

Compact disc

**W** SCHOOL OF MUSIC  
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

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2-18

# A Faculty Recital:

## ROBIN McCABE

### piano

Thursday, February 18, 2016  
7:30 pm - Meany Theater

## PROGRAM

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CD# 17,392

Sonata in G Major, Hob. 40 ..... 9:10 ..... Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

- 1 Allegretto innocente
- 2 Presto

Sonata in g minor, Opus 22 ..... 20:30 ..... Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

- 3 Prestissimo
- 4 Andantino
- 5 Scherzo
- 6 Presto Passionato

## INTERMISSION

Virtuoso Etudes Based on Songs of George Gershwin ..... 22:10 ..... Earl Wild (1915-2010)

- 7 Liza
- 8 Somebody Loves Me
- 9 I've Got Rhythm
- 10 Lady, Be Good
- 11 Embraceable You
- 12 The Man I Love
- 13 Fascinating Rhythm

- 14 encore: Mendelssohn - Song Without Words/duetto - 3:42
- 15 encore: Gershwin - Impromptu in 2 Keys - 1:13

## NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

### Haydn: Sonata in G Major, Hoboken 40

*Haydn excelled in every musical genre. He is fondly known as "the father of the symphony" and could with greater justice be thus regarded for the string quartet. No other composer approaches his combination of productivity, quality and historical importance for these genres.*

James Webster, *The New Grove Haydn*, 2002

The quantity of just a portion of Haydn's compositions, over 100 symphonies and over 60 piano sonatas, is staggering to contemplate when we realize that this is but a fraction of his complete works! Haydn wrote with a luminosity of intent and a clarity of craft which inspires us to this day. Part of his genius was the ability to develop large, sprawling structures out of very short motifs. Beethoven learned valuable lessons from this, for sure!

The little G Major sonata offered here, almost more of a *divertimento*, is a consummate example of this masterful motivic manipulation. The simple, coquettish theme of the opening provides ample fodder for the variations that follow, all emanating from the opening gesture. The variations pose a variety of moods, from childish innocence to short outbursts and coy repeated notes heard in pairs.

The finale is emblematic of Haydn's bent for humor. Here, the naiveté of the opening motif is transformed. The same pitches, the same harmonies now constitute a boisterous, rowdy caper which cavorts up and down the keyboard. Sudden dynamic shifts taunt and tease--jokes and pranks lurk at every turn and twist of a phrase. "Papa Haydn," as he was known, must have had a smile on his face as he dashed off the final notes of this frolic.

### Schumann: Sonata in g minor, Opus 22

*You must have been such a strange boy!*

Letter to Schumann from Clara Wieck, March 4, 1838

*If you want a definition of the Romantic in music, Schumann was it. Everything he wrote was over the top. The music can be incredibly passionate or superbly quiet - he'll go as far as he can in any direction.*

Emanuel Ax, *A Natural History of the Piano*, by Stuart Isacoff

The genesis of Schumann's tempestuous g minor sonata extended over a period of several years. The second movement was the first part of this work to be composed, and may be retraced to the posthumously published song "Im Herbste," (Autumn). It is a delicate soliloquy, tinged with fragile nostalgia. There followed the composing of the first movement, and then the scherzo.

A decision to compose a second version of the finale was likely induced by criticism (a not infrequent occurrence!) from Clara, then 16 years old, who regarded the early final movement as "much too difficult!" "I understand it, of course," she writes, "and I play it as well as I can, but others, even the connoisseurs for whom one really writes, do not understand it." Schumann, perhaps the peacemaker, obliged Clara and wrote a new version of the finale. More than once, Clara had expressed a fervent hope that Robert would compose something capable of arousing popular enthusiasm. "It distresses me when people fail to understand your music," she wrote.

I have always preferred the original version of this finale, also published separately as "Presto Passionato." It is bold and complex in its many ideas and themes, challenging both performer and listener. The textures can tend to be thick, the lines intricately entwined, and it is up to the performer to strive for clarity in the kaleidoscope of projected motifs. But the rhythmic ambiguity and musical content is more compelling, to my own mind and ear, than the relentless duple meter of the re-cast second version.

In both the first and final movements, we find that singular molten, high-voltage fission which lies at the heart of the composer's sensibility. The sonata unfolds with a single, massive, ringing g minor chord. This chord then has a musical "melt-down," fragmenting and hurtling forward with a searing energy that must be unleashed by the performer, and yet controlled. Here is a composer who marks this first movement "as fast as possible," and later, "faster," and a bit later, "faster still!" A daring instruction, indeed, and one to be taken up with some degree of caution by the performer! We who study, teach and perform Schumann will always be drawn to both the unbridled wildness and exquisite intimacy which is at the core of his art.

### Wild: Virtuoso Etudes on Songs of George Gershwin

*George Gershwin died on July 11, 1937, but I don't have to believe it if I don't want to.*

John O'Hara, *Gershwin*, by Edward Jablonski

Novelist John O'Hara, a hard-boiled romantic, tersely captures here the emotion shared by Gershwin admirers across the globe at the time of his death. What an exciting, brief life,

phosphorescent in its prolific talent, and individual creativity! Gershwin left the world much too soon, just shy of his 39<sup>th</sup> birthday.

I have long been fascinated by the realization that George and Ira, the sons of Russian emigrants, could indelibly capture the toe-tapping vitality and heart-on-sleeve expressivity of a musical language so quintessentially *American*. "S'wonderful, s'marvelous," the brothers might croon. From George's days as a song plugger on Tin Pan Alley, to the wonders of *Porgy and Bess*, and *An American in Paris*, we are today blessed with a trove of lyrical gems which enjoy universal and enduring popularity.

It was my good fortune to have known Earl Wild during my years at Juilliard, and he always took a kind and avuncular interest in my career. When I approached and asked him if I could play these etudes for him (I was to take them on a concert tour to Japan), he was extremely generous with his time, even giving me copies of his original manuscript so I could trace the evolution of his ideas.

I can still see the mischievous grin on his face during a coaching, as I struggled to navigate through some of the more treacherous "white water" passages. "My dear," he chortled, "you need to bring out your inner VAMP!"

These etudes are an ingenious blend of wickedly serpentine counterpoint, delectable harmonic twists, and heart-felt melodies. The atmospheres range from the exuberantly audacious to sloe-eyed and sultry. Pianistically, they evoke, at once, the styles of Liszt, Rachmaninoff, and Art Tatum. And most remarkably, the glittering virtuosity of the writing still allows for the essential magic of a Gershwin tune to shine throughout.

Program notes © Robin McCabe, 2016

## **Robin McCabe**

Robin McCabe has established herself as one of America's most communicative and persuasive artists. McCabe's musical sensibilities have delighted audiences across the United States, Europe, Canada and in eight concert tours of the Far East. The United States Department of State sponsored her two South American tours, which were triumphs both artistically and diplomatically.

As noted by the *New York Times*, "What Ms. McCabe has that raises her playing to such a special level is a strong lyric instinct and confidence in its ability to reach and touch the listener." The Tokyo Press declared her a "pianistic powerhouse," and a reviewer in Prague declared, "Her musicianship is a magnet for the listener." Richard Dyer, the eminent critic of the *Boston Globe*: "Her brilliant, natural piano playing shows as much independence of mind as of fingers."

Her recordings have received universal acclaim. Her debut album for Vanguard Records featured the premiere recording of Guido Agosti's transcription of Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite*. Critics praised it as "mightily impressive." *Stereo Review* described her disc of Bartok as "all that we have come to expect from this artist, a first-rate performance!" She was commissioned to record four albums for the award-winning Grammofon AB BIS in Stockholm, which remain distributed internationally, including the CD "Robin McCabe Plays Liszt," (AB BIS No. 185).

McCabe, earned her bachelor of music degree *summa cum laude* at the University of Washington School of Music, where she studied with Béla Siki, and her master's and doctorate degrees at the Juilliard School of Music, where she studied with Rudolf Firkusny. Seattle teacher Willard Schultz is an important mentor from her high school years. McCabe joined the Juilliard faculty in 1978, then returned to the UW in 1987 to accept a position on the piano faculty. In 1994 McCabe was appointed Director of the School of Music, a position she held until 2009. With colleague Craig Sheppard, she has launched the highly successful *Seattle Piano Institute*, an intense summer "immersion experience" for gifted classical pianists. The winner of numerous prizes and awards, including the International Concert Artists Guild Competition and a Rockefeller Foundation grant, McCabe was the subject of a *New Yorker* magazine profile, "Pianist's Progress," later expanded into a book of the same title.

In 1995 McCabe presented the annual faculty lecture – a concert with commentary – at the University of Washington. She is the first professor of music in the history of the University to be awarded this lectureship. *Seattle* magazine selected McCabe as one of 17 current and past University of Washington professors who have had an impact on life in the Pacific Northwest. In 2005, to celebrate its 100th year as an institution, The Juilliard School selected McCabe as one of 100 alumni from 20,000 currently living to be profiled in its centenary publication recognizing distinction and accomplishments in the international world of music, dance, and theater. Today she is a highly-sought teacher, with students from around the world seeking admission to her studio.

McCabe performs regularly throughout the United States. In October 2015 she gave solo recitals and master classes at the Beijing International Piano Festival. She appears often as an invited jurist for international piano competitions, most recently in New Orleans, San Antonio, and Vancouver, Canada. In June of 2016 she will serve on the jury of the Gina Bachauer International Piano Competition.



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