

BEATRICE RANA
PIANO

ALEXANDER Scriabin *Fantasia in B Minor, Op. 28*
(1872-1915)

**MARIO
CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO** *Cipressi, Op. 17*
(1895-1968)

CLAUDE Debussy *Selection of Préludes*
(1862-1918) *Prélude 7 of Book II:*
 La Terrasse des audiences au clair de lune
 Prélude 7 of Book I: Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest

L'isle joyeuse

INTERMISSION

FRANZ LISZT *Sonata in B Minor, S. 178*
(1811-1886)

This performance sponsored by CPR Classical.



Photo by Simon Fowler

BEATRICE RANA

BEATRICE RANA, PIANO

Based in Rome, Beatrice Rana has been shaking up the classical music scene, inspiring admiration and interest from concert presenters, conductors, critics, and audiences around the world.

In the 2023-24 season, Rana will be touring in Europe with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Antonio Pappano, the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, and the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg. She will debut with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra with Yannick Nézet-Séguin and the Cleveland Orchestra with Lahav Shani, and will return to the New York Philharmonic with Manfred Honeck.

Rana records exclusively for Warner Classics. In 2023 she presented her fifth album featuring Clara and Robert Schumann's concertos with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Yannick Nézet-Séguin. Rana's newest album will be released in March 2024 featuring works by Beethoven and Chopin.

In 2017, Rana started her own chamber music festival, *Classiche Forme*, in her native town of Lecce, Puglia. The festival has become one of Italy's major summer events. She became Artistic Director of the Orchestra Filarmonica di Benevento in 2020.

Rana attracted international attention in 2011, at the age of 18, when she won first prize at the Montreal International Competition. She went on to win second prize and the Audience Award at the prestigious Van Cliburn Competition in 2013. In 2017, the release of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* was a milestone in her career. The recording was praised by reviewers worldwide and crowned by two major awards: Young Artist of the Year at the Gramophone Awards and Discovery of the Year at the Edison Awards. In June 2018, she was chosen as Female Artist of the Year at the Classic BRIT Awards at the Royal Albert Hall for her 2017 recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. Her latest solo album was released in October 2019, featuring works by Stravinsky

and Ravel, and was awarded several top prizes including Diapason d'Or de l'Année and Choc de l'Année Classica in France. In 2023 Beatrice presented her 5th album featuring Clara and Robert Schumann's concertos with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

Born into a family of musicians in 1993, Beatrice Rana made her orchestral debut at the age of nine, performing Bach's Concerto in F minor. Beatrice began her musical studies at four and achieved her piano degree under the guidance of Benedetto Lupo at the Nino Rota Conservatory of Music in Monopoli, where she also studied composition with Marco della Sciucca. She then studied with Arie Vardi in Hanover and again with Benedetto Lupo at the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia.

*Ms. Rana records exclusively for Warner Classics.
More information on Beatrice Rana can be found at www.beatriceranapiano.com. Management for Beatrice Rana: Primo Artists, New York, NY, www.primoartists.com.*

IN BRIEF

BORN: January 6, 1872, Moscow, Russia

DIED: April 27, 1915, Moscow, Russia

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

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

DURATION: 9 minutes

NOTES

ALEXANDER
SCRIABIN: FANTASIE
IN B MINOR, OP. 28

With the exception of five orchestral works and a piano concerto, Alexander Scriabin composed exclusively for solo piano. Historically, he has been regarded as the direct heir to Chopin. The connection is particularly evident in Scriabin's early works, which include mazurkas, preludes, etudes, nocturnes, and other small salon pieces. One can discern the influence of Chopin and other Slavic composers in much of Scriabin's music.

That is not the case for the Opus 28 *Fantasia* (1900–1901), which is far more indebted to Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner. The Liszt connection shows itself in the piano

writing: pyrotechnics that include dense textures, abundant octaves and chords in both hands, and extravagant arpeggiations filling out textures. One senses Wagner in the heavy chromaticism, subtle harmonic shifts, and yearning for ecstasy that recalls the passionate waves of sound in the *Prelude and Liebestod* from *Tristan und Isolde*.

The *Fantasia* is an important transitional work that shows Scriabin graduating from salon miniatures to larger-scale keyboard compositions, often with a mystic, ecstatic character. He had a lifelong obsession with philosophy and mysticism that played an increasingly important role in his compositions. The *Fantasia* is part of his evolution toward the late style that reached its apogee in giant orchestral canvasses such as the *Poème d'Extase*, Op. 54 (1905-08) and *Prometheus: Poem of Fire*, Op. 60 (1908-10).

Curiously, Scriabin apparently forgot that he composed the *Fantasia*. He delayed sending it to his publisher in 1900 and 1901. When Alexander Golveyev played the premiere in November 1907, Scriabin initially denied that he had written it! The *Fantasia's* over-the-top, heart-on-sleeve themes and virtuosic demands have made it a favorite of pianists and audiences.

MARIO
CASTELNUOVO-
TEDESCO: CIPRESSI,
OP. 17

IN BRIEF

BORN: April 3, 1895, Florence, Italy

DIED: March 16, 1968, Beverly Hills, California

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

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

DURATION: 8 minutes

In 1917, the Italian composer Alfredo Casella formed the Società Italiana di Musica Moderna, an advocacy group promoting Italian composers who were writing instrumental music rather than focusing exclusively on opera. Its roster included Ottorino Respighi, Vincenzo

Tommasini, and only a few other names familiar today. Although Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco was not a founding member, he soon became associated with the Società, and his reputation benefited from its support.

Castelnuovo-Tedesco had studied with Ildebrando Pizzetti in Bologna beginning in 1915. At that early stage of his career, he was most active as a composer of songs; he was nicknamed “the Italian Brahms” because of his neo-romantic lyrical style. Pizzetti introduced him to Casella, who became an enthusiastic champion. Castelnuovo-Tedesco was a gifted pianist and essayist as well as composer. Until Mussolini’s purge of Italian Jews forced his emigration in 1939, he pursued an active career as performer, composer, and writer. In the United States he made important contributions to film music, a craft he taught to Henry Mancini, André Previn, Nelson Riddle, and John Williams.

Today Castelnuovo-Tedesco is most respected for his nearly 100 pieces for guitar—he had a long association with Andrés Segovia—but he also composed nearly two dozen works for solo piano. *Cipressi* (Cypresses) is a post-impressionist musical canvas that suggests the stately trees so common to the area around Florence, the composer’s birthplace. A single movement of about eight minutes, *Cipressi* opens slow and serious, soon introducing a recitative-like melody that is distinctly vocal in character. Setting it against rich post-impressionist harmonies, Castelnuovo-Tedesco uses two motives from the melody as material for an extended series of free variations. Some moments expand to Lisztian grandeur; others contract to a tender intimacy reminiscent of Debussy’s late piano music in its quieter moments. The printed music breaks to three staves in several places, to allow differentiation of textural activity in the high, middle, and low registers of the keyboard. Hypnotic and seductive, this is music that captivates the ear. One marvels at the coloristic potential of a single keyboard enhanced with magical pedaling.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY:
LA TERRASSE DES
AUDIENCES AU
CLAIR DE LUNE
FROM PRÉLUDES,
BOOK II

CE QU'À VU LE VENT
D'OUEST, FROM
PRELUDES, BOOK 1

IN BRIEF

BORN: August 22, 1862, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France

DIED: March 25, 1918, Paris, France

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: March 22, 2012, Pierre Laurent Aimard, piano (*La terrasse des audiences au clair de lune*); February 26, 2014, Lise de la Salle, piano (*Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest*)

DURATION: 7 minutes

Every pianist has a favorite work by Debussy, but few would deny the overarching importance of his Preludes in setting forth his singular approach to the keyboard. Published in two sets of twelve in 1910 and 1913, the Preludes comprise a profusion of ideas for connecting sound, mood, and image.

Everything in Debussy's youth pointed toward a career as a piano virtuoso. He matriculated at the Paris Conservatoire at age ten and played Chopin's Second Piano Concerto when he was twelve. Although composition eventually supplanted performance as Debussy's primary focus, he remained a superb pianist his entire life. His achievement as a composer for piano is, in large part, an extension of the sound color and techniques he learned from studying Chopin.

The two books of Preludes crystallized Debussy's innovative approach to the piano. Each one explores the keyboard in highly individual ways that involve pedaling, arpeggios, delicate figuration, and frequent whole tone harmonies. He was a literate and cultured man who knew many of the important painters and writers of his day as well as the other prominent musicians active in Paris. In his piano music, Debussy sought to recreate the subtle colors and play of light of the Impressionist school of painters, and to evoke the rich, layered imagery of Symbolist and Parnassus poets.

The Preludes are unusual in many respects. One is that the titles occur at the end in the printed music, not at the beginning, each one preceded by an ellipsis and enclosed

in parentheses. It is as if Debussy wants your imagination to wander free as the music unfolds before he tips his hand as to the scenes he seeks to conjure in the individual movements.

Debussy's harmonic language is striking. Although he was schooled in traditional 19th-century harmony, counterpoint, and form, he cared little for rules. Three summers (1880-1882) in the employ of Tchaikovsky's patron Nadezhda von Meck gave him early exposure to the works of Russian nationalists such as Mussorgsky and Borodin. He was enchanted with Slavic folk music.

Later, in 1889, he heard the music of the Javanese *gamelan* orchestra at the Paris Exposition Universelle. Soon Eastern sonorities inspired by *gamelan* were cropping up in his piano pieces. While these disparate influences bewildered some of his audience and many of his critics, they distinguished Debussy from his contemporaries. His ceaseless efforts to elicit novel sounds from the piano yielded landmarks in keyboard literature. In terms of his influence on the generations of composers that followed, Debussy was as important as Arnold Schoenberg, though in a completely different way.

La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune (The Terrace for Moonlight Audiences) was purportedly inspired by a letter from the correspondent René Puaux to the Parisian newspaper *Le Temps*. Puaux's account of the ceremonies attending George V's coronation as Emperor of India describes "... the hall of victory, the pleasure salon, the garden of the sultanas, the terrace for moonlight audiences." There is another musical pun to the title: Debussy weaves in a motive from the popular French folk song, "Au clair de la lune."

This Prelude suggests a sensitive and delicate approach to the piano, with subtle gradations of sound. Sometimes the music is passionate, but more often it is private, beseeching, questioning, and mysterious. Debussy's harmonic vocabulary is similarly fluid, sometimes bitonal, elsewhere suggesting the gongs of the Javanese *gamelan*. Skillful pedaling and a feather-light touch shade this gossamer piece. We are both participants and eavesdroppers to the hushed scene.

Each book of *Préludes* contains one blockbuster movement that is a technical *tour de force*. Book I's *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest* (What the West Wind Saw) is a virtuosic piece cut from the same bolt of musical fabric as Debussy's earlier *L'isle joyeuse*, which follows it on our program. Liszt's influence is paramount, with double trills, tremolos, broken octaves, and muscular chordal passages. The subtler imprint of Chopin's "Winter Wind" Etude is also present in this turbulent music, but the pentatonic and whole tone elements connect it unmistakably to Debussy. Paul Roberts has written, "This is a piece unique in the Debussy repertoire, requiring wrists of iron and fingers of steel."

CLAUDE DEBUSSY: *L'ISLE JOYEUSE*

IN BRIEF

FIRST PERFORMANCE: February 10, 1905, Paris, France

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: February 24, 2016, Steven Osborne, piano

DURATION: 6 minutes

Early in 1904, Claude Debussy became involved in a passionate affair with Emma Bardac, an amateur singer and wife of a Paris banker. Debussy had met her the previous autumn. He had been married to Rosalie (Lilly) Texier since 1899, but the union was shallow, and he found Bardac intoxicating. In June 1904 Debussy left Lilly to move in with Emma, whose husband traveled extensively. The lovers slipped out of Paris in mid-July to spend three glorious weeks on the British isle of Jersey. *L'isle joyeuse* (The joyous island) mirrors the delirious passion of Debussy's first extended holiday with Emma, who eventually became his second wife.

Debussy had drafted the score to *L'isle joyeuse* during the summer of 1903 while still in Paris. He initially thought to include it in the *Suite bergamasque*. While on the isle of Jersey, he revised the piece extensively, adding final touches in Dieppe in August, on his way back to Paris. In that version it is one of his lengthiest solo piano compositions (only *Masques* rivals *L'isle joyeuse* in duration) and differs markedly from the delicate understatement of many of his other piano works. As Marcel Dietschy has noted:

Voluble, passionate joy runs through *L'isle joyeuse*, like a flock of birds dazzled by the dawn and drunk on the freshness of the morning. The past was buried when Debussy finished this piece with its strong and flexible muscles. . . . (it testifies) to Debussy's uncontrollable feeling for Emma Bardac.

The piece is intensely virtuosic, placing technical demands on the pianist similar to those in the dazzling showpieces of Franz Liszt. The composer wrote to his publisher Jacques Durand: "But God! How difficult it is to perform . . . seems to assemble all the ways to attack a piano since it unites force and grace." Debussy uses the piano as if it were a full orchestra, drawing forth a variety of colors as infinite as the play of light on the sea. Evidently recognizing its symphonic potential, the composer planned to orchestrate it in 1915, but did not complete the project before his death.

Harmonically, *L'isle joyeuse* dances between folk-like tunes and vivid whole-tone passages. There are also some sections in which Debussy writes in two keys simultaneously. Rhythmically, the piece alternates between impetuosity and unpredictability to measured delicacy. Throughout, the composer's spirit emerges exultant, even ecstatic.

IN BRIEF

BORN: October 22, 1811, Raiding, Austria

DIED: July 31, 1886, Bayreuth, Germany

FIRST PERFORMANCE: January 22, 1857, Berlin, Hans von Bülow, piano

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: October 24, 2007, Markus Groh, piano

DURATION: 30 minutes

FRANZ LISZT: SONATA IN B MINOR, S. 178

The 19th century's Brahms/Wagner divide hinged on the merits of absolute music versus program music. Brahms was a champion of absolute music: the art form for its own sake, abstract works cast in the traditional forms and genres of sonata, symphony, variations. Wagner believed that Beethoven's Ninth Symphony had sounded the death

knell of the symphony. In his view, the future of music lay in multi-sensory artistic packages that embraced other arts, such as literature. The ultimate artistic creation was opera: a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (complete artwork) that combined music and libretto along with the visual arts of costume, lighting, and set design.

Franz Liszt was firmly in the Wagnerian camp. Though Liszt did not compose operas, most of his original works are somehow linked to an extramusical source. Indeed, Liszt effectively invented the symphonic poem, and he was the first to employ that term (in 1854, for a performance of the orchestral work *Tasso*). His piano music abounds in programmatic references, ranging from concert fantasies based on operatic themes to travelogues memorializing his years abroad (*Années de pèlerinage*).

Thus, the Sonata in B minor seems something of an aberration. Why would Liszt tackle a sonata, that most revered and intellectual of solo vehicles? The answer is complex, and it has close connections to another significant contribution that Liszt made to music: the concept of thematic transformation.

Among Liszt's hundreds of piano works there are only two sonatas: the *Dante* Sonata, a programmatic work related both to Dante's *Inferno* and to a poem about Dante by the French author Victor Hugo, and the Sonata in B minor. Both works date from the early 1850s and employ sonata principles within the framework of a large, one-movement form. Thereafter the similarities diminish. Whereas the *Dante* Sonata is part of the *Années de pèlerinage*, the B minor Sonata stands independently. *Dante* has extramusical associations; the B minor Sonata is a brilliant experiment in form. Liszt took two icons of absolute music as his points of departure: Beethoven and Schubert. He had studied the bold experiments in form in Beethoven's late piano sonatas, and particularly admired the mighty sectional finale to the Ninth Symphony. Among Schubert's piano works, his principal model was the *Wanderer-Fantasie*, which Liszt played frequently in recital and also arranged for piano and orchestra.

The melodic material in Liszt's Sonata is amorphous. He waits before giving us something to hold onto, yet the quiet opening measures contain a motive that will recur in various guises throughout the sonata. This motive, a descending scale in the lower register, resembles Wagner's leitmotif for Wotan's sword in the *Ring* cycle. Liszt employs it as a unifying device.

Then comes the first explosion: a sharp, angular burst in double octaves, answered by a sinister rumble in the bass. The repeated notes, the fits and starts, the stark contrasts have their roots in both Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata and his late C minor Sonata, Op.111. In the first fifteen measures, Liszt has put nearly all his thematic cards on the table—but he has barely begun to shuffle or recombine those cards. This man was an expert poker player!

He takes us on a spectacular journey of big chords and dazzling passage work, crossed hands, and fearsome cascades of double octaves. We hardly know what key we are in through the tumult. This “music of gesture” and “music of mood” has ample precedent in the romantic era, and Liszt was a master of romantic keyboard technique. The *bravura* segment ushers in the next Big Theme, marked *Grandioso*, and initially stated in D major. Remarkably, for a work that is so tonally unstable at its start, Liszt has landed us in the relative major, precisely where we would expect to be at this point in a conventional sonata.

The *Grandioso* music is the last major new idea that Liszt introduces. Now begins the thematic transformation—a process of extended development through which the newly evolved themes become the form itself. Liszt adheres to the structural ideas he set forth and explored in his symphonic poems, many of which date from the same period of the early 1850s. His transformation maintains the overall shape of each melodic unit and, in many cases, the actual pitches, but he alters the harmony, mood, rhythm, and character as well as tempo. The pianist and writer Charles Rosen has written:

Even more profound is the tendency of all the themes of the sonata to turn into one another. This fluidity of

thematic identity is perhaps the greatest sign of Liszt's mastery. . . Three different themes . . . clearly from a common source: one motif slips easily into the others.

Just as Liszt blurs the contours and distinctiveness of his melodic material, so does he erase the boundaries between sections of music. The Sonata contains no distinct movements, and musicians have long debated whether it consists of three or four principal sections. Passages of *recitativo*, mini-cadenzas, and the momentary silence of a *fermata* (pause) all serve as transitions. The music includes intimate passages that seem like eavesdropping on a confessional, such as the central *Andante sostenuto* that is sometimes cited as the sonata's "slow movement." Some listeners perceive the brilliant *fugato*—whose subject combines two of the motives introduced on the sonata's first page—as a scherzo. The seamless narrative flow argues otherwise, however, transporting us back to more double octaves, a reacquaintance with the descending scale motive, and two more transcendent statements of the *Grandioso* theme.

Liszt's original conclusion was big, bold, and loud, marked triple *forte*. He reconsidered that ending, ultimately realizing that the heroism and grandiosity had already occurred. The Sonata ends with a final statement of the three ideas on its opening page, now in radiant B major. The first is *piano, sotto voce* (quiet, subdued, "under" the voice), gradually dissipating to triple *piano*.

If one listens to surface detail, the B minor Sonata sounds free, improvisatory, and episodic. Liszt's use of Phrygian mode and Central European Gypsy scales enriches the harmonic palette. His larger scheme is dazzling in its complexity and discipline. The complexity arises from the sophistication of Liszt's thematic metamorphosis. The discipline is inherent in the composer's simultaneous attention to detail and to the architecture of large structure.

With the Sonata in B minor, Liszt was trying to move the venerable, prestigious sonata form forward to the next era,

to give this traditional vessel a future in what he regarded as the correct path for music. When the Sonata was published in 1854, admirers heralded it as a masterpiece. Detractors scorned it as an ill-conceived, overwrought exercise in virtuosity. Posterity's judgment has been generous. Kenneth Hamilton has written that, if Liszt had composed nothing else, the Sonata alone "would still be enough to rank him as one of the greatest Romantic composers." By any measure, the Sonata is incomparably original and one of musical romanticism's defining leaps forward.

A NOTE ON LISZT'S SONATA AND PROGRAM MUSIC

Is the Sonata in B minor really a work of absolute music, or does it have a programmatic subtext? Recent scholarship has been all over the map on this question.

One theory links the Sonata to Goethe's *Faust*, finding a direct parallel to Liszt's musical treatment of its themes in his orchestral portraits of Faust, Gretchen, and Mephistopheles in the *Faust Symphony*. Another hears in the Sonata a direct analogue to the Creation, the fall of mankind and expulsion from Paradise, and mankind's redemption through Christ's crucifixion. A third camp perceives the Sonata as an autobiographical work, Liszt's self-portrait in music.

Liszt would likely have repudiated these interpretations, despite the fact he was a staunch advocate of program music. Neither he nor the students who studied this work with him wrote about any program for it.

The Sonata in B minor is a rare abstract composition that is more a study in his individual adaptation of traditional form to suit his own perception of thematic treatment and pianistic technique. Writing in 1965, John Gillespie called it "incredibly disciplined, molded with meticulous attention to detail." As listeners, we may marvel at its micro and macro qualities. No note is wasted, yet Liszt keeps us grounded in a sense of narrative sweep and inevitability. His music is its own story.

Program Notes by Laurie Shulman © 2024

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Desiree Parrott-Alcorn

UPCOMING CONCERTS

CHAMBER SERIES

Sphinx Virtuosi

Wed, Mar 20, 2024 | 7:30 pm

Jerusalem Quartet

Wed, Apr 10, 2024 | 7:30 pm

TAKT Trio (*special event*)

Fri, Apr 19, 2024 | 7:30 pm

Les Violons Du Roy with MILOŠ

Thu, May 9, 2024 | 7:30 pm

COMMUNITY EVENT

MUSIC IN THE GALLERIES

St. Martin's Chamber Choir

Ensemble

Sun, Mar 10, 2024

12:00 & 1:00 pm (identical concerts)

Clyfford Still Museum

1250 Bannock Street, Denver

CONTINUING EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY

The World of the Baroque

Offered as part of DU's Continuing Education program

Four in-person sessions

Thu, Apr 18, 25, May 2, 2024, 7-9 pm

FCM May 9 performance,

Les Violons du Roy

FCM patrons receive a 20% discount with Promo Code FOCMWS24.

Visit [friendsofchambermusic.com](https://www.friendsofchambermusic.com) for more information.

SPECIAL THANKS

SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL FACILITIES DISTRICT (TIER III)

for supporting FCM's outreach efforts through school residencies and master classes

CPR CLASSICAL (KVD 88.1)

for broadcasting FCM concerts on its "Colorado Spotlight" program



BONFILS-STANTON FOUNDATION

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