

Presents a Faculty Recital:

Robin McCabe, *piano*
with
Rachelle McCabe, *piano*

April 24, 2013

7:30 PM

Meany Theater

PROGRAM

Robin McCabe, *Piano*

Prelude in c# minor, Opus 45
Mazurka in c# minor, Opus 50, No. 3 } Frederick Chopin (1810-1849)
Polonaise - Fantaisie, Opus 61 }

"*Masques*" (1904) }
"L'Isle joyeuse" (1904) } Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

INTERVAL

Robin and Rachelle McCabe, *Duo Pianos*

"Pavane for a Dead Princess"

(transcr. Castelnuovo-Tedesco)

from *DAPHNIS & CHLOÉ*: "Daybreak"

(transcr. Vyacheslav Gryaznov)

} ... Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Suite No. 2 in c minor, Opus 17 Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Introduction

Waltz

Romance

Tarantella

FREDERICK CHOPIN (1810-1849)

The piano is my second self.

--FREDERICK CHOPIN

Chopin personified the piano and dedicated himself as a composer almost exclusively to the instrument. Even at the height of his powers he was dependent upon the presence of a piano to enkindle his musical ideas. In 1838, on Majorca, he writes to his piano builder Pleyel in Paris, while impatiently awaiting the ship that will deliver his instrument. He complains that while he 'dreams' of music he can compose none, for the lack of a piano. This is an indication of the extent to which this most *pianistic* of composers thought and discovered through his fingers!

Indeed, we who study, teach and perform Chopin have a sense of this ultra-pianistic identification. Chopin's exquisite natural intuition about the hand and its optimal adaptability to the topography of the keyboard is unique and unparalleled in musical history. It is not an exaggeration to say that one senses an almost mystical connection between Chopin's creative imagination and his physical contact with the keyboard. Chopin did not write music for the piano, but for pianists!

Ravishing melodies and felicities of phrase and rhythm abound on the surfaces of Chopin's music. They are instantly and enduringly beguiling. But these aspects function on a deeper and more implicative structural level. The vitality and strength of these relationships—motivic, rhythmic, and textural—are at the core of Chopin's compositions. As in all great works of art, the "events" of a Chopin work can be susceptible to multiple interpretations, and can have multiple ramifications. As a savory consequence, the music emerges as somehow larger than itself.

And in the end, we are left with a level of musical poetry that utterly defies analysis. As the Chopin scholar Arthur Hedley remarked, "Who will open the nightingale's throat to discover where the song comes from?"

Prelude in c[#] minor, Opus 45

Chopin's set of 24 preludes was completed during his time in Majorca, although most of them were written before he arrived to the island. After these pieces were published, the term *prelude* gained widespread currency as a short character piece. But Chopin returned to the form just once, on one occasion. In 1841, three years after the publication of Opus 28, he composed the c[#] minor prelude. It is a beautifully realized and hauntingly expressive work of moody delectation. But with its cadenza section of collapsing hyper-chromaticism, and its long, seemingly restrained lyrical *cantilena* with intricate, almost serpentine accompaniment, it has little in common with the earlier cycle.

Mazurka in c[#] minor, Opus 50, Number 3

The mazurka engaged Chopin consistently as a form throughout his creative life, from his Opus 6, in 1830, to Opus 69 in his final months. The third and last of the opus 50 mazurkas is a powerful rhapsody whose textural intricacy and intensity of expression are only lightly salted with folk elements. As James Samson says, "At times we need to remind ourselves that this is a dance piece." And the work reflects Chopin's growing interest in counterpoint, the last thing we might reasonably expect in a mazurka! The opening theme is presented as an imitative point, fixating on a luminous, mysteriously accented G[#]. The spare linear texture here takes us well beyond the sphere of the dance. But there are also episodes where we do return to the swirling gestures of the mazurka, with tinges of Lydian mode. Towards the end, the harmonic intensity builds through a sequence of intricate part-writing, all moving in irrevocable momentum toward a powerful climax on a tonic 6/4 chord, again on that pinnacle G[#], a moment that might pre-echo Wagner!

Polonaise-Fantaisie, Opus 61

No other piece of Chopin opens with such mysterious, mist-shrouded "strumming" as Opus 61. Anthony Newcomb's thoughtful analysis evokes the image of "bardic fingers wandering across the strings of a lyre or a harp." And in this majestic opening introduction, one does hear a decidedly narrative "voice," perhaps intoning "and now goes the story of..."

Chopin was indecisive about what to name the piece, a rare conundrum for him. In a letter to his family in 1845, he writes, “Now I would like to finish the Sonata for Violoncello, the Barcarolle and something else that I do not know how to name.” And the compositional drafts of the work clearly show that he tried out several different tonal centers for the opening of the piece before settling on A^b as the beginning chord. The so-called “slow movement” interlude in B Major, so reminiscent of the B Major chorale in the Opus 49 Fantasy, was originally cast in the key of C Major!

In its final iteration, the piece is rich in structural complexity, while still projecting a compelling cohesion. The opening two chords are built on A^b and C^b, presaging in a remarkable way the main tonal centers of the work. Tonal and motivic relationships abound, and one moves quite seamlessly from sections in which the dance dominates, into dreamy episodes that function as nocturnes. Lyrical, private ruminations lead to sections of outspoken heroic evocation. Chopin seems intent upon blurring the boundaries of form. Wondrously, in this musical “ballad,” elements of fantasy and polonaise interweave and entwine. And in the end, recalling the image of the bard, one can almost hear the narrator’s close: “And thus went the story of...”

THE LINE FROM CHOPIN TO DEBUSSY

Although we may not readily make this embryonic connection, one of Chopin’s most far-reaching influences was on Claude Debussy, still cited in many books as “the father of modern music.” Debussy’s immersion in Chopin’s music was almost obsessive—he once went so far as to declare that “Chopin is the greatest of them all, for he discovered everything through the piano alone.” Debussy admired Chopin above all others, studying his music closely, performing it, preparing a broadly faithful edition for Durand, and later dedicating his own studies to Chopin’s memory.

Jeremy Siepmann, in his excellent study *Chopin, The Reluctant Romantic*, states that Debussy certainly was influenced by Chopin’s unprecedented liberation of harmonic movement, rich chromatic elaboration and decreased tonal stability, all aspects prominent in the three Chopin works of this evening’s program. In late Chopin there are also hints of that melodic fragmentation which is so characteristic of Debussy. And the scholar James Samson makes the essential point: “Chopin proposed, within a background of classical harmony, texture and form, certain expansions and modifications which later become part of the substance of Debussy’s musical thought, their meaning and context now changed utterly.”

And, as I think of the final harmony of the introduction of Chopin’s g minor Ballade, I find Chopin combining the tonic chords of g minor and E^b Major, the two keys that come and go in the work. Chopin suspends us, unresolved, letting the E^b hang in the ear, before launching into the ballade. He assuages the dissonance by sounding the desired D, two octaves away in the bass to be sure, but there, nevertheless. It is not too far-fetched to hear in this modest example of

polytonality a foreshadowing of the clustered chord and vaguely indeterminate harmonic colorations of Debussy.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

*If I had to sum up the music of Debussy
in one word, it would be 'enchantment.'
Everything combines to create a great
imaginary world
---RICHARD GOODE*

Masques, 1904

In *Masques* we step into just such a world, but if we view the piece simply as a frolic, in the context of the privileged aristocracy of the *fêtes galantes*, we are missing the dark secret that is at the heart of the piece. Marguerite Long, who studied with Debussy, wrote of *Masques* in these terms: "...a tragedy for piano, one might call it—as a sort of transparency of Debussy's character..."

In the summer of 1904 Debussy was vacationing on the isle of Jersey with his mistress, Emma Bardac, for whom he had just abandoned his wife. The composer was deeply in love with Emma, but also distressed at the underlying trauma he had created. As Paul Roberts puts it, "the dark ambiguity of the piece seems to be a premonition of future events." Following this giddy time, the lovers would return to Paris, friendless, and Debussy's wife would attempt suicide.

The duality of the *commedia dell'arte*, that of unrequited love and tragedy, of hope dashed in cynicism, of humor crouching side by side with pathos, would have appealed to Debussy's moody ethos. In the beginning of the piece, the ambiguity of key centers and duple and triple meter suggest playful mischief. But soon the energy turns dark and febrile, bordering on the hysterical. A few delicate moments of welcome languor appear in the middle of the piece, but soon the brooding pulsations return. There is a final outburst of the darkest fission, before the last chilling moments of the piece. Here, the mask falls, and motion is replaced by an almost glacial stasis as the piece closes upon itself. A few final measures recall the throbbing pulses of the opening, but ever so feebly.

L'Isle Joyeuse, 1904

The sea breezes of summer are decidedly warmer in *L'Isle Joyeuse*, written at the same time as *Masques*. Inspired by Watteau's famous painting *L'embarquement pour Cythère*, Debussy paints a musical portrait of the pictured young lovers, cavorting around the statue of the love goddess Aphrodite, who was herself born on the island of Cythera. The scene depicts something of a picnic as well as a dance, as the revelers enjoy themselves. "Air, lightness and grace" permeate the landscape, as Michael Levey describes the nature of Watteau's paintings. The slower middle section of the piece is voluptuous, sinuous and supple, marked *ondoyant*, as Debussy surely evokes the sea itself. As the

celebration escalates, delicate pastel hues are replaced by more rhythmic guitar and vivid percussion presences. The final moments of the piece are cast in brilliant brass fanfares, and the earlier gentle character of the central dance is now exhilarative, an intoxicating swirl of brightest color. To do justice to Debussy's genius, the enchantment of landscape and the exuberance of the dance must both, simultaneously, be brought to life.

MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)

"Pavane for a Dead Princess"

The *Pavane* was to Ravel what *Clair de lune* was to Debussy, according to the scholar Paul Roberts. Both are early works, exceedingly lyrical and sensual. They became so immensely popular that the composers likely saw their more important works as being neglected in comparison! Composed in 1899, it was given its premier by the virtuoso Ricardo Vines in Paris in 1902. Ravel did orchestrate the *Pavane* in 1910, so one could not say that he disowned the piece. The piece is dedicated to the commissioner of the work, Princess Edmond de Polignac, a patron of Ravel's, née Winaretta Singer, heiress to the Singer sewing machine fortune. Ravel recorded the piece on piano roll, but the recording is uneven, and to my mind, too fast. The musical challenge is to maintain the nobility of the classical dance while still keeping the lines buoyant and flowing.

"Daybreak," from DAPHNIS & CHLOÉ, Suite No. 2

The pianist Vyacheslav Gryaznov, who created this transcription, finds it strange that Ravel's masterpiece has not had a proper piano arrangement, in light of the fact that so many of the composer's works have "doubles," the piano or, on the contrary, the orchestral transcription done by Ravel himself. The examples are numerous: *Menuet antique*, the *Pavane*, *Une barque sur l'océan*, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, to name just a few. And Ravel did two transcriptions of the choreographic poem *La Valse*—for one and two pianos!

In this daring transcription of *Daphnis & Chloé*, the challenge is for the pianists to manage delicate balances within the definitive textures and melodic lines of the piece. Despite the necessary "management" of a great many notes, the sensation for the listener should be that of a slow, serenely unfolding work! The music is not just rich in color, timbre and "aroma," it is sumptuous. The pastoral setting, the chirping of birds and the rising sun all prepare for the two lovers who meet in enraptured embrace.

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)

Suite No. 2, Opus, 17

Rachmaninoff's first fallow period as a composer came between the calamitous reception of his First Symphony in 1897, and the composition of his Second

Piano Concerto, begun in the second half of 1900. The blow to his ego was severe, and the composer did not easily adjust. Someone older and more mature might have just shrugged his shoulders and taken it philosophically. But he was young, of passionate nature, easily carried away, with none of the tensile will and equilibrium that he later developed. He sank into a deep depression.

But after the success of the Second Piano Concerto, Rachmaninoff felt some confidence restored. The Second Suite was composed in Italy between 1900-01, and it is full of robust and commanding melodies, sweeping lyricism and vivacious energy. The two instruments are ingeniously integrated, trading phrases in both elegant and boisterous conversation. The form of the movements is neatly balanced, contrasts of mood and rhythm sharply drawn.

There remains an unconfirmed anecdote that the most famous performance of this piece was in Los Angeles in the early 1940s, just before Rachmaninoff died. He and Vladimir Horowitz were at a party and they played the Second Suite, the first and only time for such an occasion. True or not, the tale entices. One can only imagine being the fortunate fly on the wall, to hear and see such a digital Olympiad!

[Program notes © Robin McCabe, 2013.]

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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. McCabe is a teacher in high demand, with gifted students from throughout the U.S. and abroad seeking admittance to her studio class. With colleague Craig Sheppard, she has created the highly successful *Seattle Piano Institute*, an intense summer “immersion experience” for gifted and aspiring classical pianists that enters its fourth season in 2013.

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.

McCabe has collaborated in concert with many distinguished artists, and toured the United States for several years as the recital partner of the renowned violinist Ruggiero Ricci, who died last year at age 94. In the past three years she has presented duo recitals with violinist Maria Larionoff, and in February of 2013 their concert launched a two-season project in which they will perform the violin and piano sonatas of Beethoven.

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.

RACHELLE MCCABE, concert pianist and professor of music at Oregon State University, enjoys an international career as artist-teacher and is well known to audiences throughout the Pacific Northwest where she appears frequently as a solo recitalist and highly respected chamber musician. She is also an experienced harpsichordist and fortepianist.

At Oregon State University, Rachelle McCabe directs the piano program and teaches the music history sequence for undergraduate music majors. She is director of the OSU Steinway Piano Concert Series as well as the bi-annual Piano Power! camps for high school piano students in Oregon. On the basis of outstanding teaching, she was named a master teacher in the College of Liberal Arts.

She holds a doctorate (D.M.A.) from The University of Michigan where she studied with Theodore Lettvin and Gyorgy Sandor, a master's degree from The Juilliard School where she studied with Ania Dorfmann, and a bachelor's degree from The University of Washington where she studied with Béla Siki.