



BENJAMIN GROSVENOR  
PIANO

**CÉSAR FRANCK**  
(1822-1890)

**Prélude, Choral et Fugue, FWV 21**  
Prélude  
Choral  
Fugue

**ROBERT SCHUMANN**  
(1810-1856)

***Kreisleriana, Op. 16***  
Äußerst bewegt  
Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch  
Sehr aufgeregt  
Sehr langsam  
Sehr lebhaft  
Sehr langsam  
Sehr rasch  
Schnell und spielend

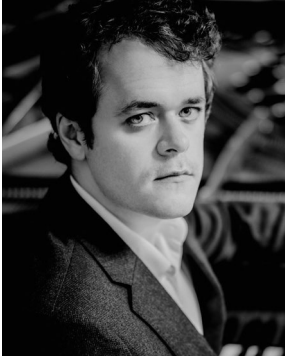
**INTERMISSION**

**ISAAC ALBÉNIZ**  
(1860-1909)

***Iberia, Book I***  
Evocación  
El Puerto  
El Corpus en Sevilla

**MAURICE RAVEL**  
(1875-1937)

***Jeux d'eau***  
***La valse***



**BENJAMIN  
GROSVENOR**

*piano*

## BENJAMIN GROSVENOR

British pianist Benjamin Grosvenor is internationally recognized for his electrifying performances, distinctive sound, and insightful interpretations. His virtuosic command of the most arduous technical complexities underpins the remarkable depth and understanding of his music-making.

Grosvenor is currently Artist-in-Residence at the prestigious Wigmore Hall in London and serves as Co-Artistic Director of the Bromley and Beckenham International Music Festival, a unique and vibrant event that helps artists reconnect with the public during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the 2020/21 season he was Artist-in-Residence with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and Radio France.

Concert highlights for the current season include engagements with the Chicago, Baltimore, and Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestras, Philharmonia Orchestra, Scottish Chamber, Hamburg Staatsorchester, and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. He also appears in recital with the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society and People's Symphony NYC.

In 2011, Grosvenor signed to Decca Classics, becoming the youngest British musician ever to sign to the label, and the first British pianist in almost 60 years. Released in 2020, his second concerto album, featuring Chopin's piano concertos, was recorded with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra under the baton of Elim Chan and received both the Gramophone Concerto Award and a Diapason d'Or de L'Année. The renewal of the Decca recording partnership in early 2021 coincided with the release of Benjamin's latest album, *Liszt*, centered on the composer's Sonata in B minor.

During his sensational career, Benjamin has received *Gramophone's* Young Artist of the Year and Instrumental Awards, a Classic Brits Critics' Award, UK Critics' Circle Award for Exceptional Young Talent, and a Diapason d'Or Jeune Talent Award. He has been featured in two BBC

television documentaries, *BBC Breakfast* and *The Andrew Marr Show*, as well as in CNN's *Human to Hero* series. In 2016, he became the inaugural recipient of the Ronnie and Lawrence Ackman Classical Piano Prize with the New York Philharmonic.

Grosvenor first came to prominence as the outstanding winner of the Keyboard Final of the 2004 BBC Young Musician Competition, and he was invited to perform with the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the First Night of the 2011 BBC Proms. The youngest of five brothers, Benjamin began playing piano at age 6. He studied at the Royal Academy of Music with Christopher Elton and Daniel-Ben Pienaar, where he graduated in 2012 with the "Queen's Commendation for Excellence," and in 2016 was awarded a Fellowship from the institution. Benjamin is an Ambassador of Music Masters, a charity dedicated to making music education accessible to all children regardless of their background, championing diversity and inclusion.

Benjamin Grosvenor is represented by Arts Management Group, Inc., and appears courtesy of Decca Classics.

## NOTES

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### IN BRIEF

**BORN:** December 10, 1822, Liège, Belgium

**DIED:** November 8, 1890, Paris, France

**FIRST PERFORMANCE:** January 25, 1885, Paris, Société Nationale de Musique, Marie Poitevin, piano

#### **MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC**

**PERFORMANCE:** September 16, 2014, Inon Barnatan, piano

**DURATION:** 19 minutes

### CÉSAR FRANCK: PRÉLUDE, CHORAL ET FUGUE, FWV 21

César Franck was one of the most influential musicians of the late 19th century. His disciples included important composers such as Vincent d'Indy, Ernest Chausson, Henri Duparc, and Louis Vierne. Like Mendelssohn before him, Franck was one of the key figures to acknowledge

and make known the rich musical legacy of the past, from Gregorian chant and the Renaissance master Palestrina, through Bach and Beethoven. He also championed Richard Wagner.

A more unlikely candidate for such weighty accomplishments can hardly be imagined. Franck was born in Belgium but came to Paris in his teens to take advantage of the French capital's superior educational opportunities in music. His father had initially determined that he should become a concert pianist, but Franck's performing career tended more sedately toward organ. He spent most of his professional career serving as organist in various lesser Parisian churches—hardly positions that would make it likely for him to attract the attention of the French musical elite.

Franck's piano pieces are either very early—when he was still considering a career as a concert pianist—or very late. The *Prélude, Choral et Fugue* that opens this program is late: from 1884. It is considered not only Franck's best piece for piano, but also a monument of 19<sup>th</sup>-century keyboard music. Franck conceived it as a tribute to Bach, initially planning a Prelude and Fugue; however, he ultimately chose a transitional movement between the two, adding the Chorale. In the end, that afterthought metamorphosed into the central—and most emotionally charged—portion of the work.

Franck was a master of cyclic technique: the linking of discrete movements by using the same or similar melodic cells. That is the case for the *Prélude, Choral et Fugue*, whose dominant motive appears in some form in all three sections. His richly textured Prelude opens with rippling arpeggiation in the right hand, reminiscent of Bach's organ preludes; a chromatic motive emerges from the ripples. Franck then states a second theme in chords before the figuration resumes. The slower motive is discernible in inner voices. Franck moves back and forth between the two textures.

The briefest of pauses leads to the Chorale, now switching from the home tonality of B minor to E-flat minor. Dignified and expressive, the Chorale has the quality of a funeral march, reinforced by the steady quarter note octaves anchoring the bass. A transitional interlude marked *Poco allegro* grows more agitated, leading to the Fugue.

The Fugue subject is rhythmically related to a motive in the Prelude; effectively it grows out of both the Prelude and the Chorale. Because of Franck's heavy chromaticism, this section requires careful pedaling and superb legato to avoid blurring the thematic strains. As the Fugue unfolds, Franck adds a countersubject in triplets, in the style of a toccata, but the subject is virtually always present. In climactic moments, the Fugue grows to quasi-orchestral proportions, straining the limitations of the piano keyboard. Toward the end, Franck re-introduces the themes from his Prelude and Chorale. Eventually they are overlaid with the Fugue subject in a dizzying weave of multiple musical threads.

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## IN BRIEF

**BORN:** June 8, 1810, Zwickau, Germany

**DIED:** July 29, 1856, Endenich, Bonn, Germany

**DEDICATION:** Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)

**MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC**

**PERFORMANCE:** May 18, 2019, Simone Dinnerstein, piano

**DURATION:** 33 minutes

ROBERT  
SCHUMANN:  
*KREISLERIANA*,  
OP. 16

The solo piano works of the 1830s display Robert Schumann's genius at its most immediate and spontaneous. He was a master of the romantic miniature, endowing smaller pieces in simple forms with layers of musical substance and expressivity. In the hands of a lesser composer, such pieces would have been merely salon music. Schumann elevated miniatures to the realm of the sublime. At his best, he compiled groups of them into cycles linked

by musical motive, tonal relationships, and programmatic or autobiographical subtexts.

The eight movements of *Kreiseriana* are one of the most successful such cycles. Idiomatic piano writing, subtle weaving of inner voices, and quicksilver mood changes make these pieces vintage Schumann. Pacing, texture, and tempo vary widely within the cycle. The movements complement one another because of Schumann's instinctive gift for narrative, and the flow of key carries over from one piece to the next.

Schumann's inspiration was Johannes Kreisler, a fictional character who appears in three of E.T.A. Hoffmann's novels published between 1814 and 1822. Schumann was the son of a bookseller, both well-read and well-educated. He devoured Hoffmann's writings, identifying strongly with the eccentric Kreisler, a composer and conductor pushing against the mores of his time. Schumann believed that Hoffmann's model for Kreisler was Ludwig Böhner, a violinist and conductor Schumann had heard in performance. In an 1834 letter after one of Böhner's concerts, he described him: "He was like an old lion with a thorn in his foot." A bipolar personality, Böhner eventually had a nervous breakdown that ended his conducting career, though he continued to compose. Given what we know today of Schumann's mental illness, it is hardly surprising that he would have identified with Böhner and, by extension, with Hoffmann's fictional Kreisler.

Indeed, there is a direct parallel with Kreisler in Schumann's own writings, published in his journal *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. He often signed his critical essays with the pseudonyms Florestan or Eusebius. Florestan represented the passionate, impulsive, excitable, and impetuous voice within all of us. Eusebius (pronounced oy-ZAY-bee-us) represented the dreamy, imaginative aspect of one's thoughts, impressions, and emotions: the opposite of Florestan.

These two characters manifested themselves in *Kreisleriana*'s wild mood swings. All eight of Schumann's movements are in ternary form or modified rondo form (A-B-A-C-A). The Florestan movements are in D minor or G minor; the Eusebius ones favor B-flat major, though each of *Kreisleriana*'s movements contains aspects of both characters. Schumann uses his B-section in the ternary movements and his episodes in the rondos to shift the mood.

Schumann wrote *Kreisleriana* between May and September 1838. By then, he and Clara Wieck were deeply in love, and struggling to surmount her father Friedrich Wieck's opposition to their match. As with most of Schumann's piano music in the mid- and late-1830s, his passion and tenderness toward her are mirrored in the music. In a letter to Clara that year, he wrote:

*Play my Kreisleriana often. A positively wild love is in some of the movements, and your life and mine, and the way you look. . . . you will smile so sweetly when you see yourself in them. Even to myself my music now seems wonderfully intricate in spite of its simplicity; its eloquence comes straight from the heart.*

He was absolutely correct. From the tempestuous opening (*Äußerst bewegt*), Schumann's textures are masterful and commanding, exploding with passion. The second movement (*Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch*)—one of the first in which a 19<sup>th</sup>-century composer labeled an interlude *Intermezzo*—is one of Schumann's most heartfelt and intimate expressions. The irregular rhythms and harmonic adventures of the ensuing movements explore the full range of moods inherent in Florestan's and Eusebius's personae. Schumann disconcerts us with nervous figures that skitter up and down the keyboard, then ravishes us with complex inner voices, woven together with consummate skill.

Schumann wanted to dedicate the work to Clara, but Friedrich Wieck would not permit him to do so. When *Kreisleriana* was published, it bore a dedication to Frédéric Chopin.

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## ISAAC ALBÉNIZ: *IBERIA, BOOK I*

### IN BRIEF

**BORN:** May 29, 1860, Camprodon, Spain

**DIED:** May 18, 1909, Cambo-les-Bains, France

**DEDICATION:** Madame Ernest Chausson

#### **MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC**

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

**DURATION:** 18 minutes

A biography of Isaac Albéniz reads rather like a turn-of-the-century adventure novel. A child prodigy who performed in public by the age of four, he was touring in Paris and composing by age seven. He ran away from the Madrid Conservatory at nine, spending five years first in the Spanish provinces, and then in South America, the Caribbean, and the United States, as both pianist and stevedore! After returning to his homeland, he secured grants to study in Brussels, Leipzig, and briefly in Budapest with the aging Franz Liszt (1811-1886).

Albéniz finally settled in Paris, but his music never forsook the characteristic flavor of his native Spain. He was a key developer of an indigenous Spanish musical style, drawing his inspiration from the vivid drama of his country's landscape and culture. *Iberia*, his masterpiece, is a collection of twelve tone poems for solo piano published in four volumes between 1906 and 1909. Like the earlier *Suite Española* (1886) and *Cantos de España* (1896), it consists of descriptive sound-pictures of particular locales and events, usually using Spanish dance rhythms and harmonies. As a solo piano composition, *Iberia* is intricate,



technically demanding, and symphonic in its approach to the keyboard. Its twelve movements comprise some 75 minutes of music. Consequently, *Iberia* is rarely performed in its entirety.

Mr. Grosvenor has chosen the three movements that comprise Book I of *Iberia*. *Evocación* is the only one of the twelve in the complete group that does not refer to a specific region, city, or dance in Spain. Instead, this introduction to the cycle evokes Spain in its entirety. Its two principal themes suggest a *jota navarra*—representing Spain’s north—and a *fandanguillo* (literally, a small fandango) more typical of Andalusia and the South. The key center is a remarkably chromatic A-flat minor (with seven flats). Albéniz’s rich, characteristically Spanish left-hand second theme—later echoed in the treble—combines with guitar sonorities, whole tone scales, and folkloric ideas in this gorgeous movement polished for the virtuoso stage.

*El Puerto* refers to the port of Santa Maria, a fishing town near Cádiz on the Guadalate River. This movement calls to mind the colorful language and jocular activity of the fishermen at the docks. Albéniz uses the Andalusian *zapateado*, a lively *flamenco* dance in 6/8 meter. Strumming figures emulate the ever-present Spanish guitar, while whole tone passages periodically diverge from the home key of D-flat major. The hustle and bustle vanish for the conclusion, which restores peace and quiet to the harbor.

*El Corpus en Sevilla* evokes the Feast of Corpus Christi, which Catholics celebrate on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. Traditionally, on this feast day Seville stages a procession led by a statue of the Virgin Mary through the city’s streets and avenues. Usually the statue is followed by marching bands, church choirs, and penitent worshippers. Albéniz opens with drum rolls, imitating the bands’ percussion. The music escalates to dizzying complexity (it requires three staves on the printed music instead of the customary two), with chiming of church bells commingling with the celebratory cries of the faithful.

The calmer middle section is a *saeta*, a traditional song of religious ecstasy in Spanish Catholicism. After a reprise of the opening march, now somewhat varied, *El Corpus en Sevilla* closes with dusk-like quietude: the procession is over and night approaches.

## MAURICE RAVEL: *JEUX D'EAU*

### IN BRIEF

**BORN:** March 7, 1875, Ciboure, France

**DIED:** December 28, 1937, Paris, France

**FIRST PERFORMANCE:** April, 1902, Paris, Salle Pleyel, Ricardo Viñes, piano

### **MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC**

**PERFORMANCE:** January 19, 1983, Ilana Vered, piano

**DURATION:** 6 minutes

Debussy and Ravel are often uttered in the same breath, cited as the two beacons of French impressionism in music. Neither man appreciated the categorization or the term. Nevertheless, the cross-pollination and mutual influence between them continues to fascinate musicians and scholars alike. *Jeux d'eau* provides a tantalizing example as to why that fascination persists.

Ravel composed *Jeux d'eau* in 1901; it is the earliest of his solo piano works to have gained a permanent place in the virtuoso keyboard literature. Ravel met Claude Debussy in November 1901, and it is possible that he showed the manuscript of *Jeux d'eau* to the older composer. If so, it could easily have influenced Debussy's subsequent approach to the piano, which evolved substantially in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ravel's score calls for stunning virtuosity merged with the delicacy and transparent colors we associate with musical impressionism. It is music drenched in light—paradoxically so, as it is also water music.

*Jeux d'eau* means “water games,” but it is sometimes translated as “fountains.” In a 1920 autobiographical sketch, Ravel offered the following:

*Inspired by the noise of water, cascades, springs, the Jeux d'eau is based on two motives, in the manner of first movement sonata form without, however, conforming to the classic tonal scheme.*

His concise summary hardly does justice to the delicate cascades of complex chords that abound in *Jeux d'eau*. In the first edition, the piece bore a dedication to Gabriel Fauré. At its head was an epigraph by Henri de Régnier: *Dieu fluvial riant de l'eau qui le chatouille* (The river god laughing from the water which is tickling him). Technically, Ravel's piece is indebted to Liszt's *Jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este*, written in response to the glittering fountains at the Villa d'Este in Tivoli, near Rome. Although Ravel was only 26 when he wrote *Jeux d'eau*, his own musical language was already fully developed. The piece evinces an emphasis on dance rhythms, subtle Spanish flavor, and—perhaps most important—daring imagination with respect to the coloristic possibilities of the piano.

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## IN BRIEF

**FIRST PERFORMANCE:** December 12, 1920, Paris, France

**MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC**

**PERFORMANCE:** January 20, 1988, Ursula Oppens, piano

**DURATION:** 13 minutes

## MAURICE RAVEL: LA VALSE

Many of Ravel's orchestral works, including *Le tombeau de Couperin*, *Menuet antique*, and *Pavane pour une infante défunte*, originated as piano pieces. *La valse* is somewhat the reverse. It began as a ballet score for the Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev, who approached Ravel in 1919 about a new work. Seven years previously, they had collaborated on *Daphnis et Chloé*. Ravel took advantage of the opportunity to return to an idea that had captured his fancy as early as 1906: an homage to Johann Strauss. That

work, called *Wien* (Vienna), never progressed beyond sketches. The project lay dormant until it was rejuvenated by Diaghilev's formal commission.

Diaghilev rejected the score when he received Ravel's manuscript, prompting the composer to arrange *La valse* for two pianos and also for solo piano. Both keyboard versions were published in 1920, before the orchestral score appeared in print. Ravel was able to secure an orchestral première in December 1920. The ballet was not staged until 1929.

Subtitled "choreographic poem," *La valse* consists of twelve minutes of whirling rhythms and dynamics viewed through a kaleidoscope. Ravel's note in the score describes the scenario:

*Clouds whirl about. Occasionally they part to allow a glimpse of waltzing couples. As they gradually lift, one can discern a gigantic hall, filled by a crowd of dancers in motion. The stage gradually brightens. The glow of the chandeliers breaks out fortissimo. An Imperial Court about 1855.*

Essentially an elongated giant crescendo, *La valse* is dynamically related to *Boléro*, though its tension builds in an altogether different fashion. Ravel thought of it as a "fatefully inescapable whirlpool," an essentially tragic work whose frenetic mania is cut off by death. His solo piano transcription incorporates some small-note, third-staff excerpts of instrumental fillips from the full score which, if played, place almost superhuman technical demands on the player. Only virtuoso pianists attempt this work.

*Notes by Laurie Shulman ©2022*

# UPCOMING CONCERTS

QUATUOR ÉBÈNE  
WED, APRIL 6, 2022  
7:30 PM

Making their debut on the Chamber Series, Quatuor Ébène is known for their charismatic playing, fresh approach to tradition, and open engagement with new forms.



Photo by Julien Mignot

“... the Ébène evinces a musical grace, ingenuousness and simplicity that is deeply satisfying.”

– *The Strad*

## PROGRAM

- Mozart: Quartet No. 15 in G Major, K. 387
- Shostakovich: Quartet No. 8 in C minor, Op. 110
- Brahms: Quartet No. 3 in B-flat Major, Op. 67

DANIIL TRIFONOV, PIANO  
THUR, MAY 5, 2022  
7:30 PM



Grammy award-winning pianist Daniil Trifonov – winner of *Gramophone's* 2016 Artist of the year award – has made a spectacular ascent in the classical music world as a solo artist, champion of the concerto repertoire, chamber and vocal collaborator, and composer.

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## PROGRAM

- Prokofiev: *Sarcasms*
- Szymanowski: Sonata No. 3, Op. 36
- Debussy: *Pour le Piano*, L.95
- Brahms: Sonata No. 3 in F Minor, Op. 5

Tickets for both concerts available at [www.newmantix.com](http://www.newmantix.com).

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FCM was pleased to support the Denver Citywide Honors String Orchestra program by sponsoring a performance by the Ivalas Quartet, held in the Newman Center's Gates Hall on February 3, 2022.



# UPCOMING CONCERTS

**Quatuor Ébène**  
Wed, Apr 6, 2022

**Daniil Trifonov, piano**  
Thu, May 5, 2022

*All concerts begin at 7:30 pm at Gates  
Concert Hall, 2344 E. Iliff Avenue,  
Denver*

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