A Senior Recital in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Bachelor of Arts in Music

January 18, 2014
Saturday at 7 p.m.
Pavilion, Performing Arts Center’s
Christopher Cohan Center

Sponsored by the Cal Poly Music Department and College of Liberal Arts
Program
Senior Recital
Alessandra Shanus, piano

Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1, BWV 851 ................. Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
  Prelude in D Minor
  Fugue in D Minor

Visions fugitives, Op. 22 ............................................. Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953)
  3. Allegretto
  7. The Harp
  8. Commodo
  10. Ridicolosamente
  17. Poetico
  19. Presto agitatissimo e molto accentuato

Sonata No. 9 in E Major, Op. 14, No. 1 ....................... Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
  Allegro
  Allegretto
  Rondo

– Intermission –

Nocturne in C Minor, Op. 48, No. 1 ......................... Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)

Sonatine ................................................................. Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)
  Modéré
  Mouvement de menuet
  Animé
Program Notes

Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1, BWV 851, by Johann Sebastian Bach

- Prelude in D minor
- Fugue in D minor

Johann Sebastian Bach is the foremost musical genius of the late Baroque period and occupies the spotlight in the most gifted family in musical history. After losing his mother in May 1694 and his father less than a year later, his uncle, Johann Christoph Bach, an organist at St. Michael’s church in Ohrdruf, adopted him. Bach received his first lessons in organ from Christoph but independently progressed. Bach had many opportunities to showcase his talent on organ, one being his position as court organist and Konzertmeister in Weimar, Kappelmeister in Cöthen, and Kantor in Leipzig.

Richard Wagner once said, “[Bach] is the most stupendous miracle in all music.” In 1722, Bach created a collection of preludes and fugues in all 24 major and minor keys composed “for the profit and use of musical youth desirous of learning, and especially for the pastime of those already skilled in this study.” Bach later compiled a second book of the same kind, dated 1742, with the title “Twenty four Preludes and Fugues.” The two works are now considered to make up a single work, The Well-Tempered Clavier. Bach’s object was to demonstrate the advantages of the newly introduced “equal-temperament” (a tuning system in which the octave is divided into twelve half steps of equal size). Today, The Well-Tempered Clavier is considered to be essential repertoire for keyboard study. The purpose of these preludes and fugues is to provide preparatory exercises as well as suggestions regarding tempi, dynamics, fingering, articulation, hand distribution, ornamentation, phrasing, and pedaling.

In the seventeenth century, the prelude was a very free improvisational work, often written without benefit of a time signature; in structure, it was virtually a series of phrases with nothing but a key signature in common. Bach was one of the first composers to provide a prelude with far greater range and formal structure. In general, each prelude is based upon a short theme or motive (either a rhythmic pattern or a melodic phrase, which presents the basic material upon which the composition is constructed). Most often this thematic material consists of figuration: a scale (a series of stepwise notes) or an arpeggio (the notes of a chord played in rapid succession, either ascending or descending), which is subsequently repeated throughout the work. In this prelude, the right hand presents the melody with quick and rapid notes, however, the bass has a slower moving line that is sometimes emphasized.

This Fugue in D Minor is intriguing in that it is complicated, containing interweaving subject lines. It also contains Bach’s written-out articulations, which are rarely found in the WTC. The main subject is presented in the first notes of the piece. Overall, this fugue has sixteen episodes (or occurrences) of the main subject. The right hand and left hand take turns accentuating the main subject. Not all instances of the subject are exact replicas. These melodic lines are sometimes reversed, use different notes, or do not finish the entire subject line. Besides the subject, unifying material is also taken from the countersubject, an accompanying line that features rapid short notes.
Sergey Prokofiev possessed brilliant compositional skill at a very early age, similar to other prolific composers such as Mozart and Beethoven. Born on April 23, 1891 in the Ukraine, Prokofiev’s mother was the first musical influence on him. Prokofiev wrote in his autobiography: “When I was put to bed in the evenings and did not want to sleep, I would listen to the faint sound of Beethoven’s Sonatas being played several rooms away from the nursery. My mother used to play the sonatas of the first volume mostly; then came Chopin preludes, mazurkas, and waltzes. Occasionally something of Liszt, not too difficult; and the Russian composers, Tchaikovsky and Rubinstein.” When he was four years old, his mother began his first piano lessons, and his earliest attempts at composition also date from this period, notably an opera he wrote at age nine. Throughout his life, he frequented the roles of pianist, composer, and conductor. His compositional output was also highly developed, including opera, film music, ballet, symphonies, concertos, solo piano, choral, and music for wind orchestra.

The piano was an important vehicle for Sergei Prokofiev’s musical expression. *Visions fugitives*, Op. 22, is comprised of twenty brief sketches. The Russian title, *Mimoliotnosti*, which Prokofiev borrowed from a poem of a contemporary poet, Konstantin Balmont, is literally translated to, “the things which fly by.” Prokofiev started composing *Visions Fugitives* in 1915 after completing one year at the St. Petersburg conservatory. Prokofiev called the *Visions* “doggies” (little puppies), which was the term he used to refer to the compositions of his childhood. The first three “doggies” were written in June 1915, and Prokofiev commented: “The doggies started to come incredibly easily. I liked them very much and they emerged with an impeccable finish. Three of them were completed on the first day: for Zoya (No. 6), for Lida (No. 5) – with a peal of bells to celebrate her marriage – and for Katya (No. 16). I decided to dedicate all of these doggies to my friends.”

Although lacking programmatic titles, the character of each piece is implied through colorful and unusual tempo indications, such as Ridicolosamente (ridiculously), Pittoresco (colorful), and Poetico (poetic). With the rising and falling melody line, “Allegretto” (No. 3) feels as if the listener is on a carnival ride. This curious and playful miniature combines romantic style with modern. Within the ternary form (ABA), the A sections are the more classical and romantic-sounding sections while the B section sounds modern.

Besides the obvious notion that “The Harp” (No. 7) sounds like a harp, it also sounds as if the listener is in a slow-moving sailboat inside of an impressionistic painting. Dreamy and ethereal, this entire piece is legato and smooth and always has a strong sense of the tonic. The rolled chords create the effect of a harp and the pedal assists in smearing these tones.

Every time the melody occurs in “Commodo” (No. 8), it becomes increasingly harder to play and project, making this piece enjoyably difficult. The opening melody happens three times in three different voices: soprano, alto, and tenor. Commodo translates to “comfortable, easy,” fully embracing the peacefulness and leisure of this piece.
“Ridicolosamente” (No. 10) is the most playful piece in the entire program. The left-hand mechanical movement sounds like a humorous “ha ha ha ha.” The range of notes is kept narrow, composing it as such that there are no bass notes.

Despite the unusual harmonies in “Poetico” (No. 17), this piece is surprisingly beautiful and delicate. The listener hears an unusual order of notes known as a whole tone scale, which is typically used as music for a dream. The piece stays in the upper half of the keyboard and extends to the top of the keyboard, where both hands participate in a sparkling and quiet ending. The piece acts as the “calm before the storm,” referring to the next piece.

“Presto agitatissimo e molto accentuato” (No. 19) fully embraces the element of surprise. From the first sounds, chaos resonates. This is the Vision about which Prokofiev wrote: “I was in the streets of Petrograd while the fighting was going on, hiding behind house corners when the shooting came too close. Number 19 of the Fugitive Visions written at this time partly reflected my impressions – the feeling of the crowd rather than the inner essence of the Revolution.”

**Sonata No. 9 in E Major, Op. 14, No. 1, by Ludwig van Beethoven**

- Allegro
- Allegretto
- Rondo

Who would have known that the world’s most famous composer received his music education from his father and several average teachers? From his success at combining tradition and exploration and personal expression, Ludwig van Beethoven came to be regarded as the dominant musical figure of the nineteenth century, and scarcely any significant composer since his time has escaped his influence or failed to acknowledge it. In 1792, Haydn, visiting Bonn, saw some of Beethoven’s early compositions and invited him to study with him in Vienna. Lessons from Haydn proved unsatisfactory, so Beethoven sought out Schenk for theory lessons and later Albrechtsberger and Salieri, names that few of us recognize today. His deafness and his inability to enter into happy personal relationships affected him greatly and inspired him to compose in an increasingly individual musical style. At the end of his life, when his tribulations were greatest, he wrote his most profound works. Beethoven is probably the most admired composer in the history of Western music.

Franz Schubert asked, “Who would be able to do anything after Beethoven?” Today, Beethoven’s piano sonatas are some of the most celebrated piano sonatas ever written and are essential in a pianist’s repertoire. A sonata is a composition for one or more solo instruments, one of which is usually a keyboard instrument, usually consisting of three or four independent movements varying in key, mood, and tempo. His works fall into three major compositional periods, the first period ending around 1802. Today’s *Sonata No. 9 in E Major* was composed in 1798, during his first period. After having examined the many sketches that exist for this work, scholars have raised a curious question: did Beethoven originally conceive it as a string quartet? The argument for Op. 14, No. 1, having originated as a string quartet revolves around three points: (1) the uncertain question of the date of origin for the sonata; (2) the seemingly unidiomatic and in some ways unique stylistic character of the sonata; and (3) the existence of this sonata in a string quartet arrangement in spite of Beethoven’s apparent reluctance to make string quartet arrangements and his refusal to do so in general.
The first movement, “Allegro,” is relatively thin and free of massive chordal structures, and the overall texture throughout seems more ideally suited for a string ensemble than a keyboard. Lively with spurts of drama, the first movement is in sonata form, the common practice for the first movement of a classical sonata. Within this form, the listener will hear an opening theme in E Major, the “home” key, and then a second theme in a new key. Fragments of these melodies are played again, but are developed into something a little different. To finish the movement, the two primary themes are repeated, both in the initial key of E Major.

The essence of this second movement, “Allegretto,” brings the listener back to an eighteenth-century ballroom, where guests are dancing a minuet. The overall delicacy and quietness of this movement is a great transition and break from the first and third movement. The rising and falling notes in the melody help dictate swells in dynamics. Again in this movement, the texture is thin and lacks massive chordal structures, mimicking the texture of a string quartet.

A sharp contrast in dynamics and brisk scales bring energy to the “Rondo,” the final movement of the sonata. The joyous melody and the wide variation in articulation make this movement distinct compared to the other two movements. The very “Beethovenian” moment towards the end of the movement is one of the musical highlights. It’s the angry-sounding music that everybody loves and which speaks pure “Beethoven.”

**Nocturne in C Minor, Op. 48, No. 1, by Frédéric Chopin**

Polish Romantic composer and pianist Frédéric Chopin was a private and fragile man, but as a composer, he was prolific. Chopin spent his early life in Warsaw, but as a young adult he moved to Paris. He made a comfortable living from teaching and from sales of his published music, and he enjoyed the friendship of some of Europe’s most eminent artists and composers. Chopin’s legendary reputation as a performer, and, above all, improviser, was based almost exclusively on his frequent appearances in fashionable society drawing rooms, because unlike most composer-pianists of the day, he disliked giving public concerts. In 1849, at age 39, he died of tuberculosis.

The nocturnes, perhaps more than any other works by Chopin, are mood pieces, reflecting personal poetic statements. The nocturne is known as “night time music,” and John Field is recognized as the “inventor” of the nocturne for piano. When Field published his Nocturne in 1812, he brought the genre into the world. Although Chopin modeled his early nocturnes on Field’s, Chopin transformed the genre in one way by utilizing the damper pedal. The damper pedal is a pedal on the piano that, when depressed with the foot, raises the dampers and permits the strings to vibrate and sustain the tone. The mechanical improvement of the damper pedal was especially significant in the changing sound environment because of the new “sound” effects that it made possible. The pedal enhanced the tone of the instrument, reinforced dynamic level, and allowed for extended accompaniment patterns. These new effects profoundly affected the Romantic composer-pianists’ treatment of the damper pedal in their compositions, ushering in new styles of writing, and hence, genres such as the nocturne.

**Nocturne, Op. 48, No. 1, in C Minor, brings new emotions to the recital program with its fiery octave passages and its emotional march-like introduction. Written in 1841, this piece has melodramatic power and Chopin utilizes the range of the keyboard**
in this nocturne. Theodor Kullak (a German pianist, composer, and teacher) said of the piece, “The design and poetic contents of this nocturne make it the most important one that Chopin created; the chief subject is a masterly expression of a great powerful grief.” The opening melody is slow and beautiful, and Chopin brings the melody back later in the piece, in even more grandiose style.

**Sonatine, by Maurice Ravel**

- Modéré
- Mouvement de menuet
- Animé

Maurice Ravel, best known for his orchestral compositions including Boléro, began writing piano music early in his compositional career, but his total output of published piano works is only eighteen pieces. His compositional training began at the Conservatory in Paris (1889-1904) and one of his teachers was Gabriel Fauré. Unlike Fauré, who is a well-known Romantic composer, Ravel has been categorized as an Impressionist or as a Post-Impressionist composer, sharing this classification with composer Claude Debussy and painter Claude Monet, to name two. His compositional style can be compared to a “Swiss clock-maker,” which Stravinsky called Ravel in more of a mocking fashion, rather than a compliment. To others, however, it actually demonstrated Ravel’s desire for perfection. He would correct his compositions again and again until he could not find any mistakes, sometimes continuing this process even after the work had been published.

The Sonatine is based on the model of the eighteenth-century “little sonata.” The three movements follow the usual sequence: perfectly balanced outside movements surrounding a minuet, all written in the Classical style but with modern twists. The piece was first debuted on March 31, 1906, at the National Society of Music. It had a mixed reception and some people in the audience “booed.” The general public was still somewhat hostile to each new composition by Ravel, but the Sonatine made rapid steps on the road to popularity. Later that year, it was presented in Lyon. Shortly after, Ravel was offered a contract by Durand to publish Sonatine, which resulted in a life-long arrangement.

Technically challenging, the first movement, “Modéré,” uses both hands playing on top of each other to create a beautiful melody. This main melody is comprised of two notes played a certain number of keys apart, creating an interval of a perfect fourth. This interval is thematically present throughout the entire movement as well as the entire piece. While the melody sings, an accompaniment is created through constantly moving notes.

The second movement, “Mouvement de menuet,” is charming and beautiful. This is the second minuet in the recital program but it is entirely different than Beethoven’s minuet. Ravel’s minuet is much slower, the melodies are sweet, and the harmonies are thicker and more experimental. The sense of time and rhythm is also more flexible, whereas Beethoven’s minuet could be played with a metronome.

Exciting, powerful, and dramatic, the third movement, “Animé,” is an incredible ending to the recital program. Despite its rapid pace, it explores a variety of keys and changing rhythms. Similar to the second movement, the harmonies are experimental, but in this finale, Ravel uses a technique called sequence, meaning that he uses the same rhythmic idea in different key areas.
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