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MURRAY PERAHIA PIANO

MAY 3, 2017

J.S. BACH

(1685-1750)

French Suite No. 6 in E major, BWV 817

Allemande

Courante

Sarabande

Gavotte

Polonaise

Menuet

Bourrée

Gigue

FRANZ SCHUBERT

(1797-1828)

Four Impromptus, Op. 142, D.935

No. 1 in F minor, Allegro moderato

No. 2 in A-flat major, Allegretto

No. 3 in B-flat major, Theme (Andante) with variations

No. 4 in F minor, Allegro scherzando

INTERMISSION

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770-1827)

Sonata in B-flat major, Op. 106 "Hammerklavier"

Allegro

Scherzo: Assai vivace

Adagio sostenuto

Largo - Fuga: Allegro risoluto



MURRAY PERAHIA

In the more than 40 years he has been performing on the concert stage, American pianist Murray Perahia has become one of the most sought-after and cherished pianists of our time, performing in all of the major international music centers and with every leading orchestra. He is the Principal Guest Conductor of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, with whom he has toured as conductor and pianist throughout the United States, Europe, Japan, and Southeast Asia.

Born in New York, Mr. Perahia started playing piano at the age of four and later attended Mannes College where he majored in conducting and composition. His summers were spent at the Marlboro Festival where he collaborated with such musicians as Rudolf Serkin, Pablo Casals, and the members of the Budapest String Quartet. During this time, he also studied with Mieczysław Horszowski. In subsequent years he developed a close friendship with Vladimir Horowitz, whose perspective and personality were an enduring inspiration. In 1972, Mr. Perahia won the Leeds International Piano Competition, and in 1973 he gave his first concert at the Aldeburgh Festival, where he worked closely with Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears, accompanying the latter in many lieder recitals. Mr. Perahia was co-artistic director of the Festival from 1981 to 1989.

In the past season Mr. Perahia toured with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, play-conducting all five of Beethoven's piano concertos. He started the 2016/17 season with European recitals followed by a tour of Asia with performances in Hong Kong, Taipei, Shanghai, Beijing, Seoul, and Tokyo. His spring 2017 tour of the U.S. includes recitals in Aliso Viejo, Vancouver, San Francisco, Santa Barbara, Denver, Chicago, Washington, D.C., at Princeton University and New York's Carnegie Hall as well as performances with the Cleveland Orchestra.

Mr. Perahia has a wide and varied discography. In October 2016, he released a highly anticipated recording of Bach's *French Suites*, his first album on the Deutsche Grammophon label. Sony Classical has issued a special boxed set edition of all his recordings including several DVDs entitled *The First 40 Years*. His recording of Brahms's Handel Variations, which won the *Gramophone* Award in 2011, was described as "one of the most rewarding Brahms recitals currently available." Some of his previous solo recordings feature a 5-CD boxed set of his Chopin recordings, Bach's Partitas Nos. 1, 5, and 6, and Beethoven's Piano Sonatas, opp. 14, 26, and 28. He is the recipient of two GRAMMY® Awards for his recordings of Chopin's complete Etudes and Bach's *English Suites* Nos. 1, 3, and 6, and several *Gramophone* Awards including the inaugural Piano Award in 2012.

Recently, Mr. Perahia embarked on an ambitious project to edit the complete Beethoven Sonatas for the Henle Urtext Edition. He also produced and edited numerous hours of recordings of recently-discovered master classes by the legendary pianist Alfred Cortot, which resulted in the highly acclaimed Sony CD release *Alfred Cortot: The Master Classes*.

Mr. Perahia is an honorary fellow of the Royal Academy of Music, and he holds honorary doctorates from the Juilliard School, Oxford University, the Royal College of Music, Leeds University, and Duke University. In 2004, he was awarded an honorary KBE by Her Majesty The Queen, in recognition of his outstanding service to music. Mr. Perahia appears by arrangement with IMG Artists.

NOTES

Program Notes © Elizabeth Bergman

J.S. BACH: *FRENCH SUITE* NO. 6 IN E MAJOR, BWV 817

IN BRIEF

BORN: March 31, 1685, Eisenach, Germany

DIED: July 28, 1750, Leipzig, Germany

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: Tonight marks the first performance of this work on our series.

ESTIMATED DURATION: 18 minutes

Bach likely composed the six *French Suites* between 1717 and 1723 while serving as music director at the court of Cöthen. Freed from the demands of writing choral music for the Lutheran liturgy (Cöthen followed Calvinist practice), he was able to focus on composing for other genres and various purposes, whether concerts at court or lessons with his children. In the *French Suites*, and especially in No. 6, Bach achieved a new suppleness and elegance in his writing for keyboard. There's a fresh focus on melody in these suites that must have been appealing to his audiences as well as his pupils.

The name "French" Suite came later; there is almost nothing really French about them. They are instead international, comprising a series of stylized Baroque dances of various national origins meant for listening and playing, not dancing. The styles of the dances all differ in such basic parameters as rhythm, meter, tempo, and overall effect. Yet all share a binary design, meaning that each falls in two parts with each half repeated. They also all showcase the *galant* style of the high Baroque era, which emphasizes a homophonic texture of melody plus accompaniment instead of the polyphonic tangle of counterpoint.

No. 6 features eight different dances: Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Gavotte, Polonaise, Menuet, Bourrée, and Gigue. The Allemande is a stately German dance in duple meter that serves as a kind of introduction to the set, thanks to its processional quality. The fleet-of-foot French Courante is in triple meter; it is one of Bach's most delicate

and transparent courantes, being exceptionally sparse and simple, sometimes becoming just a single line of music. The Gavotte is also in duple meter, with a measured pace enlivened by a graceful hop that comes from the detached thirds at the opening. The Polonaise, of Polish origins, is most often associated with Chopin in the 19th century, but was popular too throughout the 18th century as a keyboard genre often aimed at amateurs. Bach's Polonaise epitomizes the *galant* style with a melody simply accompanied; there's no counterpoint or complication here. The Menuet hides its tripartite form (ABA) within the binary (two repeated halves). Listen for the return of the opening run up to a kind of sighing figure at the end of the second half. The Bourrée features a skipping, short-short-long pattern as well as more contrapuntal interest between the two hands. The merry Gigue, in a rollicking 6/8 meter, features some playful back and forth between the two hands along with bursts of brilliance.

IN BRIEF

BORN: January 31, 1797, Alsergrund, Vienna, Austria

DIED: November 19, 1828, Vienna, Austria

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: Impromptus Nos. 1 and 4 were performed February 24, 2016, Steven Osborne, piano

ESTIMATED DURATION: 36 minutes

FRANZ

SCHUBERT: *FOUR*
IMPROMPTUS,
OP. 142, D.935

Schubert seems to epitomize the Romantic genius. It is true that he was given to bouts of melancholy and suffered from ill health, yet he was also happily social, the center of a remarkable circle of like-minded friends, and miraculously productive. Between 1821 and 1828, Schubert composed nearly 100 works—double the output of his contemporary, Beethoven.

In addition to writing gorgeously lyrical piano sonatas, Schubert also composed pieces in the newer Romantic genres, forms, and styles—like the impromptu—without clear historical, classical precedents. The title itself suggests a light piece composed and performed off the cuff. At the time, impromptus most often fell easily under the hands

of amateur pianists. Technical demands were modest, the music above all accessible. Schubert's *Four Impromptus*, Op. 142, however, are much more expansive and more demanding than the title might suggest. They demand not only considerable technical skill, but also exquisite musicality.

As a set, the *Four Impromptus* can be considered akin to a four-movement sonata. They follow the basic design of a 19th century piano sonata. The first Impromptu, like the first movement of a sonata, contrasts two themes in two different keys. The second Impromptu is a minuet, the third a set of variations, and the fourth a brilliant finale. Yet there's a wonderful mixture of Romantic tropes and styles that exceeds the bounds of a typical sonata and thus seems to reflect the extemporaneous and spontaneous connotations of the title. Hints of dance music and of song give truth to the review, penned by composer Robert Schumann soon after the *Impromptus* were first published, that the music is profoundly Schubertian. "We discover him anew," Schumann wrote, "as we recognize him in his inexhaustible moods, as he charms, deceives, then grips us."

LUDWIG VAN
BEETHOVEN:
SONATA IN B-FLAT
MAJOR, OP. 106
"HAMMERKLAVIER"

IN BRIEF

BORN: December 1770, Bonn, Germany

DIED: March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: November 30, 1994, Ursula Oppens, piano

ESTIMATED DURATION: 43 minutes

Beethoven's life story has become the stuff of legend, owing partly to the political, personal, and social crises that he lived through: the Napoleonic wars, unrequited love, deafness, and the emergence of the composer as an independent artist freed from the service of church or court. But historians have also tended to embellish his biography, seeking to read the man into the music and vice versa.

Here are the basics, unromanticized. Beethoven was born in Bonn in 1770, the son of a court musician. At age 13 he too took a position in the court orchestra,

then in 1792 struck out on his own, moving from his provincial hometown to the great musical capital of Vienna. There he studied for a time with Joseph Haydn and made a living performing in music salons. Instead of relying on aristocratic patronage, Beethoven depended on commissions. From 1800, his emotional and psychological outlook was clouded by the onset of deafness; it appears that he even contemplated suicide, the evidence contained in a famous letter of 1802 known as the Heiligenstadt Testament. By 1815, he was almost completely deaf and had to rely on his inner ear to guide him in composing. He never married, though he did end up with a family. When his brother Kaspar died, Beethoven became embroiled in a prolonged battle with his sister-in-law for custody of his nephew. He won, but their relationship was strained at best. In 1827, Beethoven died at age 57.

The “Hammerklavier” Sonata is one of Beethoven’s thirty-two works in the genre, and at the time it first appeared in 1818 was seen to make “a new period in Beethoven’s keyboard works.” This new style was inspired in part by a new instrument. In 1817, he received a powerful six-octave piano as a gift from the English firm of Broadwood. The Broadwood piano offered not only a larger range, but also a greater range of dynamics and uniquely responsive action. (Thus the dynamic markings in the score range from *ppp* to *ff*.) The “Hammerklavier” is also the longest of Beethoven’s sonatas, thanks mostly to the expansive slow movement, and indeed inaugurated a series of monumental works in other genres, including the Diabelli Variations for piano and the Ninth Symphony. Much is made about the demands made on performers who tackle the “Hammerklavier,” not only in terms of technique but also sheer concentration.

Beethoven’s late works were even at the time considered at best taxing on musicians and audiences, at worst incomprehensible, and every pianist who confronts the “Hammerklavier” faces a series of tough choices—especially about tempo. Op. 106 is the only piano sonata by Beethoven to include metronome markings in the score, but they are generally considered to be impossibly fast and always ignored. Likewise, a famous moment in the



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recapitulation of the first movement has provoked feverish debate. When the first theme returns in the recapitulation it is introduced through an enharmonic sleight of hand, whereby A-sharp becomes B-flat, the tonic. On paper, that works just fine, but A-sharp sounds very strange, even jarring. Some performers choose then to ignore this marking too, and instead play an A natural. These details are not merely technical quibbles, but strike at the heart of an essential controversy about Beethoven's late works, one that originates in his own era and stretches up to ours. How intentionally and knowingly experimental or innovative are these works? Did Beethoven's deafness compromise his compositions? Was he able always to translate what he heard in his head onto the page? Should we question his genius or always only extol it?

Like great novels, Beethoven's late works, including the "Hammerklavier," explore seemingly intractable conflicts. The first movement of the "Hammerklavier" introduces the central theme of the entire work: the interval of a third. Thirds pervade not only the melodic material, but also the harmonic architecture of the work. This design is significant because Beethoven here is undoing the tonal logic of Classical tonality, which relies on fifths, and instead introduces the foundation of Romantic harmony. (Brahms's Fourth Symphony, composed some 70 years later, likewise relies on third relations.) But the true conflict—the dramatic core of the sonata—lives in the semitone, a half step. At the end of the first movement, Beethoven introduces the "dark" key of B minor as the antipode to B-flat major.

The second movement is a brief scherzo. In one of the drafts, Beethoven wrote in the middle of the page: "A small house here, so small that there is barely room for one." By contrast, the Adagio that follows is the longest single movement Beethoven ever wrote for piano—almost a sonata within a sonata. Three contrasting themes are presented: a homophonic hymn; an anguished aria; and a spare, hollow melody in the major mode. The finale comprises a kind of prelude that introduces a fugue. The fugue, with its quicksilver subject in running sixteenth notes, is a *tour de force* showcasing every possible

contrapuntal technique along with an endless number of trills. At the very last, the conflict between B-flat major and B minor is resolved in favor of the major in a quick series of crashing octaves, trills, and a final—almost exhausted—celebratory chord.

MUSIC IN THE CITY

Friends of Chamber Music has been busy this month, presenting a variety of free chamber music concerts to audiences around Denver.

On April 9, the Patterson/Sutton Duo performed for a standing-room only crowd at the Clyfford Still Museum, the last of our “Music in the Galleries” concerts this season. A world premier by Colorado composer Nathan Hall, who introduced his new work, *Time and the Villa*, was one of the highlights of this Sunday afternoon program. Thank you to the Clyfford Still Museum for its co-sponsorship of this series.



Photo credit: Evan Semón, courtesy of Arts Brookfield

Each Tuesday in April, Friends of Chamber Music presented “Lunchtime Listening: Free Chamber Music at 1801,” performed in the beautiful lobby at 1801 California Street. The series opened with a violin duo from the Lamont School of Music, Quanshuai Li and Yuanmiao Li, playing Bach, Paganini, and Shostakovich. The Altius Quartet returned to the series on Tuesday, April 11, performing Beethoven and Mozart, with some Led Zeppelin and Michael Jackson mixed in. Mark O'Connor’s lyrical “Appalachia Waltz” was featured on Tuesday, April 18, performed by Trio Thessalia, a violin, viola, and double bass trio of Colorado Symphony Orchestra musicians. The Avium Quartet, an accomplished young quartet from the Lamont School of Music, closed the series on April 25, performing Schubert and Shostakovich. FCM is grateful to Arts Brookfield for their partnership, supporting this series for a third year in row.

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