

PROGRAM

MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN, piano

Sunday, April 28, 2019 3 PM

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Pre-concert talk with Dr. Andrew Shryock, 2 PM

CHACONNE IN D MINOR FROM VIOLIN PARTITA NO. 2, BWV 1004 [ca. 1720/ transc. ca. 1892]

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Transcribed for piano by Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924)

FANTASIE IN C MAJOR, OP. 17 (1836-38)

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Durchaus phantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen

Mäßig—Durchaus energisch

Langsam getragen. Durchaus leise zu halten

: : INTERMISSION : :

SIX ARRANGEMENTS OF SONGS SUNG BY CHARLES TRÉNET (1950s)

Coin de rue—Vous oubliez votre cheval—En avril, à Paris—

Alexis Weissenberg (1929-2012)

Boum!—Vous qui passez sans me voir—Ménilmontant

[Street corner—You've left your horse behind—Paris, in April—

Boom!—You who pass by without seeing me—Ménilmontant

(a bohemian neighborhood of Paris)]

CIPRESSI, OP. 17 (1920)

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895-1968)

POLONAISE-FANTASIE IN A-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 61 (1845-46)

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1847)

SCHERZO NO. 4 IN E MAJOR, OP. 54 (1842)

Frédéric Chopin

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CHACONNE IN D MINOR FROM VIOLIN PARTITA NO. 2, BWV 1004

Johann Sebastian Bach (b. Eisenach, March 21, 1685; d. Leipzig, July 28, 1750)

Ferruccio Busoni (b. Empoli, Italy, April 1, 1866; d. Berlin, July 27, 1924)

Composed by Bach ca. 1720, transcr. by Busoni before 1892; 17 minutes

During his four years (1717-1721) as Kapellmeister at the court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen, Johann Sebastian Bach composed most of his well-known secular instrumental works. Among them were several sets of dance suites for string instruments, including three partitas for solo violin.

The brilliant Chaconne, the fifth movement of the Partita No. 2, in D minor, is sometimes performed independently of the other Partita movements. It has also been transcribed for other instruments—notably for piano, by Johannes Brahms (for left hand alone) and by the great German-Italian composer and pianist Ferruccio Busoni.

In his transcription, Ferruccio Busoni preserved Bach's original format. It is a classic chaconne (a Baroque dance form) comprising a short, unchanging bass pattern, four measures in length, that supports 64 variations, for a total of 256 measures of sheer wonder. Busoni translated Bach's exploration of the limits of the violin's powers into a pianistic tour de force.

By the time (ca. 1890) Busoni created this transcription, the grand piano had finally evolved to the instrument that we now recognize—keyboard, steel frame, strings, pedals, and all. Busoni became known for his lavish—and sensitive—use of the piano's sustaining pedal in his compositions and his transcriptions. He regarded it as an indispensable element for plumbing the piano's unique expressive possibilities. In the Chaconne, which ranges so widely in effects—spacious and towering, subtle and mysterious, with melodies now quick and nimble, now flowingly melodious—Busoni created a tribute to Bach's achievement by effectively translating music of the Baroque for the quintessential instrument of the Romantic era (and beyond), the piano.

Breitkopf & Härtel first published Busoni's Chaconne transcription in 1892. It is an early example of the composer's life-long devotion to editing and transcribing Bach's music.

FANTASIE IN C MAJOR, OP. 17

Robert Schumann (b. Zwickau, June 8, 1810; d. Endenich, July 29, 1856)

Composed 1836-38; 33 minutes

The young concert pianist Clara Wieck was jealously guarded by her father, Frederick Wieck, who was determined to extinguish the budding love affair between his daughter and Robert Schumann. The lovers found ways of communicating, not only through stealthy letters, but also through musical compositions. In the throes of longing for Clara, Schumann put unprecedented energy into his composition of the *Fantasia in C major*.

The *Fantasia* encloses messages that Clara understood instantly: musical and poetic ideas that spoke to Robert's passion, longing, and admiration for Clara. Originally intending to write a piano sonata honoring Beethoven's memory, Robert converted existing materials to create what he described, in a secret letter to Clara in March 1838, as "a deep lament for you." He wrote to her, "I have finished a *Fantasia*, which I

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had sketched out, all but the details, in June 1836. I think the first movement is more impassioned than anything I have ever written." Franz Liszt, to whom Schumann dedicated the *Fantasie*, reportedly said of the conclusion of the first movement, "These twenty bars are out of this world."

Robert chose as the main theme for that passionate first movement a descending-scale melody sometimes referred to as "Clara's theme." She had used it in a composition of her own, and it traces a melodic motif that Schumann frequently employed in association with his beloved. He weaves it through the entire *Fantasie*.

Robert chose as another unifying theme a musical quote from Beethoven's song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* [*To the distant beloved*]. Schumann adopted the melody that Beethoven had created to voice the lover's refrain: "Nimm sie hin denn, diese Lieder/ die ich dir, Geliebte, sang...Dann vor diesen Liedern weicht/ Was geschieden uns so weit..." [Take them, then, these songs, which I have sung to you...these songs will then soften what has kept us so far apart...] Clara certainly recognized and understood that undisguised musical reference.

Schumann asked his publisher to print this verse by Friedrich Schlegel at the head of the piano score:

Durch alle Töne tönet	Above all the tones
Im bunten Erdentraum	in this colorful dream of a life,
Ein leiser Ton gezogen	one soft sound resounds,
Für den der heimlich lauschet	reaching the one who secretly listens for it.

After an extended struggle with her father, including legal battles fought in open court with the enraged Wieck, Clara and Robert finally married in September 1840.

SIX ARRANGEMENTS OF SONGS SUNG BY CHARLES TRÉNET

Alexis Weissenberg (b. Sofia, Bulgaria, July 26, 1929; d. Lugano, Switzerland, January 8, 2012)

Arranged in the 1950s (?); 14 minutes

The twentieth-century French singer and songwriter Charles Trénet (1913-2001) enjoyed a long, distinguished music career that began in Parisian radio and recording studios in the 1930s. His song "La Mer" (sometimes known by an English title, "Beyond the Sea") has achieved lasting international popularity.

In 2008 Marc-André Hamelin recorded "Six arrangements of songs sung by Charles Trénet" on a Hyperion CD, *Marc-André Hamelin in a State of Jazz*. In the liner notes, Hamelin wrote:

Sometime in the late 1950s there appeared on the Lumen label an extended-play 45-rpm record called 'Mr. Nobody Plays Trénet.' It contained unusually creative and entertaining piano settings of six songs by the French singer-songwriter Charles Trénet. The identity of 'Mr. Nobody' was kept secret until relatively recently, when it was revealed to be that of Alexis Weissenberg...From the moment I was introduced to this recording by a friend, I was anxious to play the arrangements myself. But since

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Weissenberg never wrote them down, I had to create a score. Luckily, the whole experience of transcribing the songs was pleasant—despite my devoting an entire month to it.

Anyone who is familiar with Trénet's songs in their original form will be delightfully surprised by what Weissenberg has done with them. Unusual touches abound: in 'Coin de rue,' an evocation of the narrator's childhood, the listener is treated to the sounds of a barrel organ; the 'oom-pah' rhythm of 'Boum!' becomes a foxtrot, while the moderately paced 'Ménilmontant' is transformed into a headlong *moto perpetuo*.

Alexis Weissenberg, one of the most esteemed concert pianists of the twentieth-century's latter half, was widely praised for his technical command of the piano keyboard. In addition, critics often commented upon what they regarded as his cool and steely performances. These open-hearted arrangements of Trénet's songs reveal warmth, playfulness, and lyricism—qualities that contradict such indifferent criticism. Hamelin has written of Alexis Weissenberg:

Before I met him for the first time (2004), I had assumed that the reason for not issuing the [Lumen] recording under his own name had something to do with the fact that, at that time, a serious classical pianist dabbling in such trivialities as popular song would most likely have been compromising his own career. (How times have changed...this kind of thing is welcomed, even encouraged, by record companies now.) But I do remember him telling me that he simply didn't think the end result was good enough...!

In November 2018 Muse Press announced the publication of the piano score of Weissenberg's Six Arrangements... as edited by Mr. Hamelin. The press release revealed that "Some years ago, the family of Alexis Weissenberg discovered four of these six arrangements, in Weissenberg's own hand...This publication will comprise these manuscripts bracketed together with [the Hamelin] transcriptions of what is actually heard on the Lumen recording by 'Mr. Nobody.'"

"After receiving a multitude of requests for these scores over the years," says Hamelin, "I am thrilled that they are now finally being made available."

CIPRESSI, OP. 17

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco

{b. Florence, Italy, April 3, 1895; d. Beverly Hills, California, March 16, 1968}

Composed 1920; 9 minutes

In the 1930s Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco joined the wave of immigrant composers who had left Europe and were settling in Southern California—many of them to work in the movie studios providing music scores for the blossoming film industry. In addition to his work behind the movie scenes, he continued composing concert works. As a teacher he had a great influence on such American composers as Henry Mancini, André Previn, and John Williams.

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Castelnuovo-Tedesco had composed *Cipressi* in 1920, dedicating it to his wife, Clara Forti. They had spent many pleasant holidays at the Villa Forti, an estate owned by his wife's family, near the Tuscan village of Usigliano di Lari, in central Italy. There the cypress trees had inspired him to match their stateliness, as well as their delicacy and mystery, in this evocative piano work.

POLONAISE-FANTAISIE IN A-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 61

Frédéric Chopin [b. Zelazowa Wola, Poland, March 1, 1810; d. Paris, October 17, 1849]

Composed 1845-46; 13 minutes

This grand extension of Chopin's devotion to the polonaise (he composed more than twenty of his unique interpretations of that dance form) seems an amalgamation of dance and ballade. While conforming to the ternary structure of his earlier polonaises, this one is so free, and so fanciful, that the formal structure becomes subsumed in the chromaticism, lyricism, and improvisatory explorations that Chopin's boundless imagination unspooled. It hints of the orchestral tone poems to come in the Romantic era.

SCHERZO NO. 4 IN E MAJOR, OP. 54

Frédéric Chopin

Composed 1842; 11 minutes

Chopin's choice of the term "scherzo" to describe his four piano works of that title has puzzled many a performer and listener. "Joke" is the commonly understood translation of "scherzo," but as Robert Schumann wrote about the Scherzo No. 1, "How are seriousness and gravity to be clothed if jest is to appear in such dark garments?" Over a period of years—1837, 1839, and 1842—Chopin continued to compose scherzi that demonstrated drama over humor. Then in 1842 he found joy. The E-major Scherzo of that year is scintillating, even ethereal. Arguably the most technically challenging of the four, it is also, without a doubt, the happiest.

Notes by Sandra Hyslop

