

The Classics



Classic Examples
Mon to Wed from 6 to 8 PM, Thu from 6-8:30 PM
Saturday & Sunday Breakfast
Sat from 6 till 9 AM and Sun from 7 till 9 AM

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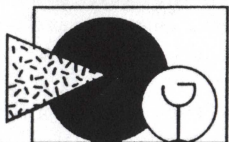
"Music is well said to be
the speech of angels."
Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881)

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EDMONTON ART GALLERY

GOURMET



GOODIES



University
of
Alberta

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music at convocation hall

Jacques Després, piano

Friday, January 12, 2001

7:15 pm *Pre-Concert Introduction*
by Henry Klumpenhower
Main floor, Convocation Hall

8:00 pm *Concert*



Arts Building
University of Alberta

Program

CD1: MMI.03A

Sonata in E Major (1788), VB 196 Joseph Martin Kraus
1 Vivave (1756-1792)
2 Adagio
3 Andante con variazione

Variationen über ein Motiv (basso ostinato) Franz Liszt
aus der Kantate "Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen" (1811-1886)
4-6. und dem "Crucifixus" der h-moll
Messe von J.S. Bach (1862), S. 180

Intermission

CD2: MMI.03B

1 Pictures at an Exhibition (1874) Modest Musorgsky
Promenade (1839-1881)
Gnomus
[*Promenade*]
Il vecchio castello
[*Promenade*]
Tuileries (Dispute d'enfants après jeux)
(*Tuileries [dispute between Children at Play]*)
Bydlo (Cattle)
[*Promenade*]
Balet nevyilupivshikhysya ptentsov
(*Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks*)
"Samuel" Goldenberg und "Schmuyle"
[*Promenade*]
Limoges le marché (la grande nouvelle)
(*The Market (The Big News)*)
Catacombae (Sepulcrum romanum)
Con mortuis in lingua mortua
(*with the Dead in a Dead Language*)
Izbushka na kur'ikh nozhkakh (Baba-Yaga)
(*The Hut on Hen's legs (Baba-Yaga)*)
Bogatyrskie vorota (vo stol'nom gorode vo Kieve)
(*The Knight's Gate in the Ancient Capital Kiev*)

2. Encore: Scarlatti; sonata L.118 in F minor

Widely acclaimed pianist Jacques Després has dazzled audiences for over two decades in his native Canada and the U.S. with his sensitive yet powerful style and sympathetic interpretations of a broad range of composers. Respected American critic Leslie Gerber took notice of this versatility by writing, "Few major pianists have given equally convincing performances of Beethoven and Chopin. The ability to play one composer's music very well seems almost to preclude doing as well with the other. But Després proved an exception to this rule...He immediately showed that he is a Bartok player after the composer's own heart."

Since his debut with the Montréal Orchestra Symphony Orchestra in 1978, Mr Després has appeared as soloist with many other symphony orchestras under the baton of conductors including Otto-Werner Müller, Franz-Paul Decker, Jens Nygaard and Simon Streatfield. He also shared the stage, in gala concerts, with internationally renowned pianists Radu Lupu, Lazar Berman, Ilana Vered, David Owen Norris, and Nicolai Petrov. Mr Després' tours have included numerous recitals in Canada aired on CBC radio, and performances at summer festivals in North America.

Mr Després has established a solid reputation as a leading lecture-performance artist on both period and modern instruments. He was invited to speak on the Chopin Ballades at the Juilliard School, the early sonatas of Beethoven at the yearly Friends of the Arts Beethoven Festival on Long Island and the Bartók Mikrokosmos at Vanderbilt University.

The long list of Mr Després' prestigious awards includes: The Frank Kopp Memorial Prize at the University of Maryland International Piano Competition; First Prize at the Montreal Symphony Orchestra Competition; and the Musical Academy of Quebec "Prix d'Europe" competition. He is also the recipient of numerous grants from the Juilliard School, the Quebec ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs, and the Canada Council.

Després was the musical director of Summer Serenades, a four-week lecture-concert series at the University of Stony Brook's Staller Center. This imaginative series won an enormous following due in large part to Després performances, his lucid and illustrative pre-concert lectures, and his creative programming. The series not only delivered compelling solo and chamber music performances from the standard repertoire; it also gave voice to such neglected composers as Clara Schumann, Alma Mahler-Werfel, and Federico Garcia Lorca to name but a few.

Mr Després completed his doctorate at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and holds a Masters degree from the Juilliard School of Music. He received with High Distinction the Artist Diploma from Indiana University, and was awarded a unanimous first prize from the Conservatory of Quebec, which invited him to perform recitals commemorating the school's 40th and 50th anniversaries. He studied under many of the great masters including György Sebök, Gilbert Kalish, Adele Marcus, William Masselos and Christiane Sénart. Mr Després has taught at Western Washington University and in the fall 2000, joined the Music Department of the University of Alberta in Edmonton. He also has recorded solo piano repertoire for the Eroica and VDE/Gallo CD labels. Naxos will release his latest CD, featuring the keyboard works of Joseph Martin Kraus, in the spring 2001.

Joseph Martin Kraus (1756-1792) can be considered one of the most talented and unusual composers of the eighteenth century. Born in the central German town of Miltenburg am Main, he received his earliest formal education in nearby Buchen and at the Jesuit Gymnasium and Music Seminar in Mannheim, where he studied German literature and music. He studied law at universities in Mainz and Erfurt, and Göttingen, coming under the influence at the last of the remnants of the Göttinger Hainbund, a *Sturm und Drang* literary circle.

In 1778 the composer decided to dedicate his life to music and to seek employment in Sweden at the court of Gustav III. Although promised a position, he found it difficult to break into the cultural establishment of Stockholm, and for the next two years he faced dire economic circumstances as he attempted to overcome the political obstacles. In 1780 he was commissioned to compose a trial work, *Proserpin*, whose text had been drafted by the king himself and versified by poet Johan Kellgren. Its successful private performance at Ulriksdal in 1781 brought an appointment as deputy Kapellmästare and in 1782 a grand tour of Europe at Gustav's expense to view the latest in musical and theatrical trends. This took him throughout Germany, Austria, Italy, England, and France where he met major figures of the period such as Gluck and Haydn.

Kraus returned to Stockholm in 1787 and the following year was appointed as First Kapellmästare and director of curriculum at the Royal Academy of Music. For the next several years he achieved a reputation in Stockholm for his disciplined conducting, his activities as a composer, and his rigorous pedagogical standards. He was a participant in the Palmstedt literary circle and contributed much to the establishment of Stockholm as one of the leading cultural centers of Europe. Nine months after the assassination of Gustav III in 1792, Kraus succumbed to tuberculosis and died at age thirty-six.

As a composer, Kraus can be seen as one of the most innovative of the entire century. His earliest training brought him the Italian style of the Mannheim composers, the contrapuntal rigor of Franz Xaver Richter and J. S. Bach, as well as the dramatic style of C. P. E. Bach, Gluck, and Grétry. A man with many talents, the composer was also theorist, pedagogue and author (a book of poetry and a tragedy). His treatise, *Etwas von und über Music fürs Jahr 1777* (Frankfurt, 1778), is one of the few examples of literary *Sturm und Drang* aesthetics applied to music. His compositional style features the unexpected, the dramatic, and it is not surprising therefore to find many forward looking stylistic devices that anticipate music of the next century.

In comparison with many of his contemporaries, Kraus wrote a relatively small amount of music for pianoforte. Only seven works—two sonatas, three sets of variations, and two smaller miscellaneous pieces—survive, although there is evidence that there may have been more. For example, in March of 1779 he composed a sonata for a Countess Ingenheim (VB 189) from Mainz, perhaps a potential patron or a family friend, which he sent from Stockholm. This work had a tortuous journey; somehow it was returned to him in June from London, and it was lost after being re-mailed. Another series of six pieces (VB 206) were stolen in 1778 by a Dutch sea captain, though these may not have been keyboard pieces although the composer did perform them for his felonious customer on the fortepiano. What is left, however, demonstrates that Kraus was thoroughly knowledgeable on the instrument, using its expressive power to craft a series of works that are highly individualistic. Although he was not himself a professional performer on the instrument, he nonetheless was often heard in soirées at the Palmstedt Circle or for friends in compositions by himself and others. On one such occasion in 1787, the Spanish ambassador Miranda wrote in his diary simply: "Kraus played like an angel."

The Sonata in E major (VB 196) is the most complex and difficult of Kraus works for pianoforte. It was probably written in 1788 especially for publication by Åhlström. The unusual opening 3/4 meter and the broad thematic sweeps are an acute foreshadowing of Beethoven in their grandeur. Parallel octaves and forceful thematic statements give the movement a power that is unexpected and progressive, while the composer modulates freely and often. The second movement is a marvel of fluid tempos and expression, drawing its inspiration from the fantasies of C. P. E. Bach, but in style and tone there are hints throughout of later composers; both Chopin and Liszt come to mind. The movement wanders down dark and spectral musical paths, surfacing occasionally into the lyrical world of classicism with short sections of flowing melody. The march-like theme of the finale heralds a concluding set of variations, calculated to demonstrate both musical diversity and virtuosity. Of particular note is when Kraus suddenly switches to compound meter, forcing the variation melody into a somewhat strange gigue, a humorous antidote to the flashing virtuoso display of the previous variation. Thereafter follows a ghostly sostenuto which sounds strangely close to the famous movement from Beethoven's Moonlight sonata. Finally, the march returns, the marshaling of the musical troops after a varied and difficult march.

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Romantic hero, demonic piano wizard, reclusive and pious monk: we too easily accept these as the superficial personae of a clever showman. If anything, Franz Liszt understood the magic of all these dimensions of the human spirit. Music enabled him to experience and express demonic fervor, heroic passion and intense religious devotion with a white-hot conviction that occasionally violates our notions of taste and propriety. Liszt, however, was not interested in decorum. His revolutionary approaches to performance and piano technique reveal a proud pioneer. As a composer, he was no less a pioneer and no less bold, particularly as he reached his later years.

Best known today for his brilliant études, rhapsodies and transcriptions, Liszt was also a prolific composer of music with religious themes. Many of these works are awash in a seraphic light, but in some works, we can witness Liszt in search of spiritual consolation.

Shortly after the death of his 26-year-old daughter, Blandine, Liszt composed the *Variationen über ein motive (Basso ostinato) aus der Kantate, "Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen" und des "Crucifixus" Der H-moll Mess von J.S. Bach* (1862). The grieving Liszt addresses his suffering using Bach's voice—a mystical utterance in and of itself for Liszt—as a starting point. The composer approaches this passage like a prayer but in a genre he had developed into an essay form: the variation-fantasy. Liszt's "Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen" is a virtuoso study of the pathos inherent in the "motive" taken from Bach's Cantata and the *Crucifixus* of the B-Minor Mass. This "motive," an ostinato bass, is a chromatically descending tetrachord, a favorite ground or passacaglia bass used by composers for centuries. Bach used this particular passacaglia not only in the "Weinen, Klagen" cantata and the B-Minor Mass, but in two other cantatas. This descending bass line suggests a sense of bottomless sorrow. Technically speaking, such a bass line allows the composer to create suspensions and other expressive dissonances and resolutions with the slightest movement in the voices above the bass.

Nothing was novel about using the descending ground for a set of variations (the practice has been around since the late fifteenth century and was extremely popular in the Baroque), but for Franz Liszt, the source of the material was steeped in a mystical aura. By the middle of the nineteenth-century, the figure of Bach had become fully consecrated. Bach sat in the musical heavens, a godlike genius, exalted as one of the first composers of absolute music (although Bach was far better known in his day as a composer of vocal works). Bach's religious vocal music (particularly *St. Matthew's Passion* and the B-Minor Mass) was held as a sacred object in the minds of many musicians. In "Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen" Liszt treats the Bach excerpt as a religious object, respecting its mystical potential. For a motto to the composition, Liszt includes the text from the cantata's opening chorus:

*Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen,
Angst und Not Sind der Christen Tränenbrot . . .*

*Weeping, wailing, grief and fear,
dread and need are the Christian's tearful bread . . .*

The composition is a free variation-fantasy, mostly constructed from regular phrases built on the ostinato and loosely based on the vocal motives and harmony that made up Bach's original. Throughout this organic series of more than twenty variations built on or derived from the descending chromatic gesture, Liszt employs familiar piano variation techniques. In this religious variation-fantasy, Liszt is not attempting to dazzle his audience; he is grappling with the "tearful bread" he has been given. After a brief, anguished introduction and a statement of the ostinato, Liszt paraphrases Bach's chorus but with a gentle hand in the treble register. The variations bear such expressive markings as *dolente* (sad), *piangendo* (weeping), and *tempestuoso*. Following an unrelenting series of variations, Liszt breaks off for a *lagrimoso* (tearful) recitative-like section. He resumes with an *andante* passage of *dolce piangendo* (sweetly weeping), overlapped chromatic strains. These travel to the bass where they become a repeated note accompaniment for an agitated allegro which breaks off in a cadenza. At this point, one might expect Liszt the virtuoso to leap into some pyrotechnical super-variation; instead, he walks to the simple, assuring Chorale from the close of Bach's cantata. Liszt inscribed the text for this chorale over the notes (except he excludes the last words):

*Was Gott tut das ist wohlgetan, dabei will ich verbleiben.
es mag mich auf die rauhe Bahn Not, Tod und Elend treiben,
es wird mich Gott ganz väterlich in seinen Armen halten.*

*What God does is rightly done, to this I will cleave, when need, death and suffering drive
me onto a cruel road God will hold me like a father in his arms.*

The tormented emotional probing of the previous pages (all in F minor) arrives at the heavenward affirmation in the F major chorale enfolded in the assuring resonance of the chorale's closing statement. With a glance to a little sequence based on the descending motive, Liszt restates the chorale's declaration in a triumphant coda.

If Liszt turned to Bach as a source of spiritual strength and musical material, Modest Musorgsky turned to his country's folk and Orthodox church culture for his nourishment. Time marched too swiftly for Musorgsky. Descended from the landed gentry, Musorgsky was disoriented completely by the emancipation of the serfs. The young aristocrat had to return home to help his brother run the family estate. Two years later he joined the civil service working as a petty bureaucrat. Although he has been portrayed (especially by Soviets) as a social progressive, Musorgsky was a bewildered fop who yearned for a fantasy Russia, one that he could attain only in his music.

Not long after celebrating the success of his opera, *Boris Godunov*, Musorgsky learned of the death of his friend, Victor Hartman. Hartman's skillful excursions into Russian folk fantasy were entirely impractical as architectural structures, but exceedingly fruitful as inspirations for Musorgsky. To commemorate the deceased architect, Vladimir Stasov organized an exhibition of Hartman's drawings, painting and architectural sketches. In June of 1874, Musorgsky began drafting the character pieces that were to become *Pictures at an Exhibition*. The music is self-consciously steeped in Russian culture from the musical style of the unifying *Promenade*, and the folklike melodies of *Bydlo*, *Il vecchio castello*, to the Russian subject matter of some of the "pictures."

Not unlike Liszt's "Weinen, Klagen" Variations, *Pictures at an Exhibition* is a variation fantasy, probing its subject with limitless imagination. The affable and confident *Promenade* is the subject; the character pieces are excursions and reflections on the paintings and drawings of Hartman.

There is a temptation to hear this as an assembly of character pieces, but Musorgsky's conception shows a keen sensitivity to the relationship of the subjective *Promenade* (which can easily be identified with an ambulating spectator) to the objective "pictures." Once this relationship is established, Musorgsky produces a developing psychological portrait of a spectator responding to an exhibition. For Musorgsky, the pictures represent the magic of the Russian imagination. As the distinction between spectator and pictures blurs (the character of the promenade is subsumed by the overwhelming influence of the pictures), Musorgsky transforms his spectator.

Promenade: "Just lively enough, in a Russian manner, without happiness but a little sustained" writes Musorgsky. This initial promenade is interrupted by the hideous *Gnomus*. Perhaps Musorgsky wants to convey his sympathy for the wretchedness of the gnome, feeling compassion as it struggles with each step. But the spectator takes leave of this image; there is a sense that it presents too much misery to bear.

Proceeding with a columnar *Promenade*, the spectator arrives before a painting of an old Italian castle. The lilting "siciliano" rhythm and "Russian" drone of *Il vecchio castello* evoke a sense of longing. The spectator broods over the distant castle (distant in time, in place, in otherness), following every subtle inflection of the lithe melody, tracing the graceful form of the old castle.

A stern promenade makes an about face, breaking the castle's hypnotic spell. The spectator stands before a tableau of children at play, *Tuileries*. A tender and somewhat wily sketch, this capricious scene lightly teases about the piano only to be shattered brutally by the next picture: *Bydlo*. Thundering oxen and ox cart emerge in this vivid portrayal with the immensity and crude beauty of these beasts conveyed by a simple folk-like melody and lumbering accompaniment. This violent disruption in the procession fades, and a celestial *Promenade* quiets the spectator's jangled nerves. As this promenade develops, the understated counterpoint suggests a sense of fragmentary interior dialogue, but the spectator is suddenly distracted: a delightfully silly sketch-- *Ballet of Chicks in their Shells*--inspires a charming and eccentric scherzo.

Immediately after the dance, a severe and complex personality portrait leaps out at the spectator: "*Samuel*" *Goldenberg and "Schmuyle"* lacerates the atmosphere with its grave address. Relentlessly direct, the picture comes to life with stern and pathetic emotional characters in poignant juxtaposition.

The spectator recovers his composure in the pivotal *Promenade*, a return to the music of the opening, but the effect is ripened by the context: we begin to feel a companionship with this spectator who, from this point on, begins to merge with the works in the exhibition. Instantly, he is swept up in the bustle of the market. Limoges is so vivid, the spectator imagines an entire scene transpiring, bursting with gossip and little spats. The dizzying banter breaks off as the spirit of the exhibit takes a serious turn: *Catacombæ*, the boldest experiment of the piece. Here the spectator stares death in the face. Inspired by a watercolor of the Paris catacombs, this stark essay leads into a tremulous *Promenade*, tentatively reflecting the inescapable reality of death.

The *Promenade* fades to a breathless whisper when it is set upon by *Baba Yaga*. The unwary traveler who encounters this creature knows that she may be a benevolent old magician or a bone munching witch. After overcoming this trial, the spectator (now participant) arrives at the *Gates of Kiev*. This majestic conception moved Musorgsky to his most brilliant writing. Kiev was the birthplace of Russian Christianity. Musorgsky contrasts the pomp of the processional music with the unadorned humility of the Russian Orthodox hymn, "As you are baptized in Christ." After an embellishment of the grand processional music, the hymn returns, this time dovetailing onto a wondrously noisy pealing of bells. Bells had long been a crucial prop to Russian life, deliriously signaling important occasions throughout Russia's history. The clanging bells of this picture eventually align to produce a version of the *Promenade*, an apotheosis of the subject, ascending to one final immense version of the processional music.

Musorgsky turns to his faith, a faith in Russian folklore, Russian art, and the Russian spirit; in this rich universe, Musorgsky creates himself anew.