

Presents a Faculty Recital:

Craig Sheppard, *piano*

MOSTLY
BRAHMS

Featuring the music of
JOHANNES BRAHMS
(1833-1897)

7:30 PM
April 20, 2012
Meany Theater

PROGRAM

(from *Five Studies*)
Chaconne in d minor for the left hand alone
after J. S. Bach (1879)

Seven Fantasies, Opus 116 (1892)

Capriccio in d minor

Intermezzo in a minor

Capriccio in g minor

Intermezzo in E Major

Intermezzo in e minor

Intermezzo in E Major

Capriccio in d minor

INTERMISSION

Two Rhapsodies, Opus 79 (1879, published 1880)
b minor
g minor

24 Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Opus 2
(1861, published 1862)

Playing Brahms!

The other day, one of my students asked a fairly innocent question, had I performed all of the works on tonight's program before? Knowing that quite a number of the Liszt pieces I performed back in October were new he must have assumed the same for this program. Well, the answer to his question is a resounding: 'Yes, I have played them all before'! I performed everything on this series (minus the two Schumann works on the first program) in a five-concert series of Brahms's solo piano works in London's Wigmore Hall in February-March, 1979. Indeed, I had already learned a number of the shorter Brahms pieces in my early teens. And, over the years, I've performed the Handel Variations (conservatively) well over fifty times. Tonight's concert is the fourth of five in the present series.

Playing Brahms has always felt 'natural' to me, as I suspect it has for many pianists, simply because he bears his soul so much of the time, and his emotions seem so very real. Brahms, particularly late Brahms, soothes the spirit. Even if we have not lived our lives quite the way he has, or experienced things (and reacted to them) in quite the way he has, we can identify with his anguish, his anxiety, his pain, and ultimately the grace that accompanies his having accepted his fate. Brahms's personal life was an unfulfilled one in many ways, and he had a lifelong struggle with intimacy. His compositions, therefore, became the one area where he could trust his innermost feelings. We, both as listeners and performers, often feel we're eavesdropping on an intimate conversation, a truly private moment. This is particularly apparent in the late works, Opuses 116-119. There are many unforgettable pages here. In the earlier works, a certain ruggedness, a distinct masculinity (I can think of no better word) manifests itself. For sure, there is passion and tenderness, sadness and even tragedy. And no mean amount of technical prowess. But, with a few notable exceptions, I wouldn't call these early piano works 'intimate'.

The *Chaconne for the left hand* is one of five studies that are thought to have been inspired by the *Paganini Variations* of 1866. The first two studies, after an Etude by Chopin and a Rondo by Weber, were published in 1869. Three later studies based on works by Bach, including the *Chaconne* from the *Partita No. 2 in d minor for Violin, BWV1004*, appeared in 1879. In a telling letter to Clara Schumann from Pörschach, (a beautiful town on the peaceful shores of the Wörthersee in Southern Austria), in June 1877, Brahms waxes lyrical about his new transcription: 'On a single stave, for a single instrument, [Bach] writes a whole world

of the profoundest ideas and mightiest emotions. [Were I to have tried to conceive such a work], I am sure that excess of excitement and violent emotion would have driven me crazy...Only in one way do I find that I can procure a much diminished, but approximate and entirely pure, enjoyment of the work – if I play it with the left hand alone!’ The present transcription adheres to the original almost note for note, taking everything down one octave in the process, approximating the range of a cello rather than a violin. It is certainly the most pure, and perhaps the most satisfying transcription of this great work.

The *Seven Fantasies, Opus 116*, might never have been written, had it not been for the noted clarinetist, Richard Mühlfeld, whom Brahms met on a trip to Meinigen in 1890. During the period preceding their meeting Brahms had confided to his close friends that he felt his days of composition were over, that it was time to pass the baton on to a new generation. Mühlfeld changed all that. From Brahms’s pen quickly flowed two clarinet sonatas, the clarinet quintet, and the trio for clarinet, cello and piano. This compositional fire also gave rise to the lyrical late piano works we now cherish, include the last four opuses 116-119. The mood of the first of the three *Capriccio* evokes memories of the *Edward* Ballade of Opus 10 (both are in the key of d minor). The outer sections of no. 2, the first *Intermezzo*, bespeak a certain forlornness, the middle sections’ longing interspersed with moments of great tenderness. No. 3, the second *Capriccio*, brings us back to the more passionate Brahms, interrupted by what is probably a toned down version of a German drinking song (we mustn’t forget that Brahms loved his beer halls!). No. 4 is the undisputed gem of the set. Originally titled *Notturmo*, this *Intermezzo* begs passion, yet is ineffably intimate at the same time. Small admonitions of the spirit break the intimacy at two junctures. To my way of thinking, this *Intermezzo* fuses the past, present and future, lending it a certain moral authority. The *Intermezzo* of No. 5 is a dialogue between two friends, quite in agreement and even ironic at times (Brahms, like Bach, can have a twinkle in the eye in the minor key!). No. 6 is a conversation, again between close friends, in which intimacies and strains from the past are revealed. The intensity which breaks out in the final *Capriccio*, again in the key of d minor, brings us full circle. Brahms often achieved his most passionate statements throughout his life in this dark key (think of the first piano concerto, the third violin-piano sonata).

The two *Rhapsodies, Opus 79*, were composed during Brahms’s summer holiday in Pörtschach in 1879, about the time the *Chaconne for the left hand alone* was published. They are dedicated to Elizabeth von Herzogenberg, a piano pupil to whom Brahms was greatly attracted (in

typical fashion, when intimacy reared its head, he put a distance to the relationship). This might explain the passionate energy in both pieces, with (in the case of the first) a glorious, exalted middle section in the parallel major key. What distinguishes these two pieces from other shorter Brahms works, most of which are in A-B-A *song form* and titled either *Capriccio* or *Intermezzo*, is that they are in *rondo* and *sonata form* respectively. Perhaps this is the reason for the title ‘Rhapsody.’ My guess is that Brahms wasn’t quite sure *what* to call them! A similar situation presents itself with the Schumann *Fantasy in C*, the ultimate decision of the title for which drove Schumann to distraction!

The *Handel Variations* of Opus 24 were composed in 1861, just after Brahms gave up his post as head of the *Frauenchor* (Female Chorus) in Hamburg, and a year before he visited Vienna for the first time (within several years, he was to make Vienna his permanent home). Given the enormous energy that normally accompanies such momentous decisions, it is no surprise that these variations show a vitality, a maturity, and particularly a scope missing in the three previous sets he’d composed (Opus 9, and Opus 21a and 21b). The theme is taken from the *Aria* of the third movement of Handel’s *Harpisichord Suite in B^b*, HWV434. Brahms, a great student of the Baroque, infused many musical elements from that period into his variations. Notably, we have a *canon* in variation 6, a *siciliana* in variation 19, a *musette* (bagpipes) in variation 22, and a glorious *fugue* to finish. They are among the greatest sets of piano variations in the solo piano repertoire.

Program notes © Craig Sheppard 2012

Tonight’s program is being recorded for Romeo Records by Dmitriy Lipay, Chief Recording Engineer for the Seattle Symphony. The concert is being video recorded by Dr. Fumio Ohuchi, Professor of Materials Science and Engineering here at the UW. Susan Cady is the wonderful piano technician. I am performing on my own Hamburg Steinway #489770.

Professor of Piano, CRAIG SHEPPARD, joined the faculty of the School of Music of the University of Washington in 1993 after living twenty years in London. Known for his ebullience and passion at the keyboard, allied to a technical mastery and deep commitment to both scholarly and historic perspectives, Sheppard continues to enjoy a highly successful international concert career that has spanned over forty years. Last month, Sheppard presented his all-Liszt program (heard here in Meany Theater this past October) at the Nehru Memorial Library in New Delhi. This coming September, he does a two-week residency at the University of Melbourne, Australia, during which he will perform the Liszt program and Debussy's 24 Preludes, the latter in preparation for his Meany concert of the same on October 18, 2012. Sheppard will also perform both the Liszt and Debussy programs in New Zealand during the latter portion of September.

In the April, 2011, issue of London's *International Record Review* of Sheppard's recent CD release of *The Last Three Piano Sonatas by Franz Schubert*, Robert Matthew-Walker noted: 'It was Hans Keller who said that *All great artists are, by virtue of what they do, also great teachers* and those who have heard Sheppard's recent recordings on the Romeo label – particularly the complete Beethoven sonatas and the Bach's 48 Preludes and Fugues – will know the truth of that statement... The City of Seattle and the students at its University are indeed fortunate to have him in their midst.' Bryce Morrison, in an earlier review of Sheppard's traversal of the Beethoven sonatas in *Gramophone* magazine, said: 'On record, there are few [performances] more piquantly characterized or, at their finest, more deeply sensitive to the darker recesses of Beethoven's towering imagination'. Peter Cossé, Germany's foremost piano critic, had this to say about Sheppard's Bach: 'Sheppard's technique, in all its elasticity, confirms a musician who always put these means at the service of the composer. Sheppard's Bach is learned, and in every respect well informed as to performance practices of the day. Yet, he never forces his views on the listener, but rather gives the listener sufficient breathing space in which to store the memories.' Following Sheppard's appearance at the 2010 Minnesota Beethoven Festival, the reviewer exclaimed: 'With the [solo] recitals of Yo-Yo Ma and Craig Sheppard, the festival is off to a great start!' Sheppard's recital debut at the Berlin Philharmonic, featuring the 24 Chopin Preludes and Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, caused one critic to enthuse: '*The pianist revealed himself as an intimate connoisseur of Bach's soul.*'

Craig Sheppard was born in Philadelphia in November, 1947. Following early studies with Dr. Lois Hedner and Susan Starr, he studied

at the Curtis Institute under Eleanor Sokoloff, then at The Juilliard School with Sasha Gorodnitzki. He also worked with Claude Frank and Lilian Kallir as a Fromm Fellow at Tanglewood, and with Rudolf Serkin and Pablo Casals at the Marlboro Festival, culminating in a nationwide tour in the *Music from Marlboro* series. In 1972, Sheppard gave his New York debut at the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and six months later won the Silver Medal at the Leeds International Pianoforte Competition in England. Moving to London in 1973, he continued studies with Ilona Kabos, Peter Feuchtwanger and Sir Clifford Curzon, and performed with all the major orchestras in Great Britain and many on the European continent, including the Berlin Philharmonic and the orchestra of La Scala, Milan. During the twenty years he lived in England, Sheppard also taught at Lancaster University, the Yehudi Menuhin School, and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, in addition to giving numerous concerts and master classes at both Oxford and Cambridge universities. Returning to this country in 1993 and taking up residence in Seattle, Sheppard quickly became a favorite at such venues as the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, the Seattle Symphony (where he opened the 1996 Season), and other local and regional arts organizations.

Craig Sheppard's repertoire is eclectic, comprising forty-plus recital programs and over sixty concerti spanning all the major eras of Western music. An avid chamber music player, musicians he has collaborated with include Wynton Marsalis, José Carreras, Victoria de los Angeles, Renato Bruson, Irina Arkhipova, Sylvia Rosenberg, the Cleveland and Emerson string quartets, and many members of the younger generation, including James Ehnes, Stefan Jackiw, Richard O'Neill and Johannes Moser. In this country, he has soloed with the orchestras of Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Atlanta, Dallas, San Francisco and Rochester, among others. Conductors he has played with include Sir Georg Solti, James Levine, Michael Tilson Thomas, Aaron Copland, Yehudi Menuhin, Esa Pekka Salonen, David Zinman, and Leonard Slatkin. A champion of contemporary music, Sheppard gave the world première this past summer of Laura Kaminsky's *Horizon Lines* at the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, and will give the world première next month in Nordstrom Hall for *Music of Remembrance* of Jake Heggie's *Another Sunrise*, inspired by the life of the Polish dissident and Holocaust survivor, Krystyna Zywyłska.

A much sought after pedagogue, Sheppard's students in both Europe and in the US have won numerous local, national and international competitions over the years. A number of former students hold positions

at universities throughout the US, Europe and Asia. With his colleague, Dr. Robin McCabe, Sheppard is co-founder of the Seattle Piano Institute, held every summer at the University of Washington's School of Music for a group of sixteen gifted young pianists from around the world. This July, a second session for students age 15 and under has been added to the schedule.

Craig Sheppard's CDs can be found on the Roméo, AT-Berlin, Philips Sony, and Chandos labels. A voracious reader, he is known for his broad academic interests, particularly foreign languages.

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