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DASOL KIM
JAN 25 & 26, 2019 / 4PM
LINCOLN HALL

January 25
Beethoven:
Piano Sonata No. 30 in E Major, Op. 109
Piano Sonata No. 31 in A-flat Major, Op. 110
Piano Sonata No. 32 in C minor, Op. 111

January 26
Schumann: Geistervariationen, WoO 24
Medtner: Chetyre skazki, Op. 26, No. 1; Chetyre skazki, Op. 26, No. 2; Dve skazki, Op. 20, No. 1
Scriabin: Piano Sonata No. 3, Op. 23
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Sibelius meets Shakespeare, as a live theatrical cast brings drama to the Finnish composer’s moving incidental music.

FEATURING:
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DECEMBER 7, 7:30 PM | DECEMBER 8, 2 PM | DECEMBER 9, 7:30 PM

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PROGRAM ALSO INCLUDES:
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Our apologies in advance for any omissions. Every gift is important to us!

Widney Moore

This program is dedicated to the memory of Widney Moore, who passed away on September 20. Widney was the executive director of Portland Piano International during a challenging transition in 2009 / 2010. Widney will be remembered for her grace and style, as an award-winning textile artist, a philanthropist, and someone with a deep love for the piano.

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Tom & Sheila Smith
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Jean Cauthorn
In honor of Pauline Jensen
Lauren Canfield
In honor of Tony Newcomb
Maynard Orme
In honor of Ruth Reimann
Helen D. Christians
In memory of Bill Vanderheide
Ina Hammon

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In honor of Ruth Reimann
Helen D. Christians
In memory of Bill Vanderheide
Ina Hammon
“One of the most admired pianists of his generation” (New York Times), Inon Barnatan is celebrated for his poetic sensibility, musical intelligence, and consummate artistry. He inaugurates his tenure as Music Director of California’s La Jolla Music Society Summerfes in July 2019. The coming season brings the release of a two-volume set of Beethoven’s complete piano concertos, which he recorded for Pentatone with Alan Gilbert and London’s Academy of St. Martin in the Fields. Barnatan’s upcoming concerto collaborations include Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 23 with Nicholas McGegan and the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl, Gershwin’s Rhapsody in Blue and Ravel’s G-major Concerto with the Chicago Symphony, Rachmaninov’s Third Concerto with Gilbert and the Royal Stockholm Symphony, Clara Schumann’s Concerto with the New Jersey Symphony, and a recreation of Beethoven’s legendary 1808 concert, which featured the world premieres of his Fourth Piano Concerto, Choral Fantasy, and Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, with Louis Langrée and the Cincinnati Symphony. Barnatan also plays Mendelssohn, Gershwin, and Thomas Adès for his solo recital debut at Carnegie’s Zankel Hall, returns to Alice Tully Hall with Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and reunites with his frequent recital partner, cellist Alisa Weilerstein, for tours on both sides of the Atlantic. The first takes them to London’s Wigmore Hall, the Netherlands and Italy for Brahms and Shostakovich, while the second sees them celebrate Beethoven’s 250th anniversary with performances of his complete cello sonatas in San Francisco and other U.S. cities.

A regular performer with many of the world’s foremost orchestras and conductors, Barnatan served from 2014-17 as the inaugural Artist-in-Association of the New York Philharmonic. In summer 2017, he made his BBC Proms debut with the BBC Symphony at London’s Royal Albert Hall and gave the Aspen world premiere of a new piano concerto by Alan Fletcher, which he went on to reprise with the Atlanta Symphony and in a season-opening concert with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl. Recent orchestral debuts include the Chicago, Baltimore, Fort Worth, Indianapolis, Nashville, San Diego, and Seattle Symphony Orchestras, as well as the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and the London, Helsinki, Hong Kong, and Royal Stockholm Philharmonics. Other recent highlights include a complete Beethoven concerto cycle in Marseilles; performances of Copland’s Piano Concerto with the San Francisco Symphony and Michael Tilson Thomas in San Francisco and at Carnegie Hall; and a U.S. tour with the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, playing and conducting Mozart and Shostakovich from the keyboard and premiering a newly commissioned concerto by Alasdair Nicolson. With the Minnesota Orchestra and Osmo Vänskä, Barnatan played Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto on New Year’s Eve, followed by a Midwest tour that culminated in Chicago, and a return to the BBC Proms in summer 2018.

Barnatan is the recipient of both a prestigious 2009 Avery Fisher Career Grant and Lincoln Center’s 2015 Martin E. Segal Award, which recognizes “young artists of exceptional accomplishment.” A sought-after chamber musician, he was a member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center’s CMS Two program from 2006 to 2009, and continues to make regular CMS appearances in New York and on tour. His passion for contemporary music sees him commission and perform many works by living composers, including premieres of pieces by Thomas Adès, Sebastian Currier, Avner Dorman, Alan Fletcher, Joseph Hallman, Alasdair Nicolson, Andrew Norman, Matthias Pintscher, and others.

Barnatan’s most recent album release is a live recording of Messiaen’s 90-minute masterpiece Des canyons aux étoiles (“From the Canyons to the Stars”), in which he played the exceptionally challenging solo piano part at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. In 2015 he released Rachmaninov & Chopin: Cello Sonatas on Decca Classics with Alisa Weilerstein, earning rave reviews on both sides of the Atlantic. His most recent solo recording, of Schubert’s late piano sonatas, was released by Avie in September 2013, winning praise from such publications as Gramophone and BBC Music, while his account of the great A-major Sonata (D. 959) was chosen by the BBC Proms in summer 2018.

Born in Tel Aviv in 1979, Inon Barnatan started playing the piano at the age of three, when his parents discovered his perfect pitch, and made his orchestral debut at eleven. His musical education connects him to some of the 20th century’s most illustrious pianists and teachers; he studied first with Professor Victor Derevianko, a student of the Russian master Heinrich Neuhaus, before moving to London in 1997 to study at the Royal Academy of Music with Christopher Elton and Maria Curcio, a student of the legendary Artur Schnabel. Leon Fleisher has also been an influential teacher and mentor. Barnatan currently resides in New York City. For more information, visit www.inonbarnatan.com.
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NOV 16, 2019 / 4PM

"SONGS WITHOUT WORDS"

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

SONGS WITHOUT WORDS
Op. 67, No. 2, F-sharp minor
Op. 30, No. 4, B minor “The Shepherd’s Lament”
Op. 67, No. 5, B minor
Op. 62, No. 1, G Major
Op. 19b, No.1, E Major
Op. 67, No. 4, C Major “Spinning Song”
Op. 19b, No. 6, G minor “Gondolier Song”
Op. 85, No. 4, D Major “Elegy”
Op. 62, No. 2, B-flat Major

RONALD STEVENSON

PETER GRIMES FANTASY

GEORGE GERSHWIN

PRELUDE NO. 2
I GOT RHYTHM (ARR. EARL WILD)

- INTERMISSION -

FRANZ SCHUBERT

SONATA IN A MAJOR, D. 959
Allegro
Andantino
Scherzo: Allegro vivace
Allegretto

NOV 17, 2019 / 4PM

"VARIATIONS ON A THEME"

Time Traveler’s Suite:

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
TOCCATA IN E MINOR, BWV 914

GEORGE FRIEDERICH HANDEL
FROM SUITE IN E MAJOR, HWV 430: ALLEMANDE

JEAN-PHILLIPE RAMEAU
FROM SUITE IN A MINOR: COURANTE

FRANÇOIS COUPERIN
L’ATALANTE (12EME ORDRE)

MAURICE RAVEL
FROM LE TOMBEAU DE COUPERIN: RIGAUDON

THOMAS ADÈS
BLANCA VARIATIONS

GYÖRGI LIGETI
MUSICA RICERCATA, NO. 11 & 10

SAMUEL BARBER
FROM SONATA IN E-FLAT MINOR: FUGUE

- INTERMISSION -

JOHANNES BRAHMS
VARIATIONS AND FUGUE ON A THEME BY HANDEL, OP. 24

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"Songs Without Words"

This program is about words. Well, maybe not exactly about words, but it certainly reflects a strong inspiration from the realm of music with words. Or, of course, music specifically without words. (See Mendelssohn, below.) Perhaps it would be better to say that it is derived from music that seeks to express specific meaning. In any case, it is a remarkable juxtaposition of pieces that, I think, will, by the end, add up to more than the sum of its parts.

That juxtaposition, indeed, and the resulting effect, seems to be of prime importance to Mr. Barnatan. “A program is a chance to put things together that interact with each other and when you hear them next to each other, it makes more of an impact.” There is a lot of impact, indeed, to be heard in these assembled pieces. Welcome to Inon’s personal concept for what a piano recital can convey.

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

SONGS WITHOUT WORDS

COMPOSER: February 3, 1809 in Hamburg, Germany; died November 4, 1847 in Leipzig

WORK COMPOSED: composed between 1820 and 1840; the first set published by Novello in London in 1832 as Original

Mendelssohn wrote these songs for a number of purposes, one of which, nobly, in my opinion, was to give pianists of moderate and better skill “useful” pieces that could be fine material for concerts in homes and even fancier settings. Too, scholars tell us that Queen Victoria, who held Mendelssohn as a “favorite,” loved these short, evocative pieces, and had him to play them for her often, privately and in company, and even played some of them herself. But, it is probably most valuable to acknowledge, first, that these “Songs without Words” initiated a style of composing emulated by many later composers, including Edvard Grieg, Anton Rubenstein and even his sister, Fanny, among them, giving wonderful stuff to the canon of the piano, and that, second, there is nothing wrong with parlor music when it’s this good!

In each of these “songs,” and in their groupings by four different opus numbers, not to mention the whole mess of them, over two hours in duration, we are treated to splendid aural “imagery” and exceptional tone painting. One can easily imagine texts and tales that could be associated with each. Many poets and admirers, both wise and foolish, have often tried to do just that. Mendelssohn objected, though, particularly when his friend Marc-André Souchay tried to turn them into literal songs by adding texts. I’ll put no quotations here. We are here just to listen to them as written, pure and simple.

By the middle part of the 19th century, the time of these compositions, the piano had become a very popular instrument, one that was increasingly common in middle class European homes. Of course, owners of these instruments sought out pleasant, useful music for their own entertainment and for that of friends. Mendelssohn’s piano songs were quite popular almost instantly and remain his most well-remembered and most-played works in our own time.
Some of the songs, of course, bear titles, but Mendelssohn ascribed only a few of them. The others were added by his publishers after his death. Some are sticky sweet: “Consolation” and “Sweet Remembrance” and so on. Others (“Spinning Song,” “Gondolier’s Song”) give us a few nice mnemonics by which to remember them.

Melody, as we immediately hear from the first measures, is supreme here. By “omitting” texts, as Mendelssohn’s biographer R. Larry Todd wrote, these brief works “broached in a different way the ability of music to convey extramusical ideas.” What a fine tour of imagined things we get to take in listening to this carefully chosen collection of favorites from Inon!

Ronald Stevenson

Peter Grimes Fantasy

Composer: born March 6, 1928 in Blackburn, Lancashire; died March 28, 2015 in West Linton, Scotland

Work composed: 1971, for the pianist Graham Johnson

Estimated duration: 7 minutes

The name of composer Ronald Stevenson may be new to many in today’s audience, as it was to me, and this Fantasy, based on themes from Benjamin Britten’s opera, Peter Grimes, may send us all looking into more of his music. Stevenson was actually quite prolific and even a quick search of his music on YouTube will yield one many fine things, in multiple genres, to listen to.

His was an astonishing musical life, 87 years of it, full of fascination with fellow adventurers in pianism and composition (Busoni, Grainger, and Paderewski were among his idols.) Too, he had a profound social and political conscience and was outspoken in many admirable ways. Movie-star good looking, and with a flair for dressing well, he was omnivorous in his explorations of unorthodox inspirations for composing. Some critics called him post-modern, and that may be just. Most of all, though, one should observe his rigorous compositional processes married to vivid post-Romantic emotion. Particularly in the piano music, requiring exceptional virtuosity to play, we can hear his respect for the musical past and his striving toward a new aesthetic. His music seems always to reveal his passion for celebrating all of human experience.

This “piece of music in love with a piece of music,” as I often say about transcriptions, variations, and the like, incorporates a fugue on two subjects and strives, quite successfully I think, to give the listener a remarkably profound acquaintance with the most important stuff of Britten’s opera in very compressed time. In the Fantasy, quotations of storm music and the Dawn Interlude that reflects Grimes’s drowning at sea are juxtaposed, making it, in a way, a microcosm of the entire opera. In crafting it, Stevenson used techniques and tricks that would have been admired by Liszt. Britten approved of it and it is easy to imagine that he quite admired its compelling, forward power. (Britten himself arranged parts of the opera score as independent pieces, too, among them the Four Sea Interludes and the Passacaglia. Such transcriptions have always been useful for promulgating significant musical ideas to a wider audience.)

Here is Stevenson on his own work: “Peter Grimes is the living conflict. His pride, ambition, and urge for independence fight with his need for love: his self-love battles against his self-hate . . . .” Thus, into the morning fog we depart for this exceptional reflection of Britten’s austere, bleak tale.

George Gershwin

Prelude No. 2

Composer: born Jacob Bruskin Gershowitz September 26, 1898 in Brooklyn; died July 11, 1937 in Los Angeles

Work composed: 1926, published in 1927

Estimated duration: 5 minutes

We seem, happily, to get a little Gershwin just about every year in one of the recitals on this series and it is good to have some again today. (“Fascinating Rhythm” was the offering last year.) The two works joined here show us all the hallmarks for which we love Gershwin: clear influence from jazz, the ease by which they seem right for any setting from a dive to something after dinner with friends at home to a concert hall. He is one of our very greatest American composers, a real treasure in our musical patrimony.

That jazz flavor is amply evident in the Prelude No. 2 (of a set of three.) Beginning with a veiled melody over a confident bass line, it proceeds by harmonies reminiscent of the stuff by which blues music is made. In the

1717

On March 2 The Loves of Mars and Venus becomes the first ballet performed in England; François Couperin composes L’Atalante

1750

On May 1 George Friederich Handel inaugurates benefit performances of his oratorio Messiah for the Foundling Hospital in London; J.S. Bach dies on July 28 in Leipzig

1797

Franz Schubert is born January 31 in Vienna; Italian dancer, choreographer and dance theoretician Carlo Blasis is born on November 4 in Naples
middle, the key, tempo, and theme all change; only the style holds them together. The first material returns in the final section, a bit abbreviated, then ends sort of smoking its way up the keyboard. Of it, Gershwin himself said that he thought of it as “a sort of blues lullaby.”

**GERSWIN, ARR. BY EARL WILD**

*I GOT RHYTHM*

**ARRANGER:** born November 26, 1915 in Pittsburgh; died January 23, 2010 in Palm Springs

**WORK COMPOSED:** Gershwin’s original was published in 1930; Wild’s “Virtuoso Etudes after Gershwin” were composed in 1954 and 1973

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 5 minutes

The American crazy-virtuoso pianist Earl Wild, pal of Eleanor Roosevelt, first performer of *Rhapsody in Blue*, concert artist for six Presidents in the White House, etc., undertook to make crazy-virtuoso arrangements of many of Gershwin’s songs (to limited triumph, in my opinion). In doing so, he fused the traditions of 19th-century transcribing (think of Liszt again) with the thoroughly modern material that we so admire in original form. He turned a great sleight of hand here and by rendering this and the other songs into show pieces worthy of the concert hall, yet retaining their jazziness, he did a great service to Gershwin, who so wanted to be considered a “serious” composer. But, maybe it’s best just to forget all that sort of musicological talk and just revel in the fun, the joy, that gushes from Gershwin’s wonderful tune. If you feel that you just have to dance a few steps in the lobby at intermission for having heard this, I would think that just exactly the right reaction!

**FRANZ SCHUBERT**

**SONATA IN A MAJOR, D. 959**

**COMPOSER:** born January 31, 1797 in Vienna; died November 19, 1828 in Vienna

**WORK COMPOSED:** composed shortly before his death in 1828 and published in 1837-38

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 38 minutes

“The moment is supreme.” – F.S.

Schubert wrote three piano sonatas at the end of his all-too brief life and this one is the middle of the three. In contrast to the other two, the mood of the A-Major Sonata is not primarily tragic. Schubert certainly knew he was peering at his own mortality, but he saw brightness in the distance as well as somber things. As a set (which, actually, they are not), they are markedly different from one another in character and effect. This sonata, like its two siblings, so reflects his last years of suffering, a time of great despair and deprivation. It is, to my ears, a testament of exceptionally personal revelation coming from a composer who, with few peers, so endlessly revealed his own heart in myriad works.
Vast in its dimensions (cranky sorts will talk of it being “discursive” or “too full of repeats” or will reveal their own attention deficit disorder somehow), it unfolds in a noble way. There will be a stormy, minor key episode in the middle, as is true in so much of Schubert’s music. The writer Joseph Machlis had this to say about the sonatas altogether: Schubert “was not the master builder Beethoven was. Inevitably he loosened the form, introducing into its flexible architecture the elements of caprice and whimsy, improvisation and inspired lyricism. His sonatas are spacious, fantasy-like compositions that display all the characteristics of the Schubertian style – spontaneous melody, richly expressive harmonies, rhythmic vitality, charming changes of key, emotion-charged shifts from major to minor, figuration that is almost always fresh and personal (with an occasional tendency to ramble), and great freedom in the handling of classical form.”

The sonatas were not published before Schubert died. The famous publisher Diabelli put them out ten years later, in 1838, adding a dedication to Schumann, an appropriate thing to do because of his enthusiasm for Schubert’s music.

A grand, majestic subject opens this sonata and then gracefully moves into an exceptional lyricism floating on a sea of triplet figures. A second theme is full of repose and simplicity. These ideas spin together for quite some time to marvelous effect.

A three-part structure is easily perceptible in the slow movement. A hypnotic, rocking theme unspools languorously in f-sharp minor, then gives way to a middle section marked by sharp dissonances, chromatic scales, fluttering trills, and a bass line that rumbles below it all.

The light-hearted mood of the succeeding scherzo is a welcome delight after the seriousness of the prior movements. The latter part of the scherzo seems to face off serenity and violence, or even reason and madness, against each other.

The finale in rondo form (main theme/refrain-idea-refrain-next idea-refrain-third idea-refrain-etc.) lets us see, I think, most clearly the congenial, sincere man that all his contemporaries thought him to be.

It is all too easy for any of us to put “the greats” in a mental museum, if not a mental mausoleum, because they can seem removed from our own time, so it strikes me as terrific that we are invited especially today to listen even more closely to this ultra-personal pouring forth of “self” from the composer who so easily can also be considered to be a friend.

“All three of the last sonatas are works in which meditation, charm, wistfulness, sadness, and joy are housed in noble structures.”

– George R. Marek, 20th-century music executive and biographer of many composers

1840
“Tippecanoe and Tyler Too” comes out of the campaign of of President William Henry Harrison; Felix Mendelssohn completes his Songs without Words

1861
Lola Montez, the famous “Spanish dancer” and mistress of King Ludwig I Bavaria, dies on January 17; Brahms composes Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op. 24

1875
Maurice Ravel is born on March 7 in Ciboure, France; in the US the popular song “Carve Dat Possum” is published by Sam Lucas & Herbert Hershy
It is normal for concert artists appearing in this series to “invite” us on a “journey” musically. In this program, though, it seems to me that Inon Barnatan will do that with a special kind of charm and, in the first half, with a conciseness and thoroughness that is really exceptional.

In choosing to craft a “suite” of seemingly disparate pieces – and, yes, he has been quite observant of the traditions of dance inspiration that define a suite – he will take us on a fantastic ride of sharply contrasting compositional approaches. But, it coheres remarkably and, I predict, will be of very moving impact.

The compositional organization of a “suite” began in the 17th century and, while fading for a time in the 19th, it then enjoyed robust revival in the 20th. It is still popular with contemporary composers.

So, why shouldn’t an artist select pieces that fulfill the tradition of slow-fast-slow-fast-dances-with-a-prelude/etc., and take it a step further to challenge and engage the ear and heart of the listener in new ways? Barnatan, I think, in this program selection has done this brilliantly.

**Jean-Philippe Rameau**

**Courante from Suite in A Minor**

**COMPOSER:** born September 23, 1683 in Dijon; died September 12, 1764 in Paris

**WORK COMPOSED:** 1726-27, included in *Nouvelles suites de pièces de clavecin*

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 4.5 minutes

“We must have recourse to the rules of music when our genius and our ear seem to deny what we are seeking.”

– J-P.R.

To our modern eyes and ears, much of the 18th-century French aesthetic can seem “merely” all perfumed and curlicued and lacy, but a closer examination reveals that, from the best composers and artists, there is an underlying solidity, an orderliness that renders all that ornamentation not at all frivolous, but, rather, necessary and thrilling. In this Courante, one can hear melodic and harmonic sequences (repetitions of small ideas in modulating and very pleasing ways) as intriguing as can be; think of parallels, for example, in the Rococo decoration of an organ case of the same period. For added fun, note how Rameau takes the left hand zooming around in the bass notes two octaves and more below middle-C, an extra sonic opportunity for the grand piano!

**Francois Couperin**

**1915**

“I Love a Piano” by Irving Berlin is published; Earl Wild is born November 26 in Pittsburgh
L’ATALANTE (12EME ORDRE)

**COMPOSER:** born November 10, 1668 in Paris; died September 11, 1733 in Paris

**WORK COMPOSED:** 1717

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 1.5 minutes

“Experience has taught me that hands that are strong and capable of executing that which is fastest and lightest are not always those which succeed in the tender and sentimental pieces, and I would acknowledge in good faith that I like better what touches me than what surprises me.” — F.C. in his preface to the *Pièces de clavecin* (Paris, 1713)

Staying in the splendid French keyboard tradition, we get our next dance from the Twelfth “Order” of Couperin’s Second Book of Harpsichord Pieces, that being the term he used to connote a suite. Some of the movements in his *Ordres* are titled with the dance terms and others, like today’s L’Atalante, have deliberately ambiguous titles. No mind — here is a fine flurry of notes in just two voices that sails along, hardly ever taking a breath. Scholars puzzle over which Atalante the title refers to, the mythological, fierce Greek huntress or the sorcerer Atalante of the late-medieval Orlando tradition.

MAURICE RAVEL

**RIGAUDON FROM LE TOMBEAU DE COUPERIN**

**COMPOSER:** born March 7, 1875 in Ciboure, France; died December 28, 1937 in Paris

**WORK COMPOSED:** between 1914 and 1917

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 3 minutes

“We should always remember that sensitiveness and emotion constitute the real content of a work of art.” — M.R.

Ravel, like many of his contemporaries, Vincent d’Indy in the lead among them, took a great interest in French music of his predecessors, particularly the grand keyboard tradition of the 18th-century clavecinistes, two of whose music we will have just heard. In the early part of his maturity as a composer, he undertook to write a “French Suite” in homage, in a sense, to that tradition and its practitioners. But, this was the time of World War I and that music, like Ravel’s life, would be greatly changed by the tragedies of that conflict. The music, of course, honors Couperin but, more important, became a set of six movements reflective of and memorializing six of Ravel’s friends killed in battle. (The whole *Tombeau* was heard on this series last year.)

Ravel strove, successfully, I think, to revive the grandeur of that prior musical tradition, the Baroque dance suite, with snappy rhythms and abundant ornamentation, but with decidedly 20th-century chromatic harmony and a kind of neoclassicism.

The 18th-century Provençal *rigaudon* that Ravel “borrowed” as a framework
for his *Rigaudon* was a quick, courtly social dance and he retained its enthusiastic rhythmic character, but inflected it with bright colors that sound fresh every time one hears them. A contrasting quiet section in the middle lends a reflective moment in the swoosh of this fine dance.

**THOMAS ADÈS**

**BLANCA VARIATIONS**

**COMPOSER:** born March 1, 1971 in London

**WORK COMPOSED:** 2015

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 5 minutes

“In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts.” – critic Alex Ross reflecting on Thomas Adès’s compositions

“... There was a bit of attraction and a bit of repulsion in that these sour notes made me wince, but I really wanted to go back to them and find out why they hurt me so much.” – T.A.

Many in today’s audience will know the name and music of Thomas Adès because, happily, several of his great works have been played by the Oregon Symphony in recent time. Too, Adès’s opera, *The Exterminating Angel*, based on a film by Luis Bunuel, was one of the recent selections for high-definition live broadcast into movie theatres by the Metropolitan Opera. Perhaps a few lucky folks among us got to see it live in New York. I envy them.

Today’s work, the Blanca Variations, appear in that opera in the first act, but were originally commissioned as a stand-alone composition for the 2016 Clara Haskil International Piano Competition. Adès chose a folk tune from the Spanish Sephardic Jewish tradition, *Lavaba la blanca nina*, sung in Ladino dialect, and of it said that it displays “an unassuageable harmonic structure very typical of longing and bereavement.” Five variations after the poignant theme explore emotional depths that many of us are shy to visit. With wildly ornamented melodic lines and rhythms reminiscent of the flamenco tradition, we are confronted with a character (the theme) of unparalleled force of will, but, in the variations, must equally meet moments of tragedy and unbearable pain. The final variation, filled with crazy, delirious ornaments and trills is unsurpassed pathos.

**GYÖRGI LIGETI**

**MUSICA RICERCATA**

**COMPOSER:** born May 28, 1923 in Târnăveni, Romania; died June 12, 2006 in Vienna, Austria

**WORK COMPOSED:** 1953

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 5.5 minutes

“One, in London, the BBC asked me what was my favorite English book. I said Alice in Wonderland.” – G.L.

Surprise! Actually, not a surprise... there is a double meaning in Ligeti’s title, *Musica Ricercata*. He refers first to the *ricercare*, a 17th-century predecessor of the Baroque-period fugue, but also to his own life-long striving to create a compositional process and style “out of nothing,” entirely his own. That is, we could translate that Latin title as “Researched Music” or “Sought-Out Music.” All that said, in this we get a heads-up about some of the more radical directions Ligeti would take in composing down the road a piece.

Eleven movements comprise the *Musica Ricercata* and with today’s selection of the last two movements, in reversed order, we are introduced to his compositional practice of limiting the number of pitches allowed. Two appear in the first movement, another is added in the next, and so on until all twelve pitches of our normal chromatic octave appear in the last movement. (The tenth contains everything except C-natural.)

The eleventh piece is an homage to Girolamo Frescobaldi, the 16th and 17th-century composer who was long organist of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. A master of the toccata (see above!) and the *ricercare*, he, too, was an experimenter with sequences of notes, going further afield chromatically (that is, notes beyond the “legal” scale of a piece) in melodies and being quite the innovator. Ligeti’s *ricercare* here uses all 12 notes of the chromatic scale in various intervals in the main theme and a descending scale for the second subject. In 1953, he published an organ version of this movement, titling it *Ricercare per organo* – Omaggio a Girolamo Frescobaldi.

The tenth movement (without C-natural!) could be described as a frantic dash of close, dissonant scales and arpeggios, egged on by startling rhythms. Near the conclusion, big tone-clusters are to be played “spitefully” and “like a madman,” but then we get a curious, gentle slide in arpeggios right down to the left end of the piano. Maybe Ligeti was just teasing us?

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1971

"Joy to the World" by Three Dog Night topped the charts; Ronald Stevenson composed *Peter Grimes Fantasy*

2006

On June 12, Györgi Ligeti dies in Vienna; the following week Natasha Bedingfield’s "The One That Got Away" topped the US dance single charts

2015

Ronald Stevenson dies on March 28 in West Linton, Scotland; on April 10, the San Francisco Ballet premiers *Swimmer*, a ballet choreographed by Yuri Possokhov
SAMUEL BARBER
SONATA IN E-FLAT MINOR: FUGUE

COMPOSER: born March 9, 1910 in West Chester, PA; died January 23, 1981 in NYC

WORK COMPOSED: 1947
ESTIMATED DURATION: 5 minutes

“I have always believed that I need a circumference of silence. As to what happens when I compose, I really haven’t the faintest idea.” — S.B.

Some years ago, I wrote that that there should be a statue of Samuel Barber somewhere in America. I still feel that way. My 50-year acquaintance with his music has only increased my belief that he was one of our nation’s greatest composers. This sonata, from which we will hear the final movement to conclude Inon’s happily contrived suite, is evidence of that genius and generosity. Commissioned in 1947 by Irving Berlin and Richard Rogers to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the League of Composers, the booster club for American music, this sonata was originally conceived to be of three movements. Vladimir Horowitz, chosen for the premiere, convinced Barber that it needed a big finale and he gave Horowitz that and more.

This is a FUGUE in all capital letters, meaning that Barber utilized every compositional device that generations of composers ever did, sometimes by “the rules,” to render a marvel out of a plain theme, repeated and slightly altered by various voices conversing in radical agreement. (All fugues do this. Some succeed more than others.) An American, jazzy accent is perceptible in the proceedings, all to its benefit, but it bows, too, to the great Russian piano tradition of vivid tone coloration and huge sound borne out by formidable technique. Horowitz must have been thrilled. We will be, too.

There is a fine moment of calm in the middle and you might take the memorable tune home with you, but then there is this busting-out-all-over climax with a cadenza like no other and sounds crashing all over the keyboard like a big house afire, leading to one of the most thrilling and deeply pleasing conclusions in the whole of 20th-century music.

JOHANNES BRAHMS
VARIATIONS AND FUGUE ON A THEME BY HANDEL, OP. 24

COMPOSER: born May 7, 1833 in Hamburg, Germany; died April 3, 1897 in Vienna

WORK COMPOSED: 1861
ESTIMATED DURATION: 27 minutes

“In a theme for a [set of] variations, it is almost only the bass that has any meaning for me. But this is sacred to me, it is the firm foundation on which I then build my stories. What I do with a melody is only playing around ... If I vary only the melody, then I cannot easily be more than clever or graceful, or, indeed, [if] full of feeling, deepen a pretty thought. On the given bass, I invent something actually new, I discover new melodies in it, I create.” — J.B.

Any audience member this afternoon who has come to these recitals for some time (New people! — Keep coming! It’s great every time!) will have had the experience of “finally” hearing not merely a favorite work, but one that has alternately inspired and tortured one with its beauty and sirene-like calling to listen deeper and deeper to it. Such is the case for me today with this masterwork from Brahms. I bet I’m not the only one to feel that way. I like to imagine that we will all leave this evening slightly better people for having heard it, especially from Inon.

Brahms, as we know, quite admired the musical achievements of prior musical eras, particularly the Baroque, with its counterpoint, balance, elegance of proportion, and so on. The finale of his fourth and final symphony, for example, contains a passacaglia, that mountain of music made over an oft-repeated bass line. In choosing a theme for this set of variations (there are other sets, of course), he chose a composer from more than a century prior to his own time.

Taken from Handel’s Suite in B-flat Major, HWV 435, of 1733, the theme is a best example of precisely those “antique” characteristics that Brahms loved and admired. (Brahms was a passionate bibliophile and owned a first edition of the Handel original.) With its two balanced halves, each repeated, and the lovely ornamentation that makes it all the more engaging, we have the departure point for two-dozen-plus-one variations that range from the poetic to nearly unbridled exuberance.

Much of his proceedings could be considered traditional, staying, as he did, with honored genres of the musical past: we hear a siciliana, a canon, a musette, and so on, not to mention the towering fugue of the end. But, Brahms was no stick in the mud. We hear multiple rhythms in two of the variations, hefty chords and grand sonorities in others, even “Gypsy violin sixths” right in the variation in the middle. How he did this is, of course, important, but even more important, I would claim, is how it grows in majesty as the variations unroll. One might well be ready to stand and salute by the end of the last variation.

But, wait! He’s not done with us yet. A fugue subject of seemingly mincing steps right at the beginning evolves, via that masterful contrapuntal skill he had, into an aurally, intellectually, and heart-wise beguiling homage to the theme. It grows and grows and then comes a spine-straightening moment of “pedal-point,” a sort of rock-solid harmonic grounding while the fireworks start exploding. The finale is simply heroic.

Brahms was 28 years old when he played this piece at his own debut
concert in Vienna in 1862. Along with other significant works, this, too, is dedicated to his “beloved friend” Clara Schumann, a gift on her birthday in 1861. Scores of writers and nosy people have speculated about what really was the relationship among Johannes, Clara, and Robert. I prefer to reflect on the fulsome admiration they had for one another and how very kind and devoted they were, particularly after Robert’s mental illness and death.

So very monumental, to my ears, is this music, so redolent of devoted love of many years’ duration, that I will close these remarks with a poem from the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, Lisel Mueller so that you might have a little extra bit of inspiration for close listening to one of Brahms’s best things.

**Johannes Brahms and Clara Schumann**

The modern biographers worry
“how far it went,” their tender friendship.
They wonder just what it means
when he writes he thinks of her constantly,
his guardian angel, beloved friend.
The modern biographers ask
the rude, irrelevant question
of our age, as if the event
of two bodies meshing together
establishes the degree of love,
forgetting how softly Eros walked
in the nineteenth-century, how a hand
held overlong or a gaze anchored
in someone’s eyes could unseat a heart,
and nuances of address not known
in our egalitarian language
could make the redolent air
tremble and shimmer with the heat
of possibility. Each time I hear
the Intermezzi, sad
and lavish in their tenderness,
I imagine the two of them
sitting in a garden
among late-blooming roses
and dark cascades of leaves,
letting the landscape speak for them,
leaving us nothing to overhear.

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