

presents a Faculty Recital:

ROBIN MCCABE
Piano

7:30 PM
January 24, 2012
MEANY THEATER

PROGRAM

CHACONNE IN D MINOR, BWV 1004..... J. S. BACH (1685-1750)
(transcr. Ferruccio Busoni, 1866-1924)

KREISLERIANA, OPUS 16 ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

ÄuBerst bewegt
Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch
Sehr aufgeregt
Sehr langsam
Sehr lebhaft
Sehr langsam
Sehr rasch
Schnell und spielend

INTERMISSION

SONETTO DEL PETRARCA 104, "PACE NON TROVO,"
("PEACE I CANNOT FIND")..... FRANZ LISZT (1811-1886)

Liebeslied (Widmung) }ROBERT SCHUMANN (transc. Franz Liszt)
Frühlingsnacht }

from RIGOLETTO:

CONCERT PARAPHRASE ON THE QUARTET GIUSEPPE VERDI (1813-1901)
(transcr. Franz Liszt)

Ferruccio Busoni is “virtually unrivalled in the history of music,” writes Sir Alfred Brendel in his *Musical Thoughts and Afterthoughts*. “He was a world-famous, phenomenal pianist, a conductor of new orchestra works, a composer of highly significant music for the stage and concert hall...a theorist of genius, a highly cultured man of letters, a devotee of theatre as a sublimation of life, and of life as an extension of theatre; he was a world citizen, a child of his strife-torn age, and the prophet of a music of the future....”

Whew! That is heady praise, indeed. But then the great pianist Wilhelm Kempff also genuflects, declaring Busoni “a kind of musical Leonardo.” The man does seem larger than life, one of those humanists who present an all-embracing spirit about the world itself. There is also something Faustian about Busoni, as Harold Schonberg points out in his book *The Great Pianists*. The man’s restless, searching energy seemed unquenchable. An avant-garde composer, author and theorist who worked out new scale systems, Busoni the intellectual was above all interested in the *idea* and the philosophy of music itself. A fearless innovator, he settled in Berlin and from there advocated his vision for “the music of the future,” distinguished by openness to all new possibilities of sound. This theme was enthusiastically taken up by many of Busoni’s pupils, including Percy Grainger and Edgar Varèse, arguably the father of electronic music. And he was also a transcendent pianist who thought nothing of dispatching fourteen concertos in four programs!

For most of his life as a performer, Busoni specialized in Bach, Liszt and Beethoven. One of his well-known aphorisms: “Bach is the foundation of piano playing. Liszt is the summit. The two make Beethoven possible.” It is also worth noting that Brendel links Bach and Liszt as the two “nerve centers” of Busoni’s repertoire in what he calls the “basis and apex” of pianism. Writes Brendel: “The contemplative inwardness of the one was as congenial to him as the theatrical and mysterious tonemagic of the other.”

Both the contemplative and the theatrical are dimensions adroitly represented in the magisterial transcription Busoni creates in the d minor chaconne. The lucid irrevocability of Bach’s counterpoint and linear progression is faithfully represented, but enriched by harmony and color, and pristinely detailed articulations and expressive indications. The piano writing pays homage to string effects and textures as well, respectfully hearkening back to the genesis of the piece as a movement within a partita for solo violin.

We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and to know the place for the first time.

T. S. Eliot, Little Gidding, (no. 4 of Four Quartets)

The turbulent world of the “Kreisleriana” is not for the faint of heart. From the first opening phrase, Schumann pitches performer and listener into a whirling vortex of shifting tonalities, rhythmic ambiguities, and melodic fragments, interruptions and circular flashbacks luminous with wistful beauty and pain. Written in just a few days, this year (1838) marks, I believe, the beginning of Schumann’s descent into the abyss of mental illness, culminating in his eventual death in an asylum.

Based on a novel by E. T. A. Hoffman, written half by a cat, this piece, a cycle of fantasies, is about split identities. For both Hoffmann and Schumann, such a *doppelgänger* subject presented a compelling minefield where humor and mental imbalance could crouch perilously close. After the opening movement, the next five pieces of the cycle alternate between the two keys of B^b Major and g minor, characterizing the interplay of the two voices of Kapellmeister Kreisler, and the cat, Murr. In the novel, the two stories of the cat and the man alternate, interrupting each other mid-sentence. The cat’s narrative always takes up again where it left off, (as in No. 2 in B^b Major) while Kreisler’s narrative is not continuous.

The end of the novel circles back to the beginning, and the first incident is actually the last. The choice of the name “Kreisler” is more than happenstance. As the character himself says, “There’s no getting away from the word ‘Kreis’ meaning a circle.” For me, personally, the spell of this music is in its suggestion, in half-revealed, half-concealed essence. What counts here is not so much “meaning,” as “shades of meaning.”

Schumann’s love for Clara radiates within the poetic lyricism found throughout the score. But the moody delectation of shuddering rhythmic twists and harmonic convolutions is a dark and insistent interloper. In the end, ideally, we are more aware of Schumann and his encroaching demons than the demonic virtuosity he demands from the performer.

Franz Liszt's 200th anniversary in 2011 was resonant with deserved homage bestowed from concert stages and symphony halls throughout the world. Our "Lust for Liszt," as the *London Times* headlined a feature piece, encouraged many an intrepid pianist to program pieces from among Liszt's staggering output of more than 700 works for our instrument alone!

So in 2012 I arrive a bit late to the party, as the saying goes, but nonetheless enthusiastic about continuing the celebration. A confirmed Lisztophile for many years, I continue to marvel at the range of emotional scope and depth which exists in his music, right along with the blazing pyrotechnics and sword-swallowing virtuosity for which he is most often known.

Alan Walker, certainly today's preeminent Liszt scholar and biographer, contends that Liszt has been very badly served by his chroniclers of the past. "Everyone concentrated on the razzmatazz," he states in a *New York Times* interview of 2001. "{They} turned Liszt into a kind of Elvis Presley of the 19th Century. He was very handsome, very virile. The ladies fell over themselves to get close to him and he was very fond of female company. But to blame Liszt for this, as many of his contemporaries did, is rather like blaming Niagara Falls for the suicides."

Liszt was a musician who was not only interested in playing the piano; he was steeped in history, poetry, art and literature. In fact, as a composer he was ultra-suggestible to the inspiration and stimuli provided by all these external "triggers." And in 1847, at the height of his fame, with his stature comparable to that of a rock star today, Liszt stopped playing concerts and never again appeared in public as a paid artist. Such a decision for a young man in his thirties cannot have been a casual one. He turned, indefatigably for the rest of his life, to composition.

SONETTO DEL PETRARCA 104, "PACE NON TROVO,"
("PEACE I CANNOT FIND")

LISZT

The three Petrarch Sonnets Liszt wrote for piano (first conceived for voice) are eloquent outpourings. The sonnet No. 104 is a tumultuous declamation that expresses the poet's growing, obsessive love for the beautiful Laura. Restless passion, despair, self-loathing and fear are all expressed, culminating in the poet's final brooding statement, consigning his soul to its eternal love-struck state.

LIEBESLIED (WIDMUNG) / FRÜHLINGSNACHT

SCHUMANN / Liszt

Liszt's generosity of spirit and his motto, "génie oblige," led him to champion the works of many other composers. His opera and lieder

transcriptions are a trove of great variety and ingenious adaptation to the solo piano medium. Among them one finds some 55 transcriptions of Schubert lieder alone! Recognizing poetry as the original inspiration for the music, Liszt asked his publishers to print the lyrics plainly above the melody throughout the scores of his transcriptions. Here, Liszt transcribes two Schumann songs for the piano, the ardent *Widmung*, or *Dedication*, and the *Frühlingsnacht*, the *Spring Night*, a blissful evocation in which the piano texture shimmers with trilling nightingales and the promise of a joyous love unfolding.

The poetry of *Widmung* is by Rückhart, the lyrics aglow with a profound and consuming declaration of love and devotion:

You are my soul, my heart,
My ecstasy and my pain.
You are my world in which I live,
My heaven into which I am suspended,
My good spirit,
My better self.

The *Frühlingsnacht* is part of Schumann's "Liederkreis" cycle, composed in 1840. This is often dubbed "the year of song" in which Schumann was to marry his beloved Clara as well as to compose more than 200 songs. The poetry is by Joseph Eichendorff:

Above the garden and across the sky
I heard migrating birds passing;
That meant that spring was in the air;
below, things are already beginning to bloom.

And the moon and the stars say it
and in a dream the grove murmurs it,
and the nightingales sing it:
She is yours, she is yours!

CONCERT PARAPHRASE ON THE QUARTET VERDI / Liszt

In Liszt's many operatic transcriptions he exploited every facet in the arsenal of bravura piano technique. The *Rigoletto Paraphrase* of 1859 is an elaborate version of the famous quartet from Verdi's opera. Liszt's arrangement is essentially conversational and remarkably intimate, depicting the various emotions of the flirtatious characters: ardent passion, coquetry, jealousy and bleak despair.

Celebrated American pianist ROBIN MCCABE has established herself as one of America's most communicative and persuasive artists. McCabe's involvement and musical sensibilities have delighted audiences across the United States, Europe, Canada, and in seven concert tours of the Far East. The United States Department of State sponsored her two South American tours, which were triumphs 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*, wrote: "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 Bartók 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 company Grammofon AB BIS in Stockholm, which remain distributed internationally, including the CD "Robin McCabe Plays Liszt" (AB BIS No. 185).

McCabe, a Puyallup native, 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. She 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. She has held a Ruth Sutton Waters Professorship and a Donald Petersen Professorship in the School of Music. In addition, McCabe is a dedicated arts ambassador and advocate for arts audience development, frequently addressing arts organizations across the country. With colleague Craig Sheppard, she has launched the highly successful *Seattle Piano Institute*, an intense summer "immersion experience" for gifted and aspiring classical pianists that enters its third season in July 2012.

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 lengthy *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.

McCabe performs regularly throughout the United States, and in September of 2011 she made her first visit to South Korea. She appears often as an invited jurist for international piano competitions, most recently in New Orleans, San Antonio, and Vancouver, Canada.

Upcoming piano recitals at the University of Washington:

February 9, Brechemin Piano Series. 7:30 PM, Brechemin Auditorium.

March 8, Brechemin Piano Series. 7:30 PM, Brechemin Auditorium.

April 8, guest artist Bernadene Blaha. 1:30 PM, Brechemin Auditorium.

April 12, Brechemin Piano Series. 7:30 PM, Brechemin Auditorium.

April 20, faculty artist Craig Sheppard, *Mostly Brahms*. 7:30 PM, Meany Theater.

May 10, Brechemin Piano Series. 7:30 PM, Brechemin Auditorium.

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