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CHOPIN
SOCIETY

2023-2024 **SEASON**

WHERE WORDS FAIL
MUSIC SPEAKS

YEFIM **BRONFMAN**
Tuesday, April 16, 2024
7:30 PM Orpheum Theatre

MESSAGE FROM OUR ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Our concerts in 2024 begins with performance by Rafal Blechacz, a familiar visitor and an old friend of our society. This will be followed by the Vancouver debut of Anna Geniushene, and recitals by the legendary Yefim Bronfman and Canada's own Bruce Liu – surely a star-studded line-up of performances to greet the arrival of Spring!

As always, we strive to present performances by seasoned concert artists as well as outstanding musicians who are at the outset of their artistic journey and musical career. We are confident that you will be moved by the musicianship and pianism of our artists.

The VCS aims to promote cultural interaction among the people of Vancouver, who come from a rich variety of ethnic backgrounds, and to highlight the importance of great music in our lives. We named our Society after the Polish composer Frederic Chopin because of the universal appeal of his music and his acknowledged reputation as one of the greatest composers for the keyboard.

Our society is a member of the International Federation of Chopin Societies, based in Vienna. This connection puts us in touch with some fifty other Chopin Societies worldwide, creating exciting possibilities for inviting international musicians to Vancouver.

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YEFIM BRONFMAN

**Sonata in A minor Op. 143
Faschingschwank aus Wien**

**SCHUBERT
SCHUMANN**

Intermission

**Sisar
Nocturne Op. 27, No. 2
Sonata No. 7**

**SALONEN
CHOPIN
PROKOFIEV**

Artist management: **Opus3 Artists**

*We acknowledge the financial support of
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NOTES

Schubert: Sonata in A minor, D.784

Like many of Schubert's large instrumental works, this sonata was not published until long after the composer's death. It was written in February of 1823, a very difficult time for the young man—at age twenty-six, he was ill and had no money and was living back home with his father. The bleak opening theme has the quality of a funeral march, with a melody doubled in stark octaves, a doleful swing in the bass, and fateful dotted rhythms. A heroic transition leads to the second theme, a warm chorale in E major whose peaceful mood is occasionally disrupted by harsh fortissimo chords. The development offers a few glimpses of heaven, but they are soon shaded over. In the recapitulation, both themes are varied and the valiant transition material is reserved for the coda, allowing for a life-affirming resolution in A major.

The sober second movement *Andante* has murmuring interjections between the phrases of its melody and wanders through some distant keys before returning to its home tonality of F major.

The *Allego vivace* finale opens with frantic triplets chasing up and down the keyboard in both hands. The second theme enters serene and song-like in F major, but soon the intense triplet theme returns. We hear a sonata-rondo structure emerge, as the peaceful theme comes back, now in C major and suffering from shocking eruptions of fortissimo triplets. Both themes return once more, the first a brief explosion in A minor and the second a sweet melody in A major, highlighting their contrasting character. The coda ends forcefully with a flurry of octaves in A minor.

Schumann: Faschingschwank aus Wien (Carnival Jest from Vienna)

Schumann travelled to Vienna in the fall of 1838, looking for musical opportunities in light of his intention to marry Clara Wieck, in spite of the objections of her father. He dreamt of publishing his journal in Vienna while Clara would find a job teaching at the Conservatory. These plans came to nothing, but most of this set of pieces were written while he was there and show efforts the composer made to write in a more popular, accessible style than had been his habit.

Carnival is the season before Lent, celebrated with merry pranks, costume balls and revelries of all sorts. There are five movements in this series of character pieces inspired by Schumann's ideas of Carnival time in Vienna,

beginning with a lively rondo. Statements of the cheerful main idea are interrupted by a kaleidoscopic variety of episodes. Snatches of the popular Grandfather Dance and the French anthem La Marseillaise are heard in one of the episodes. Following quickly after this extended first movement are a miniature *Romanze* in plaintive G minor, a good-humoured *Scherzino*, and then a passionate *Intermezzo* in E-flat minor. The *Finale* provides a satisfying conclusion in full sonata form, energetic and colorful, bursting with high spirits.

Salonen: Sisar

Finnish composer and conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen has a long history of musical collaboration with Yefim Bronfman, including many performances and recordings. *Sisar*, one of a set of five preludes for piano, was dedicated to Mr. Bronfman in 2012. The composer explained, "Its title has (at least) a double meaning: in Finnish *sisar* means sister, in Spanish to steal or filch. Both make sense: *Sisar* is the little sister of my orchestra piece *Nyx* (a mysterious and obscure goddess figure in Greek mythology), and it steals some of its material from the bigger relative. The character of *Sisar* is capricious and dream-like with sudden bursts of kinetic energy interlaced with more static, calmer music."

Chopin: Nocturne in D-flat major, Op. 27, No. 2

Chopin was well-established in Paris in 1835 when he wrote this Nocturne, teaching and composing by day and socializing with the Who's Who of the aristocracy at night. Chopin's gift for melodic embellishment is featured in the three-fold variation of the main theme. In each statement, the aria-like melody begins as a solo line but is soon doubled in thirds or sixths in increasingly expressive ways. There is a coda, *dolcissimo* over a repeating D-flat in the bass, which ends with a line of rising parallel sixths as if a happy couple were walking off into the night.

Prokofiev: Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major, Op. 83

In 1936, in the midst of the Stalin years, Prokofiev decided to move back home to Russia. This probably contributed to the disintegration of his marriage, and in 1942, he left his family to live with the young writer Mira Mendelssohn. It was in this period, in the shadow of World War II, that he wrote a set of piano sonatas known as the Three War Sonatas. Sonata No. 7 is the second of the set, premiered by Sviatoslav Richter in January 1943, shortly before Russia's success in defending Stalingrad from Hitler's army.

Richter said the sonata plunges the listener “into the anxiously threatening atmosphere of a world that has lost its balance ... In the tremendous struggle that this involves, we find strength to affirm the irrepressible life-force.”

The first movement *Allegro inquieto* begins with a restless swirl of motion in 6/8 time, dissonances and ostinatos insistent in the left hand. The chromatic second theme is slower and sad, but soon accelerates back to an even more intense development. Briefly we hear the second theme once more, but again it is overwhelmed by the turbulent first theme.

A warm, singing theme in the baritone range opens the middle movement *Andante caloroso*, a melody which makes reference to a song by Schumann with the title “Sadness.” Its middle section becomes passionate and contrapuntal, but this recedes and the haunting first theme is heard again. Then we are thrown into the frenzy of the finale *Precipitato*, a perpetual motion toccata in 7/8 time. The accumulated effect of its blazing virtuosity, heavy dissonance and demonic ostinatos is of a savage struggle resolving finally in victory.

Ruth Enns,

Vancouver Academy of Music

April 2024



Yefim Bronfman
Piano

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BIOGRAPHY

Internationally recognized as one of today's most acclaimed and admired pianists, Yefim Bronfman stands among a handful of artists regularly sought by festivals, orchestras, conductors and recital series. His commanding technique, power and exceptional lyrical gifts are consistently acknowledged by the press and audiences alike.

Following summer festival appearances in Verbier, Israel, Aspen, Grand Tetons and Sun Valley the season begins with a European tour celebrating the auspicious 500th anniversary of the Munich Opera and Orchestra with concerts in Lucerne, Bucharest, London, Paris, Linz, Vienna and Munich.

Widely praised for his solo, chamber and orchestral recordings, Mr. Bronfman has been nominated for 6 GRAMMY® Awards, winning in 1997 with Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic for their recording of the three Bartok Piano Concerti. His prolific catalog of recordings includes works for two pianos by Rachmaninoff and Brahms with Emanuel Ax, the complete Prokofiev concerti with the Israel Philharmonic and Zubin Mehta, a Schubert/Mozart disc with the Zukerman Chamber Players and the soundtrack to Disney's Fantasia 2000.

Born in Tashkent in the Soviet Union, Yefim Bronfman immigrated to Israel with his family in 1973, where he studied with pianist Arie Vardi, head of the Rubin Academy of Music at Tel Aviv University. In the United States, he studied at The Juilliard School, Marlboro School of Music, and the Curtis Institute of Music, under Rudolf Firkusny, Leon Fleisher, and Rudolf Serkin. A recipient of the prestigious Avery Fisher Prize, one of the highest honors given to American instrumentalists, in 2010 he was further honored as the recipient of the Jean Gimbel Lane prize in piano performance from Northwestern University and in 2015 with an honorary doctorate from the Manhattan School of Music.

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