

Our 25th Year

PIANO CONCERTS
FEBRUARY 2020–MAY 2020

Steinway Society

THE BAY AREA



Juho Pohjonen



Daria Rabotkina

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Federico Colli



Alexander Sinchuk

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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



Changyong Shin

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



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 hope you enjoyed the first half of our exhilarating 25th season! With only four concerts remaining in our Silver Anniversary Season, we're sure you'll agree that our Artistic Committee (Nancy Daggett Jensen and Donald Wright) has brought another lineup of thrilling, captivating pianists to San Jose for your enjoyment.

If you are a subscriber, thank you so much for your ongoing support. If you have not yet subscribed, there is still time to subscribe to a mini-series and save.

The second half of this Anniversary Season opens with "requisite ferocity and tenderness" displayed by Daria Rabotkina, performing works by Schubert, Beethoven, Griffes, and Aurandt. Alexander Sinchuk shows his "bright artistic temperament and particular charm," playing a program of Beethoven, Schubert, Liszt, Tchaikovsky-Pletnev, and Rachmaninoff. Music of Brahms and Ravel will allow Juho Pohjonen to showcase his critically praised "pearly touch, singing tone and sensitivity." The final concert of this 25th Silver Anniversary Season will feature Federico Colli bringing his "beautiful light touch and lyrical grace" to the music of Scarlatti, Bach, Haydn, Schubert, and Beethoven.

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

Your ongoing support has allowed us to bring great concert pianists to the Bay Area for 25 years. We need your continued support to do so for the next quarter century. Thank you for your dedication to the arts. We look forward to seeing you again soon, and hope you will join us for next season's exhilarating performances of masterpieces from the last 300 years.

Kathy You Wilson

President, Board of Directors

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Daria Rabotkina

Daria Rabotkina, born in Kazan, Russia, studied at the Kazan State Conservatory and later with Vladimir Feltsman at Mannes College. Winner of top prizes at international competitions, including from the Concert Artists Guild, she has performed under renowned conductors including Michael Tilson Thomas, and in distinguished venues in Europe, Japan, and the US, including at Carnegie Hall. Her CDs have garnered universal praise. Rabotkina holds a doctorate from Eastman School of Music and is on the faculty of Texas State University.

Daria Rabotkina, © Josh Huskin

PROGRAM

Schubert, *Selections from Six moments musicaux, D. 780 (Op. 94)*

1. No. 2 in A-flat Major (Andantino)
2. No. 3 in F Minor (Allegro moderato)
3. No. 5 in F Minor (Allegro vivace)
4. No. 6 in A-flat Major (Allegretto)

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

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

INTERMISSION

Griffes, *Selections from Roman Sketches, Op. 7*

1. No. 3, The Fountain of the Acqua Paola
2. No. 4, Clouds

Aurandt, *Piano Sonata in B-flat Minor*

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegro assai

PROGRAM NOTES

Moments musicaux, D. 780 (Op. 94)

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Schubert and his publishers were quite aware of the growing market of amateur piano players in the years after the Congress of Vienna, and he was happy to write for it. These enthusiastic amateurs represented a source of ready income to a composer who was never fully free from financial concerns. Yet Schubert would not have felt that he was “writing down” to such performers. Throughout his life he wrote a vast number of dances and short pieces for piano, composed purely for the pleasure of the performer (and of any listener who might be present).

In the fall of 1827, only a year before his death, Schubert set out to write specifically for this market. In these months he completed eight impromptus and a set of six short pieces published in July 1828 with the title *Momens* [sic] *musicals* (in faulty French probably supplied by

the publisher). These musical moments were brief pieces of varying difficulty, probably intended for performance at home (the original title has since been corrected to *Moments musicaux*). Schubert would have welcomed performances of individual pieces from the set, and this recital offers four of the six.

Moment musical No. 2 in A-flat Major, a gentle rondo, alternates a tranquil and dotted chordal opening section with passages in F-sharp minor that proceed above flowing left-hand triplets, both themes set in 9/8 meter. *No. 3 in F Minor* is the best-known of the set and also the earliest to be written—Schubert composed it in 1823. It was originally published under the title *Air russe*, though there does not seem to be anything particularly Russian about it. The graceful main theme, of a *Rosamunde*-like charm, has struck some listeners as ballet music; Schubert builds the piece on repeated phrases, then rounds it off with a long coda. *No. 5 in F Minor* is the most difficult of the set, with its quick pace (Schubert marks it *Allegro vivace*), chordal writing, and powerful dactylic (long–short–short) rhythms. The concluding *No. 6 in A-flat Major* was written somewhat earlier, in December 1824, and originally published under another fanciful title supplied by the publishers: *Les plaintes d'un troubadour*. Longest of the movements, this one is unusually expressive, full of brief episodes in different moods and keys.

Sonata No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

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. Where the previous two decades had seen a great outpouring of music, in these years 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 writing three piano sonatas for the Berlin publisher Adolf 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, Opus 109, immediately, but ill health postponed the other two. Notes in the manuscript indicate that Beethoven completed Opus 110 in December 1821 and Opus 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 liveliness 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 almost brutal and slashing energy.

A 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 an 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.

Selections from Roman Sketches, Op. 7

Charles Tomlinson Griffes (1884–1920)

Like Mozart, American composer Charles Griffes died a few months short of his 36th birthday. His death deprived American music of a major talent and probably deprived music of a number of major works. A prodigy as a boy, Griffes had intended to make his career as a virtuoso pianist, and at age 19 he went to Berlin to study piano at the Stern Conservatory. But the lure of composition proved too strong, and in Berlin Griffes studied privately with Humperdinck before returning to the United States in 1907. He became director of music at the Hackley School, a private school for boys in Tarrytown, New York, and remained there for the rest of his brief life. Griffes's music evolved quickly: at first influenced by Brahms and Strauss, he quickly fell under the spell of the exotic new sounds that composers were producing in the early years of the 20th century. The first of these influences was the impressionism of Debussy and Ravel, but Griffes was soon drawn to the sensuality of Scriabin and to the music of the Far East, a fascination that would also captivate Szymanowski and many other composers in these years.

Under these influences, Griffes composed a set of four piano pieces in 1915–16 that he published as his *Roman Sketches, Opus 7*. Each of the pieces was prefaced by a quotation from the collection *Sospiri de Roma* by the Scottish novelist and poet William Sharp (1855–1905), one of Griffes's favorite writers. Sharp was a complex personality: attracted to mysticism and to the pre-Raphaelite movement, he published much of his work under the pen name Fiona Macleod. On this recital Rabotkina

offers the two final movements of *Roman Sketches*, "The Fountain of the Acqua Paola" and "Clouds."

As its title suggests, "The Fountain of the Acqua Paola" is a water piece. As a student in Berlin, Griffes had been much impressed by a performance of Ravel's great water piece *Jeux d'eau*, and—given the Roman setting of Sharp's poems—we might also note that at just the moment Griffes was composing this music, Ottorino Respighi was composing his *Fontane di Roma*, another great water piece. Griffes prefaces his score with five lines from Sharp's poem:

Shimmering lights,
As though the Aurora's
Wild polar fires
Flashed in thy happy bubbles,
Died in thy foam.

Marked *Allegro moderato*, Griffes's fountain piece sparkles and shimmers before us like water in bright sunlight. Part of the charm of this music is its rhythmic complexity: Griffes sets different rhythms against each other and changes meters frequently. The music rises to a great climax but subsides on a quiet discord.

If "The Fountain of the Acqua Paola" recalled Ravel, "Clouds" inevitably recalls Debussy's "Nuages" from *Nocturnes*. But where Debussy kept his tonal palette subdued and gray, Griffes gives us the motion of great clouds moving across a bright sky. He quotes seven lines from Sharp in the score:

Mountainous glories,
They move superbly;
Crumbling so slowly,
That none perceives when
The golden domes
Are sunk in the valleys
Of fathomless snows.

Griffes marks his piece *Tranquillo* and sets it in the unusual meter 7/4. The most striking feature of the music is its bitonality—the pianist's hands are often in different keys, and at some points Griffes expands

the many strands of this music across four staves. The colors seem to cry out for full orchestra, and in fact Griffes made an orchestral version of the piece, which was premiered by Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1919.

Sonata in B-flat Minor

Paul Aurandt (1948–)

The son of radio commentator Paul Harvey (whose full name was Paul Harvey Aurandt), Paul Aurandt has had a distinguished career of his own—and in many different fields. Aurandt studied at the Chicago Musical College of Roosevelt University, where he earned his Master’s degree in piano performance. At the same time, the young man assisted his father on Harvey’s radio program, *The Rest of the Story*; it was Aurandt who created and wrote the program. Aurandt is a playwright (his first play, *Burton*, about the life of actor Richard Burton, was produced in Florida in 1996) as well as a composer and pianist. His most recent major composition—*Jehanne: An Anthem*, an opera about Joan of Arc—was premiered in Arizona in 2018.

Aurandt’s *Piano Sonata in B-flat Minor* is the work of a young man: he copyrighted the sonata in 1975, when he was 27. The sonata has apparently never been published (though the composer did prepare an authorized printing in 2000), but it has been championed by several distinguished pianists and has been recorded at least three times, once by the composer himself. The idiom of this sonata might best be described as neo-Romantic: anyone coming to this music without knowing its composer might well guess that it is a work of Rachmaninoff’s, given its rich harmonies, advanced technical demands, and thematic elements that recur in subsequent movements. This is a sonata in the grand manner, full of sweep, bold gestures, and a full-throated sonority, a sonata that demands a virtuoso performer at every moment.

It is in the three-movement form of the classical piano sonata, taking the traditional fast–slow–fast sequence. The opening *Allegro* establishes the sonata’s dramatic character from its first instant. This opening

gesture will furnish much of the material for this movement, though there are more reflective and lyric secondary themes. The *Adagio* brings a complete change, at least at first. Gone are conflict and fire of the first movement, and in their place we enter a different world with a quiet chordal melody. This peace is short-lived, however, as the music quickly erupts into glistening runs and soon spills over with energy. The concluding *Allegro assai* returns to the manner of the first movement. It bursts to life on a theme driven sharply along syncopated rhythms, and at moments this movement feels like a perpetual motion. But this rush of energy is interrupted along the way by gentler interludes, and at the end the sonata drives to its conclusion on a great torrent of sound.



Alexander Sinchuk

Born near Vladivostok in the Russian Far East, Alexander Sinchuk has an affinity for the darkly Romantic corners of the repertoire. He won first prize at the 2008 International Rachmaninoff and 2012 International Horowitz piano competitions, and has performed all over the world giving recitals and master classes. *New York Concert Review* says of his 2011 Tchaikovsky Competition performance, “he hurled himself at the Prokofiev Seventh Sonata ‘Stalingrad’ as if he could see the carnage and smoking ruins in his mind’s eye.”

Alexander Sinchuk, courtesy of the artist

PROGRAM

Beethoven, *Sonata No. 23 in F Minor, Op. 57 (“Appassionata”)*

- I. Allegro assai
- II. Andante con moto
- III. Allegro ma non troppo—Presto

Schubert, *Impromptu No. 3 in G-flat Major, D. 899 (Op. 90)*

Liszt, *Mephisto Waltz No. 1 (“The Dance in the Village Inn”), S. 514*

INTERMISSION

Tchaikovsky-Pletnev, *Suite from The Nutcracker*

Rachmaninoff, *Six moments musicaux, Op. 16*

1. B-flat Minor (Andantino)
2. E-flat Minor (Allegretto)
3. B Minor (Andante cantabile)
4. E Minor (Presto)
5. D-flat Major (Adagio sostenuto)
6. C Major (Maestoso)

PROGRAM NOTES

Sonata No. 23 in F Minor, Op. 57 (“Appassionata”)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Between May and November 1803, Beethoven sketched the *Eroica*, a symphony on a scale never before imagined. Nearly half an hour longer than his Second Symphony, Beethoven’s Third thrust the whole concept of the symphony—and sonata form—into a new 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 piano sonatas. These sonatas, later nicknamed the *Waldstein* and the *Appassionata*, would be governed by the same impulse that shaped the *Eroica*.

While Beethoven completed the *Waldstein* quickly, the other sonata, delayed by his work on *Fidelio*, was not finished until early in 1806. The subtitle *Appassionata* appears to have originated with a publisher

rather than with the composer, but few works so deserve their nickname as this sonata. At moments in this music one feels that Beethoven is striving for a texture and intensity of sound unavailable to the piano, reaching for what Beethoven's biographer Maynard Solomon calls "quasi-orchestral sonorities." Despite the volcanic explosions of sounds in this sonata, it remains piano music—the *Appassionata* may strain the resources of the instrument, but this music is clearly conceived in terms of a pianistic rather than an orchestral sonority.

The ominous opening of the *Allegro assai* is marked *pianissimo*, but it is alive with energy and the potential for development. As the long first theme slowly unfolds, deep in the left hand the four-note motto that will later open the Fifth Symphony is heard; and out of this motto suddenly bursts a great eruption of sound. The movement's extraordinary unity becomes clear with the arrival of the second theme, which is effectively an inversion of the opening theme. And there is even a third subject, which boils out of a furious torrent of 16th notes. The movement develops in sonata form, though Beethoven does without an exposition repeat, choosing instead to press directly into the turbulent development. The rhythm of the opening theme is stamped out in the coda, and—after so much energy—the movement concludes as the first theme descends to near inaudibility. When this sonata was published in 1806, a reviewer—aware of the new directions in which Beethoven was taking music—tried to offer some measure of this movement: "Everyone knows Beethoven's way when writing a large-scale sonata. . . . In the first movement of this sonata (15 pages in 12/8 time) he has once again let loose many evil spirits . . ."

The second movement, a theme and four variations marked *Andante con moto*, brings a measure of relief. The theme, a calm chordal melody in two eight-bar phrases, is heard immediately, and the tempo remains constant throughout, though the variations become increasingly complex and ornate. Beethoven insists that the gentle mood remain constant—in the score he keeps reminding the pianist to play *dolce*, and even the swirls of 32nd notes near the end remain serene. The sonata-form finale, marked *Allegro ma non troppo*, bursts upon the conclusion of the second movement with a fanfare of dotted notes, and the main

theme, an almost *moto perpetuo* shower of 16th notes, launches the movement. The searing energy of the first movement returns here, but now Beethoven offers a repeat of the development rather than of the exposition. The fiery coda, marked *Presto*, introduces an entirely new theme.

Beethoven offered no program for this sonata, nor will listeners do well to try to guess some external drama being played out in it. Sir Donald Francis Tovey, trying to take some measure of this sonata's extraordinary power and its unrelenting conclusion, has noted: "All his other pathetic finales show either an epilogue in some legendary or later world far away from the tragic scene . . . or a temper, fighting, humorous, or resigned, that does not carry with it a sense of tragic doom. [But in the *Appassionata*] there is not a moment's doubt that the tragic passion is rushing deathwards." That may be going too far, but it is true that—in sharp contrast to the shining, exultant conclusions of the *Eroica*, *Fidelio*, and the Fifth Symphony—this sonata ends with an abrupt plunge into darkness.

Impromptu No. 3 in G-flat Major, D. 899 (Op. 90)

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Schubert wrote eight impromptus for piano during the summer and fall of 1827. The term *impromptu* lacks precise musical meaning, but it refers to a short instrumental piece, usually for piano, without specified form. The title suggests music that gives the impression of being improvised on the spot, but the notion that this music is improvised should be speedily discounted—Schubert's impromptus are very carefully conceived music, set in a variety of forms that include variation, rondo, and minuet.

This program offers one of the four impromptus that Schubert wrote late in the summer of 1827, only a year before he died. In the *Impromptu 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.

Mephisto Waltz No. 1 (“The Dance in the Village Inn”), S. 514

Franz Liszt (1811–86)

In 1860, as he neared the end of his tenure as music director at the Weimar court, Franz Liszt wrote a pair of orchestral works that he titled *Two Episodes from Lenau’s Faust*. Nikolaus Lenau (1802–50) was the nom de plume of an Austrian poet who wrote his own versions, different from Goethe’s, of the Faust legend. Liszt’s pieces depict two scenes from Lenau’s dramatic poem. The first, *Der nächtliche Zug* (“The Ride by Night”), is a portrait of a religious procession passing Faust in the forest at night, the riders carrying torches as they go. It is seldom played, but the second piece has become one of Liszt’s most familiar works. Liszt titled it *Der Tanz in der Dorfschenke* (“The Dance in the Village Inn”), though it is most commonly known today under the title *Mephisto Waltz No. 1*. Liszt completed this music in January 1861 and led its first performance at Weimar on March 8, 1861, only months before his departure from that city (and only months before his 50th birthday). At the same time, he prepared a piano version of the work; it is virtually the same musically as the orchestral version, though it differs in a few pianistic details.

In the score Liszt printed a synopsis of the action that his music depicts. Faust and Mephistopheles wander into a village tavern, where Faust is smitten by a “black-eyed beauty.” But he is afraid to approach her, and Mephistopheles chides him for being willing to stand up to the creatures of hell but cowering at the prospect of approaching a mortal woman. Bored with the tavern, its inhabitants, and the music, Mephistopheles challenges the local musicians to dig in and play with some life. He takes up a violin and begins to play, and his playing is so exciting that it whips those in the tavern into a frenzy of excitement. Under the spell of the music, Faust overcomes his fears and leads the black-eyed beauty out into the warm night, where they cross a meadow and enter a dark forest. Deep in that forest, they hear the music from the distant tavern as a nightingale sings overhead.

Liszt’s music does not set out to depict these events in the sort of realistic detail that Richard Strauss would have brought to the task a generation later. Instead, Liszt offers a more generalized impression. His piece is structured as a series of waltzes in 3/8: some are fiery,

some languorous, and some dance with an almost Mendelssohnian lightness. After all this excitement, the music turns quiet as Faust and his companion enter the dark woods. In Liszt’s orchestral version, solo cello and solo violin suggest the couple in the dark, while a flute echoes the nightingale’s song. A sudden rush of energy propels the music to its powerful final chords.

Suite from The Nutcracker (arr. Pletnev)

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–93)

Tchaikovsky’s *Nutcracker* has become an inescapable part of how we think about Christmas, and even those who claim to know nothing about classical music can still hum many of the ballet’s wonderful tunes. Given this music’s universal appeal, it is surprising to learn that Tchaikovsky did not much care for the work. The idea of a Christmas fairy tale full of imaginary creatures set in a confectionary dreamworld of childhood fantasies left Tchaikovsky cold, but he accepted the commission from the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg and grudgingly began work. As always, he was worried that he had written himself out as a composer. To his brother he wrote grimly: “The ballet is infinitely worse than *The Sleeping Beauty*—so much is certain.” First produced in December 1892, *The Nutcracker* at first had only a modest success, but then a strange thing happened—that success grew so steadily that in the months before his death Tchaikovsky had to reassess what he had created: “It is curious that all the time I was writing the ballet I thought it was rather poor, and that when I began my opera [*Iolanthe*] I would really do my best. But now it seems to me that the ballet is good, and the opera is mediocre.”

We all know *The Nutcracker* in its orchestral garb, full of original scoring and employing such unusual instruments as the newly invented celesta, but the present performance lets us hear this familiar music in quite a different way. In 1978 the Russian pianist-composer Mikhail Pletnev, then only 21 and still a student at the Moscow Conservatory, arranged seven movements from *The Nutcracker* for solo piano. Pletnev did not aim for any sense of completeness in his choice of movements—he omits the famous “Waltz of the Flowers,” for instance, and his excerpts do not mirror their sequence in the ballet itself. Instead, he chose

seven movements that could be effectively transcribed for piano. His transcription demands a virtuoso pianist: parts of it are written on three staves; there are long passages written in rapid octaves; and the piano is sometimes called upon to generate a near-orchestral volume of sound. These excerpts are so familiar that they do not need introduction, but listeners may enjoy such touches as the piano's mimicking the sound of the celesta in "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy," the grandeur of sound achieved in the "Intermezzo," or Pletnev's own witty additions to the "Russian Dance."

We hear this music—in whatever form—and are left wondering: how could the man who wrote it possibly have worried that he had dried up as a composer?

Six moments musicaux, Op. 16

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

The *Six moments musicaux* represent one of Rachmaninoff's earliest works: he wrote these six pieces in the fall of 1896 when he was only 23 years old, a pivotal time in his career. During the previous year Rachmaninoff had composed his First Symphony, and the premiere was scheduled to take place in March 1897. That first performance would prove a disaster, with reviews so vitriolic that the young composer would be plunged into a paralyzing depression. Only through hypnotic suggestion was his confidence gradually restored, and he would go on to achieve great success with his Second Piano Concerto.

But now, while waiting with high hopes for that premiere, Rachmaninoff found himself under financial pressure, and he composed rapidly as a way of earning money. Part of the problem, he told a friend, was his need to replace "a rather large sum of money that was stolen from me on a train, money that did not belong to me." To another he wrote: "I am using all my free time to write intensively and I hurry this work not just to be able to say to myself, 'There—I've finished.' No! I hurry in order to get money I need by a certain date. . . . This perpetual financial pressure is, on the one hand, quite beneficial—at least it makes me work on schedule."

Such a background might make the *Moments musicaux* seem a hack job rushed into print, but in fact these six mood pieces show signs of a new maturity in Rachmaninoff and begin to point the way toward his later music. This is demanding music technically, and it seems to alternate between two expressive poles: explosive energy on one hand, and a somber darkness on the other; four of the six pieces are in minor keys. The opening *Andantino* is in the latter manner, though it offers a glittering (and unexpected) cadenza along the way. In the *Allegretto*, Rachmaninoff's main idea emerges from swirling keyboard textures; this music—full of waves of energy and fierce attacks—falls away to a quiet close. This piece has been particularly admired, and in 1940—nearly half a century after its composition—Rachmaninoff came back, revised it, and published the new version as a separate piece. The *Andante cantabile* is at first dark and halting, but then marches along smartly, if briefly, on its second subject; both themes are reprised. The *Presto* takes place in a blur of energy, with the left-hand accompaniment whirling constantly downward before the drive to the abrupt close. The *Adagio sostenuto* breathes an air of calm as the right hand plays the long main melody over the left's triplet accompaniment. Though the concluding movement is in C major and marked *Maestoso*, it brings no triumphant ending to this set of pieces. We are back at the explosively energetic side of these works, and the ternary-form movement rides huge chords to a furious close.



Juho Pohjonen

Finnish pianist Juho Pohjonen has received widespread acclaim for his profound musicianship and distinctive interpretations of repertoire from Bach to Salonen. His interpretations are known for their intensity, thoughtfulness, and fearless musical conviction. He performs widely in Europe, Asia, and North America. He has won numerous prizes in both Finnish and international competitions. In 2009, Sir András Schiff chose Pohjonen for Germany's Klavier Festival Ruhr Scholarship and its prestigious invitation to play at the Festival.

Juho Pohjonen, © J. Henry Fair

PROGRAM

Brahms, *Sonata No. 3 in F Minor, Op. 5*

- I. Allegro maestoso
- II. Andante espressivo—Andante molto
- III. Scherzo: Allegro energico—Trio
- IV. Intermezzo: Andante molto
- V. Finale: Allegro moderato ma rubato

INTERMISSION

Ravel, *Menuet antique*

Ravel, *Gaspard de la nuit*

- I. Ondine
- II. Le gibet
- III. Scarbo

PROGRAM NOTES

Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Minor, Op. 5

Johannes Brahms (1833–97)

Like so many other 19th-century composers, Brahms burst to fame as a virtuoso pianist who happened also to compose. But the young composer chose as his model not the recent (and formally innovative) piano music of Liszt and Chopin, but the older classical forms of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Of Brahms's first five published works, three were piano sonatas. He completed the last and finest of these sonatas in October of 1853, when he was still only 20 years old.

By coincidence, in that same month Robert Schumann's article on Brahms appeared in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, extravagantly hailing the young composer as one "at whose cradle graces and heroes kept watch," a composer who would show the world "wonderful glimpses into the secrets of the spirit world." Schumann had seen several of Brahms's early manuscripts and significantly referred to "sonatas, or rather veiled symphonies." Schumann had very probably seen an early version of the Sonata in F Minor; for this massive, heroic sonata has

struck many observers as being of orchestral proportions, a symphony masquerading as a piano sonata. It is in five movements rather than the expected three, and the young Brahms apparently set out to wring every bit of sound possible from the piano: the sonata features huge rolled chords; the music races between the highest and lowest ranges of the instrument; and Brahms creates textures so rich in color and sound that virtually every critic who writes about this sonata refers to its orchestral sonorities. Schumann may have hailed Brahms as a “young eagle,” but in this sonata the composer comes on like a young lion.

Brahms marks the sonata-form first movement *Allegro maestoso*, and majestic it certainly is. This powerful, heroic music grows almost entirely out of the simple thematic shape announced in the first measure. Brahms marks one of the quiet derivations of this theme *fest und bestimmt* (“firm and determined”), and that might stand as a marking for the entire movement. In sharp contrast, the *Andante espressivo* is a nocturne, and Brahms prefaces it with a few lines from a poem of Sternau: “The twilight falls, the moonlight gleams, two hearts in love unite, embraced in rapture.” A quiet center section, marked “As gentle and tender as possible,” leads to a return of the opening material and then a stunning coda: over a quiet A-flat pedal, the music gradually rises to a triumphant climax before falling back to end quietly.

The third movement is a lopsided scherzo that leaps across the keyboard; its quiet trio section is entirely chordal. Brahms marks the fourth movement *Intermezzo*—an unusual movement for a sonata—but even more unusual is the parenthetical subtitle *Rückblick* (“Reminiscence”). He brings back the theme from the second movement, but now it is very somber—the gentle love song has become a funeral march. This is the movement that seems most orchestral to the critics; and some claim to hear the sounds of timpani, snarling basses, and trumpets as the movement develops dramatically. The finale is a rondo-like movement based on a halting main theme. Along the way, Brahms remembers themes from earlier movements and treats them contrapuntally as the sonata races to its thunderous close.

In his piano music, Brahms turned next to variation form and later to the short pieces he preferred in his mature years; and in these forms he would create some of the greatest music ever written for the piano. But

he apparently felt that with the Sonata in F Minor he had said all the things he wanted to in the form of a solo piano sonata. He never wrote another.

Menuet antique

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

This music—so brief, so lovely—is the work of a boy. Ravel was only 20 when he composed it in November 1895. His friend, the Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes, gave the premiere at the Salle Érard on April 18, 1898. The *Menuet antique* was published later that year; it was Ravel’s first published work. The composer retained his affection for the piece. He performed it often; and 30 years later, in 1929, he returned to the work and orchestrated it.

The music may be described simply: it is a minuet in the expected 3/4 meter and ABA form. Its first section, marked *Majestueusement* (“majestically”), proceeds from the syncopations and slight dissonances of its opening to the poised main theme, which unfolds gracefully between the two hands. The central section, marked *doux* (“gentle”), sings wistfully, almost nostalgically, and—in a very deft touch—the young composer subtly combines both his main themes before the return of the opening section. The music is beautifully written for the keyboard, and Ravel is scrupulous about indicating pedaling and dynamic markings.

What are we to make of the title? In what sense is this minuet “antique”? The minuet had been out of fashion for about a century when Ravel wrote the work. Perhaps it was that very sense of reaching out to a distant and vanished past that attracted the composer. What has been described as a “mock-archaic manner” was very much a part of Ravel’s aesthetic, as works like *Daphnis et Chloé*, *Le tombeau de Couperin*, and others remind us. The form of the *Menuet antique* may be from the past, but in the precision of the writing, the attention to sound, and the longing for an idealized order, this gentle little piece by a 20-year-old already suggests some of the characteristics of the composer Ravel would become.

Gaspard de la nuit

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

Maurice Ravel had a lifelong fascination with magic and the macabre, and this shaped his music in different ways. While still a student at the Paris Conservatory, he fell in love with a curious book written 60 years earlier: *Gaspard de la nuit*, a collection of prose poems by Aloysius Bertrand (1807–41). Bertrand said that these spooky tales from the Middle Ages were “after the manner of Callot and Rembrandt” (it was an engraving by Jacques Callot—*The Huntsman’s Funeral*—that inspired the third movement of Mahler’s First Symphony). Bertrand gave these tales a further whiff of brimstone by claiming that the manuscript had been delivered to him by Gaspard himself—an alias for Satan.

Ravel composed *Gaspard de la nuit*—a set of three pieces that blend magic, nightmare, and the grotesque—in 1908, at the same time he began writing his collection of luminous fairyland pieces for children, *Ma mère l’Oye*. Bertrand’s prose poems were originally inspired by the visual arts (paintings, etchings, and woodcuts), and in turn—his imagination enlivened by Bertrand’s literary images—Ravel composed these “three poems for piano.” This heterogeneous background makes itself felt in the music, for at its best Ravel’s *Gaspard de la nuit* blends word, image, and sound.

Each of the three pieces was inspired by a particular prose poem, and Ravel included the texts in the score. But the set should not be understood as the attempt to re-create each tale in music; rather, these pieces evoke the particular mood inspired by Bertrand’s originals. Still, there are moments of such detailed scene painting that one imagines that Ravel must have had specific lines in mind as he wrote.

Ondine pictures a water sprite who tempts mortal men to her palace beneath the lake. Ravel’s shimmering music evokes the transparent, transitory surfaces of Bertrand’s text, the final line of which reads: “And when I told her that I was in love with a mortal woman, she began to sulk in annoyance, shed a few tears, gave a burst of laughter, and vanished in a shower of spray which ran in pale drops down my blue windowpanes.” It is impossible not to hear a conscious setting of these

images over the closing moments of this music, which vanishes as suddenly as the water sprite herself.

Le gibet (“The Gallows”) evokes quite a different world. All commentators sense the influence of Poe here (during his American tour of 1928, Ravel made a point of visiting Poe’s house in Baltimore). Bertrand’s text begins with a question: “Ah, what do I hear? Is it the night wind howling, or the hanged man sighing on the gallows?” He considers other possibilities, all of them horrible, and finally offers the answer: “It is the bell that sounds from the walls of a town beyond the horizon, and the corpse of a hanged man that glows red in the setting sun.” Muted throughout, this piece is built on a constantly repeated B-flat, whose irregular tolling echoes the sound of that bell.

The concluding movement *Scarbo* is a portrait of a bizarre creature—part dwarf, part rogue, part clown—who seems to hover just outside clear focus. The text concludes: “But soon his body would start to turn blue, as transparent as candle wax, his face would grow pale as the light from a candle end—and suddenly he would begin to disappear.” Ravel’s music—with its torrents of sound, sudden stops, and the unexpected close—suggests different apparitions of the demonic creature.

Gaspard de la nuit is music of stupefying difficulty for the performer, by design: Ravel consciously set out to write a work that would be more difficult than Balakirev’s *Islamey*, one of the greatest tests for pianists. (Alert listeners may detect hints of the beginning of *Islamey* in *Scarbo*, perhaps an act of homage on the part of Ravel.) In his effort to write blisteringly difficult music for the pianist, Ravel succeeded brilliantly. From the complex and finger-twisting chords of *Ondine* through the dense textures of *Le gibet* (written on three staves) and the consecutive and rapid intervals of seconds of *Scarbo*, *Gaspard de la nuit* presents hurdles that make simply getting the notes right almost impossible. And only then can the pianist set about creating the range of tone color, dynamics, and pacing that bring this evanescent music to life.



Federico Colli

Known for highly imaginative and philosophical interpretations, Colli achieved international prominence after winning both the 2011 Salzburg Mozart Competition and the Gold Medal at the 2012 Leeds International Piano Competition. He has concertized throughout Europe, Russia, Japan, and the Americas. His debut and second CDs both received wide acclaim. His concerts have been broadcast live on European radio, and he shares the stage with such notables as Lang Lang and Martha Argerich. The *Guardian* has described Colli's playing as having a "wonderful subtlety." He was recently featured on the cover of the popular music magazine, *Pianist*.

Federico Colli, © Sarah Ferrara

PROGRAM

Scarlatti, *Eight Sonatas*

1. F Minor, K. 19
2. A Major, K. 279
3. F-sharp Minor, K. 25
4. F-sharp Major, K. 318
5. D Minor, K. 32
6. D Major, K. 430
7. D Major, K. 118
8. D Minor, K. 1

Haydn, *Sonata in E-flat Major, Hob. XVI/52*

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Finale: Presto

INTERMISSION

Schubert, *Impromptu No. 3 in B-flat Major, D. 935 (Op. posth. 142)*

Beethoven, *Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp Minor "Quasi una fantasia," Op. 27, No. 2 ("Moonlight")*

- I. Adagio sostenuto
- II. Allegretto—Trio
- III. Presto

Bach-Busoni, *Chaconne in D Minor from Violin Partita No. 2, BWV 1004*

PROGRAM NOTES

Eight Sonatas

Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757)

In a famous remark, Haydn once said that his isolation at Esterháza had forced him to "become original." Such a comment might describe another composer who worked far from established music centers, Domenico Scarlatti. Trained as a keyboard player, Scarlatti held positions in Naples, Florence, Venice, Rome, and Palermo before making the long trip to Lisbon, where he served as court harpsichordist to the King of

Portugal, in 1719. When the Princess Maria Bárbara married the Spanish Crown Prince in 1729, Scarlatti followed her to Spain, moving in 1733 to Madrid, where he spent the final quarter century of his life. And it was there, far from the cultured courts he had known as a young man, that Scarlatti became original.

Though his primary responsibility was to write vocal music for the court, Scarlatti is remembered today for his 555 keyboard sonatas, most of them believed to have been written over the final decade of his life. Scarlatti called these pieces *essercizi* (“exercises”), and while they are not actually in sonata form, they look ahead to that form as it would develop across the remainder of the century. They are in one movement, but in binary form, built on themes of contrasting tonalities. Scarlatti would have played them primarily on the harpsichord, and these sonatas are remarkable for the brilliance of the keyboard technique he demands: they require fast runs, hand crossings, arpeggios across the range of the keyboard, great cascades of sound, and rapid repetition of notes. The sonatas are brief—usually lasting between three and five minutes—but in these short spans Scarlatti creates miniature worlds full of drama, excitement, color, and beauty.

Mr. Colli opens his recital with eight of the sonatas (the K. numbers refer to the ordering in Ralph Kirkpatrick’s chronological catalog of Scarlatti’s works). The *Sonata in F Minor* is a subdued Allegro in 2/4, effective precisely because it is so restrained. Its graceful introductory theme gives way to a calming progression of steady 16ths that will run throughout. The *Sonata in A Major*, marked *Andante*, is poised music, almost chaste in its stateliness; the second half brings a nicely shaded extension of the opening theme. The *Sonata in F-sharp Minor* offers smooth, flowing textures from which the principal theme emerges quietly along the way; the second half treats the same material but in a slightly more dramatic fashion before driving the sonata to its firm close. The *Sonata in F-sharp Major*, marked *Andante*, is remarkable for Scarlatti’s choice of unusual keys. It begins in F-sharp major, and the second half begins in D-flat major before returning to the home key.

The *Sonata in D Minor* is quite brief (only 24 measures without the repeats); it has the title *Aria*. In a slow and solemn 3/8 and full of

harmonic tension, it might well be music for an aria from a tragic opera. The *Sonata in D Major* has the unusual marking *Non presto ma a tempo di ballo*, and this music does indeed dance along in its 3/8 meter, its progress enlivened by syncopations and turns. The *Sonata in D Major* features numerous trills and some deft hand crossings; its second half is unusually expressive. The *Sonata in D Minor*, marked *Allegro* and full of trills and graceful runs, powers its way right through a poised conclusion.

Sonata in E-flat Major, Hob. XVI/52

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)

Haydn’s 106 symphonies and 68 string quartets have generally become part of the repertory, but his 62 keyboard sonatas (of which some are of doubtful authorship) remain less familiar. These sonatas span his creative career—he wrote the earliest about 1750, the last in 1794—yet they are not widely performed, nor is a great deal known about them. There is even debate about the sort of performer Haydn was writing for: Were the sonatas intended for the growing number of amateur pianists at the end of the 18th century? (Their publication in groups suggests that they might have been.) Did Haydn write them for his students? Did he write them for himself? (Haydn was an able pianist but by no means a virtuoso, and these sonatas are at times very difficult.) Even the instrument he had in mind has been debated: while the early sonatas may have been composed for clavichord, the wide dynamic range of the later ones makes clear that he was writing these for the piano.

There is no doubt, however, about the instrument for which Haydn wrote this *Sonata in E-flat Major*: he composed it in 1794, during his second visit to England, and he wrote it with the powerful British piano in mind. Further, he wrote it for a particular player: the 24-year-old Therese Jansen, a student of Clementi and a pianist of the first order. These factors may contribute to the public character of the sonata, which has been compared to the *London* symphonies Haydn was writing in these same years. Both this sonata and those symphonies have a grand sonority: they offer large gestures and appealing melodies, and they seem calculated to appeal to a wide audience.

The opening *Allegro* gets off to an impressive start with great rolled chords; and Haydn quickly offers a wealth of ideas: leaps into the piano's highest register, exciting runs, and an elaborately decorated second subject. At moments, this music sounds like Beethoven's; and some have wondered if Haydn, who had left his student Beethoven behind in Vienna, is showing the influence of the young man here. And do we hear an eerie prefiguration of Beethoven's piano sonata *Les adieux* in this movement? That sonata, also in E-flat major, would not be composed for another 15 years, but the pattern of three descending notes that Beethoven would use in that sonata to suggest the words *Lebe wohl* ("farewell") appears repeatedly in this movement—perhaps the young Beethoven was aware of how impressively his teacher had written here.

The handsome *Adagio* brings a surprise: Haydn moves into the utterly unexpected and distant key of E major, which makes this elegant music sound all the more fresh and surprising. The harmonic displacements continue at the beginning of the finale, where the music has a great deal of trouble settling into a home key; and it is as if that opening theme—set off by repeated pauses—is trying to find its way to E-flat major. It eventually does, and this movement—in the virtuoso manner of the opening *Allegro*—sweeps to an emphatic close.

Impromptu No. 3 in B-flat Major, D. 935 (Op. posth. 142)

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Schubert wrote eight impromptus for piano during the summer and fall of 1827. The term *impromptu* lacks precise musical meaning. It refers to a short instrumental piece, usually for piano, without specified form. That title suggests music that is being improvised on the spot, but the notion that this music is improvised should be speedily discounted—Schubert's impromptus are very carefully conceived music, set in a variety of forms that include variation, rondo, and minuet.

This program offers one of the four impromptus that Schubert wrote in December 1827, only 11 months before he died. The *Impromptu in B-flat Major* is based on the famous theme that Schubert had first used in his incidental music to the play *Rosamunde* in 1823. This graceful melody appealed so much to him that he used it in his String Quartet in A

Minor (1824) and again in this impromptu, where it serves as the basis for a set of five extended variations. The theme itself may be simple, but these variations are difficult. Schubert brings back the theme for a quiet restatement at the end, and this too involves another variation of the famous melody.

Sonata in C-sharp Minor, Op. 27, No. 2 ("Moonlight")

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

When Beethoven composed this piano sonata in 1801, he could not possibly have foreseen that it would become one of the most popular pieces ever written. But Beethoven, then 30 years old, *was* aware that he was trying to rethink sonata form. The keyboard sonata of the classical period had taken a fairly standard shape: sonata-form first movement, a slow middle movement, and a rondo finale. While Haydn and Mozart had written some very good keyboard sonatas, no one would argue that their best work lies in such music; and in fact those two composers often wrote keyboard sonatas for home performance by amateurs or for students.

So radical was Beethoven's rethinking of the form that he felt it necessary to append a qualifying description to the two sonatas of Opus 27: *Sonata quasi una fantasia*—more like a fantasy than a strict sonata. In the *Sonata in C-sharp Minor*, he does away with sonata form altogether in the first movement, writing instead an opening movement that functions as an atmospheric prelude. This haunting music, full of a bittersweet melancholy, feels almost improvisatory, and one senses that Beethoven is trying to avoid beginning with a conflict-centered movement that will overpower all that follows. Here the gently rippling triplet accompaniment provides a quiet background for some of the most expressive music Beethoven ever wrote.

The middle movement becomes not the traditional slow movement of the classical sonata, but a brief *Allegretto* that dances on gracefully falling phrases. Formally, this movement resembles the classical minuet, though Beethoven eliminates the repeat of the first strain. Phrases are short, and Beethoven makes clear that he wants unusually strong attacks by specifying accent marks rather than a simple staccato indication.

Nothing in the sonata to this point prepares one for the *Presto* finale, which rips to life with a searing energy far removed from the dreamy atmosphere of the opening movement. Here, finally, is the sonata-form movement: Beethoven has moved the dramatic movement to the end as a way of giving it special significance. His marking *agitato* is crucial: this *is* agitated music, and the pounding pulse of 16th notes is never absent for long. Beethoven asks for an exposition repeat, builds the development around the dotted second subject, and at the close offers a series of arabesque-like runs and a moment of repose before the volcanic rush to the close.

The nickname that has become an inescapable part of the way we think of this music did not originate with the composer, and Beethoven would be as surprised to learn that he had written a *Moonlight* Sonata as Mozart would be to learn that he had written a *Jupiter* Symphony. It was the poet-critic Ludwig Rellstab who coined the nickname in 1832, five years after Beethoven's death, saying that the music reminded him of the flickering of moonlight on the waters of Lake Lucerne. One can only guess what Beethoven would have thought of such a nickname, particularly since it applies only to the first movement.

Chaconne in D Minor from Violin Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (arr. Busoni)

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) / Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924)

The magnificent *Chaconne* that concludes the Partita No. 2 for Unaccompanied Violin is among the most intense music Bach ever wrote, and it has worked its spell on musicians everywhere over the last three centuries. The violin is a linear instrument, and the full harmonic textures implied in the original seem to cry out for performances that can project these more satisfactorily than can the violin. The *Chaconne* has been transcribed for many instruments and combinations of instruments, including several versions for keyboard: first by Joachim Raff, and in 1877 by Brahms, who arranged it for left hand only. Brahms was almost beside himself with admiration for this music; to Clara Schumann he wrote: "If I could picture myself writing, or even conceiving such a piece, I am certain that the extreme excitement and emotional tension would have driven me mad."

Ferruccio Busoni, who felt a similar excitement about the *Chaconne*, made his transcription some years after Brahms and first performed it at a concert in Boston in 1893. This was a period when Busoni was making piano transcriptions of Bach's organ music, and at least one scholar has suggested that Busoni conceived of the *Chaconne* as organ, rather than violin, music, and then—with that sonority in mind—proceeded to make a transcription for piano that would project an organlike richness of sound.

A chaconne is one of the most disciplined forms in music: it is built on a ground bass in triple meter over which a melodic line is repeated and varied. Here the four-bar ground bass repeats 64 times during the quarter-hour span of the *Chaconne*, and Bach spins out gloriously varied music over the ground, all the while keeping the variations firmly anchored on it. At the center section Bach moves into D major, and here the music relaxes a little, content to sing happily for a while; after the calm nobility of this interlude, the quiet return of D minor sounds almost disconsolate. Busoni's transcription is a fairly faithful translation of Bach's music: he makes only minor changes to the original, including the repetition of one brief phrase not repeated by Bach. Bach drives the *Chaconne* to a great climax and a restatement of the ground melody at the close. Busoni likewise closes his transcription with a thundering and majestic final cadence.

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