of 1838. He was 27 years old, his efforts to marry Clara Wieck were being thwarted by the opposition of her father, and music seemed to pour out of the young composer. From January 1838 came his *Novelletten*, followed by the *Kinderszenen* in February; in March Schumann composed the *Fantasie in C Major*, and in April—in the space of four days, so he claimed—he wrote *Kreisleriana*. Schumann may have called these pieces “fantasies,” which

implies formlessness, but they are in fact quite disciplined works. They do, however, defy easy classification: some are in ABA form, some are in simple binary form, and several have forms all their own. As a very general rule, it might be observed that the odd-numbered movements are fast and dramatic, and the even slow and expressive, but even this observation is undercut by the frequent internal episodes in contrasting tempos. Particularly striking is the variety of mood and expression in this music—one moment it can be simple and lyric, the next it turns mercurial, and suddenly it is violent and extroverted. Yet this music tells no tales and paints no pictures, nor does it try to translate Hoffmann’s magical stories into music—these eight pieces are abstract music, complete in themselves. Throughout, one feels Schumann’s instinctive and idiomatic understanding of the piano, and the end of *Kreisleriana* is stunning: after the galloping, hammering energy of the final piece, the music grows quiet and suddenly vanishes like smoke on two barely audible strokes of sound.

The apparent inspiration for this music was Hoffmann’s character, but Schumann chose to dedicate *Kreisleriana* “To His Friend Frederic Chopin.” His letters, however, make clear that the real inspiration for this music was his love for Clara Wieck—he wrote to tell her: “Play my *Kreisleriana* occasionally. In some passages there is to be found an utterly wild love, and your life and mine.”

Selections from Vingt regards sur l’enfant-Jésus

Olivier Messiaen (1908–92)

Messiaen composed *Vingt regards sur l’enfant-Jésus* in Paris between March 23 and September 8, 1944. That was one of the happiest moments in the history of that city—the liberation of Paris from Nazi occupation took place that summer—but there is absolutely no trace of such external events in this work. This music is concerned with quite a different sort of joy, one that exists outside time and human action—it is an expression of the devout Christian faith that lies at the heart of every note Messiaen composed. The title translates as “Twenty watches [or perhaps ‘observations’ or ‘perspectives’] on the Infant Jesus.” Written specifically for Messiaen’s brilliant pupil Yvonne Loriod, who later became his wife, *Vingt regards* is a collection of 20 pieces that lasts in its

entirety about two hours.

These 20 pieces are unified in several different ways. First, three different themes run through the set: a simple chordal melody that Messiaen calls the “Theme of God,” a linear “Theme of the Star and of the Cross,” and a “Theme of Chords,” a sequence of four simple chords. *Vingt regards* also reflects Messiaen’s lifelong interest in birdsong (he quotes the songs of specific birds) as well as his interest in canon. In its purest form, religious faith should be ecstatic, and *Vingt regards* is ecstatic music: in its rhythmic freedom (there are no time signatures here and few bar lines), its incredible pianistic sonorities (much of it is written on three staves), and in its virtuosity—Yvonne Loriod was a superb pianist, and this music was written specifically for her abilities. In the preface to the score, Messiaen writes of *Vingt regards*: “More than in all my preceding works, I have sought a language of mystic love, at once varied, powerful and tender, sometimes brutal, in a multicolored ordering.”

This recital offers two movements from *Vingt regards*. *Le baiser de l’enfant-Jésus* (“Kiss of the Infant Jesus”) is a rapt slow episode that treats the “Theme of God” as a berceuse, or lullaby. Messiaen marks the movement “Very slow, calm” and then stipulates that it should be like “a dream.” This movement is in the home key of *Vingt regards*—F-sharp major—and Messiaen sends the piano into its ringing high register as the music comes to a quiet, shimmering close. *La parole toute-puissante* (“The Omnipotent Word”): “This child is the Word who sustains all things by the strength of his word.” Written on three staves, this movement is distinguished by its percussion sounds: deep in the left hand, the sound of a tam-tam rings throughout, and at moments Messiaen has the piano echo the sound of drumrolls.

Nocturne in C-sharp Minor, Op. 27, No. 1

Frédéric Chopin (1810–49)

The *Nocturne in C-sharp Minor*, composed in Paris in 1835, has left critics gasping for language that can suggest its unearthly evocation of the night: “night-marmoreal . . . hushed, airless, and miasmic . . . black magic,” says one. “An atmosphere of morbid pessimism, heavy and oppressive,” says another. By comparison, *The New Grove Dictionary*

keeps itself under control, describing this music only as “one of [Chopin’s] best nocturnes.”

This is impressive music, and its haunting night atmosphere is the result of Chopin’s careful—and very imaginative—technical control. The *Nocturne in C-sharp Minor* is in the expected ternary form, with an opening section that glides darkly along the left hand’s widely ranging sextuplets, a pattern that continues throughout. High above, the right hand has the melodic line, quiet but unsettling in its harmonic freedom. At the center section, marked *Più mosso*, the music presses forward powerfully. Over triplet accompaniment, the right hand begins quietly but soon hammers its way to a great climax marked *appassionato* and *agitato*. This falls away, and the transition back to the opening material brings another surprise: Chopin gives it entirely to the left hand, whose long sequence of octaves is almost a small cadenza in itself. The opening material resumes, but the repeat is not literal; and Chopin suddenly abandons this music for an entirely new idea, which moves easily along a chain of major thirds. The atmosphere, so tense to this point, now seems to relax, and Chopin completes the surprise with an utterly unexpected modulation into C-sharp major at the end.

This technical description, no matter how accurate, misses the essence of this music. That lies in its atmosphere—dark, unsettled, and constantly changing.

Piano Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major, Op. 83

Serge Prokofiev (1891–1953)

Prokofiev liked to plan works far in advance, and in 1939—when he was 48—he projected a series of three piano sonatas, which would become his Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth. He completed the first of these in 1940, but then came catastrophe—Hitler invaded Russia in June 1941, and Prokofiev’s plans were delayed and altered. Along with many other artists, he was evacuated, first to Nalchik in the Caucasus, then in the fall of 1941 to Tbilisi, near the border with Turkey. Here Prokofiev plunged into his project to compose an opera based on Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*: the heroic Russian resistance to Napoleon became a parallel for the struggle against Nazi Germany. And at the same time as he worked

on the opera, Prokofiev found time to compose his *Piano Sonata No. 7*, completing the score in Tbilisi in April 1942. Young Sviatoslav Richter gave the first performance, in Moscow, on January 18, 1943.

Since the moment of that premiere, the Seventh has been acclaimed one of Prokofiev's finest works. Almost inevitably, observers have claimed to hear the sound of war and national catastrophe in this music, but the composer himself made no direct connection, leaving such issues to his listeners. The first movement has the unusual marking *Allegro inquieto*, and unquiet this music certainly is. The opening section is quite percussive, and something of the music's character can be understood from Prokofiev's performance markings: *tumultuoso, veloce, con brio, marcato, secco*; at one point, he even requests that the performer make the piano sound *quasi timpani*. The pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy has compared this opening section to the sound of "drums beating and iron screeching," which makes the second section all the more impressive. This is a singing and flowing Andantino, which Prokofiev marks *espressivo e dolente* ("grieving"); these two quite different kinds of music alternate before the movement comes to a quiet close.

The second movement also has an unusual marking, *Andante caloroso* ("warm"); and some have found the opening almost sentimental in its relaxed songfulness. This is soon disrupted by an agitated middle section; the violence fades away, but the gentle opening makes only the briefest and most tentative return before the close. The famous last movement is a blistering toccata, marked simply *Precipitato* ("precipitous"). The movement is extremely fast, set in the unusual meter 7/8, and unremittingly chordal in its textures. It is also extraordinarily difficult music (Vladimir Horowitz sometimes used this movement as an encore piece), and it forms an exciting conclusion to the sonata. Along the way, material from the opening movement makes a brief reappearance, but the chordal violence of this movement overpowers it and drives the sonata to its hammering close.



Alessio Bax and Lucille Chung

UK magazine *Together* calls husband and wife team Alessio Bax and Lucille Chung one of the most "appealing and impressive piano duos of our time." They have performed in major festivals and concert halls around the world. The couple met at Japan's Hamamatsu Competition, where Bax says, "I think we fell in love with each other's playing!" The duo's three CDs feature works of Saint-Saëns, Stravinsky, and Ligeti for piano four-hands and two pianos. The duo gave recent acclaimed performances in Lincoln Center; Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC; and Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires.

PROGRAM

Schubert, *Fantasia in F Minor for Piano Four-Hands, D. 940 (Op. posth. 103)*

- I. Allegro molto moderato
- II. Largo
- III. Allegro vivace
- IV. Tempo I

Debussy, *Petite Suite for Piano Four-Hands*

- I. En bateau ("Sailing") (Andantino)
- II. Cortège ("Procession") (Moderato)

- III. Menuet (Moderato)
- IV. Ballet (Allegro giusto)

INTERMISSION

Stravinsky, *Petrushka for Piano Four-Hands*

- I. First Tableau: The Shrovetide Fair
Russian Dance
- II. Second Tableau: Petrushka's Room
- III. Third Tableau: The Moor's Room
Waltz: The Ballerina and the Moor
- IV. Fourth Tableau: The Shrovetide Fair (Towards Evening)
 - 1. Dance of the Nursemaids
 - 2. The Peasant and the Bear
 - 3. Dance of the Gypsy Women
 - 4. Dance of the Coachmen and Grooms
 - 5. Masqueraders
 - 6. Scuffle (The Moor and Petrushka)
 - 7. Death of Petrushka
 - 8. The Policeman and the Charlatan
 - 9. Apparition of Petrushka's Double

Piazzolla-Bax/Chung, *Milonga del ángel for Piano Four-Hands*

Piazzolla-Bax/Chung, *Libertango for Piano Four-Hands*

PROGRAM NOTES

Fantasia in F Minor for Piano Four-Hands, D. 940 (Op. posth. 103)

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

The *Fantasia in F Minor for Piano Four-Hands* is one of the creations of Schubert's miraculous final year of life, which saw a nearly unbroken rush of masterpieces. Schubert wrote most of the *Fantasia* in January 1828 but ran into problems and set the work aside for several months, returning to complete it in April. He and his friend Eduard von Bauernfeld gave the first performance on May 9 of that year, six months before the composer's death at age 31.

Music for piano four-hands is a very particular genre, now unfortunately much out of fashion. In early 19th-century Vienna, however, there was a growing market for music that could be played in the home, where there might be only one piano but several pianists, usually amateur musicians. Such music often had an intentionally social appeal—it was not especially difficult, and it tended to be pleasing rather than profound. Much of Schubert's four-hand piano music was intended for just such home performers (he often wrote music for his students to play together), but the *Fantasia in F Minor* is altogether different: this work demands first-class performers and contains some of the most wrenching and focused music Schubert ever wrote. Schubert scholar John Reed has gone so far as to call it “a work which in its structural organisation, economy of form, and emotional depth represents his art at its peak.”

The title *fantasia* suggests a certain looseness of form, but the *Fantasia in F Minor* is extraordinary for its conciseness. Lasting barely a quarter of an hour, it is in one continuous flow of music that breaks into four clear movements. The very beginning—*Allegretto molto moderato*—is haunting. Over murmuring accompaniment, the higher voice lays out the wistful first theme, whose halting rhythms and chirping grace notes have caused many to believe that this theme had its origins in Hungarian folk music. Schubert repeats this theme continually—the effect is almost hypnotic—and suddenly the music has slipped effortlessly from F minor into F major. The second subject, based on firm dotted rhythms, is treated at length before the music drives directly into the powerful *Largo*, which is given an almost baroque luxuriance by its trills and double (and triple) dotting. This in turn moves directly into the *Allegro vivace*, a sparkling scherzo that feels like a very fast waltz; its trio section (marked *con delicatezza*) ripples along happily in D major. The writing for the first pianist here goes so high that much of this section is in the bell-like upper register of the piano—the music rings and shimmers as it races across the keyboard. The final section (Schubert marks it simply *Tempo I*) brings back music from the very beginning, but quickly the wistful opening melody is jostled aside by a vigorous fugue derived from the second subject of the opening section. On tremendous chords and contrapuntal complexity the *Fantasia* drives to its climax, only to fall away to the quiet close.

Schubert dedicated this music to the Countess Caroline Esterházy, who 10 years before—as a girl of 15—had been one of his piano students. Evidence suggests that Schubert was—from a distance—always thereafter in love with her: to a friend he described her as “a certain attractive star.” Given the intensity of this music, it is easy to believe that his love for her remained undiminished in the final year of his life.

Petite suite

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

In 1886, Claude Debussy—unknown to the world at large but only too well known to the authorities at the Paris Conservatory—began work on a set of pieces for piano, four-hands. This was a difficult time for the 24-year-old composer. He was just completing two unhappy years in Rome, where he had been obligated to study as winner of the Prix de Rome, and he would continue to struggle in obscurity for several more years. Not until 1893 and 1894, with the premieres of his *String Quartet* and *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, did he achieve fame. Now, however, the young composer was writing for piano. He composed the two *Arabesques* in 1888, and the following year he completed the set of pieces for four-hand piano, which he published under the title *Petite suite*. There was a market for this sort of attractive music that talented amateurs might play at home, but the *Petite suite* became much better known nearly 20 years later when Debussy’s friend, the composer Henri Büsser, arranged it for small orchestra in 1907. Debussy himself conducted the orchestral version with some success, including a performance in Vienna; and the composer’s biographer Edward Lockspeiser notes that the orchestral version of *Petite suite* has achieved “an enviable place in the repertory of so-called light music.”

Critics have been hard on the suite, perhaps because it is still early Debussy and does not show the distinctive advances in harmony and form that mark his mature music. Lockspeiser, in fact, speaks of this music’s “period prettiness” and hears a number of echoes of earlier French composers in the four pieces. Despite the critics, the *Petite suite* has proven popular with audiences, and at least one of its movements has become famous on its own. This is the suite’s opening movement, *En bateau*—“In a Boat” or “Sailing”—which is also a favorite of pianists in its version for solo piano. It is in the form of a barcarolle, the gently

rocking song of the Venetian gondoliers. Like all the pieces in *Petite suite*, it is in ternary form: an opening section, a middle section of different mood and harmony, and a return of the opening material that also subtly recalls music from the central episode. *En bateau* is in the manner of a Monet water painting, with brightly colored water lilies and brilliant sunlight glistening off the water’s surface. Debussy called the second movement *Cortège*, but there is little of the funeral procession about this movement, which rides along a steady pulse of 16ths in its outer sections. The third movement is a minuet that concludes very delicately, while the finale, called *Ballet*, dances with unusual energy. Its central episode also dances, but in a different way: Debussy marks this *Tempo di Valse*, and this music does waltz along its 3/8 meter before the opening material returns to drive the *Petite suite* to a powerful close.

Petrushka

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

Petrushka, Stravinsky’s ballet about three puppets at a Russian Shrovetide carnival, actually began life as a sort of piano concerto. In the summer of 1910, shortly after the successful premiere of *The Firebird*, Stravinsky started work on a ballet about a pagan ritual sacrifice in ancient Russia. But he set the manuscript to *The Rite of Spring* aside when he was consumed by a new idea: “I had in my mind a distinct picture of a puppet, suddenly endowed with life, exasperating the patience of the orchestra with diabolical cascades of arpeggi. The orchestra in turn retaliates with menacing trumpet-blasts. The outcome is a terrific noise which reaches its climax and ends in the sorrowful and querulous collapse of the poor puppet.”

When impresario Serge Diaghilev visited Stravinsky that summer in Switzerland to see how the pagan-sacrifice ballet was progressing, he was at first horrified to learn that Stravinsky was doing nothing with it. But when Stravinsky played some of his new music, Diaghilev was charmed and saw possibilities for a ballet. With Alexander Benois, they created a story line around the Russian puppet theater, specifically the tale of *Petrushka*, “the immortal and unhappy hero of every fair in all countries.” Stravinsky composed the score to what was now a ballet

between August 1910 and May 1911, and *Petrushka* was first performed in Paris on June 13, 1911, with Nijinsky in the title role.

From the moment of that premiere, *Petrushka* has remained one of Stravinsky's most popular scores, and the source of its success is no mystery: *Petrushka* combines an appealing tale of three puppets, authentic Russian folk tunes and street songs, and brilliant writing for orchestra. The music is remarkable for Stravinsky's sudden development beyond the Rimsky-inspired *Firebird*, particularly in matters of rhythm and orchestral sound. One of those most impressed by *Petrushka* was Claude Debussy, who spoke with wonder of this music's "sonorous magic."

On this recital *Petrushka* is heard in an arrangement, apparently made by Stravinsky himself, for piano four-hands. A brief summary of the music and action, which divides into four tableaux separated by drumrolls:

First Tableau: The Shrovetide Fair To swirling music, the curtain comes up to reveal a carnival scene in 1830 St. Petersburg. The crowd mills about, full of organ grinders, dancers, and drunkards. An aged magician appears and—like a snake charmer—spins a spell with a flute solo. He brings up the curtain in his small booth to reveal three puppets: Petrushka, the moor, and the ballerina. At a delicate touch of the magician's wand, all three spring to life and dance before the astonished crowd to the powerful *Russian Dance*. A drumroll leads to the second tableau.

Second Tableau: Petrushka's Room This tableau opens with Petrushka being kicked into his room and locked up. The pathetic puppet tries desperately to escape and despairs when he cannot. Stravinsky depicts his anguish with two clarinets, one in C major and the other in F-sharp major: their bitonal clash has become famous as the "Petrushka sound." The trapped puppet rails furiously but is distracted by the appearance of the ballerina, who enters to a tinkly little tune. Petrushka is drawn to her, but she scorns him and leaves.

Third Tableau: The Moor's Room Brutal chords take us into the moor's opulent room. The ballerina enters and dances for the moor to the accompaniment of cornet and snare drum. He is charmed, and the two

waltz together. Suddenly Petrushka enters (his coming is heralded by variations on his pathetic clarinet tune), and he and the moor fight over the ballerina. At the end, the moor chases him out.

Fourth Tableau: The Shrovetide Fair (Toward Evening) At the opening of the tableau, a festive crowd swirls past. There are a number of set pieces here: the *Dance of the Nursemaids*, *The Peasant and the Bear* (depicted respectively by squealing clarinet and stumbling tuba), *Dance of the Gypsy Women*, *Dance of the Coachmen and Grooms* (who stamp powerfully), and *Masqueraders*. At the very end, poor Petrushka rushes into the square, pursued by the moor, who kills him with a slash of his scimitar. As a horrified crowd gathers, the magician appears and reassures all that it is make-believe by holding up Petrushka's body to show it dripping sawdust. As he drags the slashed body away, the ghost of Petrushka appears above the rooftops, railing defiantly at the terrified magician, who flees. Petrushka's defiance is depicted musically by the triplet figure associated with him throughout. Quiet strokes of sound, taken from both the C-major and F-sharp major scale, bring the ballet to an end that is—dramatically and harmonically—ambiguous.

Milonga del ángel for Piano Four-Hands (arr. Bax/Chung)

Libertango for Piano Four-Hands (arr. Bax/Chung)

Astor Piazzolla (1921–92)

Astor Piazzolla was a fabulously talented young man, and that wealth of talent caused him some confusion as he tried to decide on a career path. Very early he learned to play the bandoneon, the Argentinian accordionlike instrument that uses buttons rather than a keyboard, and he became a virtuoso on it. He gave concerts, composed a film soundtrack, and created his own bands before a desire for wider expression drove him to the study of classical music. In 1954 he received a grant to study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, and it was that great teacher who advised him to follow his passion for the Argentinian tango as the source for his own music. Piazzolla returned to Argentina and gradually evolved his own style, one that combines the tango, jazz, and classical music. In his hands, the tango—which had deteriorated into a soft, popular form—was revitalized. Piazzolla transformed this old Argentinian dance into music capable of a variety of expression

and fusing sharply contrasted moods: his tangos are by turn fiery, melancholy, passionate, tense, violent, lyric, and always driven by an endless supply of rhythmic energy.

Alberto Rodríguez Muñoz (1915–2004) was an Argentinian poet, playwright, and stage director. In 1962 he staged his play *El tango del ángel*, in which an angel descends into the slums of Buenos Aires and cleanses the souls of the poverty-stricken inhabitants but is eventually killed in a knife fight. Piazzolla supplied incidental music for the play, and among those pieces was his *Milonga del ángel*. A milonga is a dance that originated in the Argentina-Uruguay area in the 19th century; originally fast, it has been described as a forerunner of the tango. Piazzolla's *Milonga del ángel*, however, is in a slow tempo, and it has become one of his best-known compositions, arranged for many different instrumental ensembles. Its haunting beginning gives way to a more animated central episode (in Piazzolla's recording of the piece, this section featured a memorable violin solo); this rises to a climax and drives to the firm close.

After returning from his studies with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, Piazzolla had great success in Argentina, but after two decades there (and a heart attack in 1973), he decided to return to Europe. *Libertango*, composed in Italy in 1974, quickly became a hit in Europe, and it remains today one of Piazzolla's most popular works. The title of this brief tango is somewhat fanciful (Piazzolla himself described it as "a sort of song of liberty"), and listeners will be taken more by its pulsing rhythm, which functions as an ostinato throughout, and Piazzolla's sinuous, sensual, and dark main theme.

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