



The Vancouver
CHOPIN
SOCIETY

2023-2024 **SEASON**

WHERE WORDS FAIL
MUSIC SPEAKS

LILYA ZILBERSTEIN

Sunday, September 24, 2023

3 PM Vancouver Playhouse

MESSAGE FROM OUR ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

We begin our season by welcoming back Lilya Zilberstein, an artist at the height of her powers. Few days later together with our friends at Early Music Vancouver, we will present fortepianist Melisande McNabney in recital.

Lastly, Alexander Gavrylyuk, whose performance of Rachmaninoff's second sonata still rings in our ears, will return to perform for us in October.

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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LILYA ZILBERSTEIN

6 moments musicaux, Op.94 – D780

SCHUBERT

4 Lieder

SCHUBERT-LISZT

Der Wanderer
Ständchen von Shakespeare
Gretchen am Spinnrade
Auf dem Wasser zu singen

Intermission

13 Preludes Op.32

RACHMANINOFF

*We acknowledge the financial support of
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NOTES

Schubert: 6 Moments Musicaux, Op. 94, D. 780

The six short pieces of this collection were written between 1823 and 1828, the year Schubert died. Geared toward the amateur market, the name “Musical Moments” probably came from an imaginative publisher seeking sales appeal. The first piece in C major begins with a folk-like wave of the hand, a unison triadic yodelling gesture. Many surprising details follow—flips into the minor, contrapuntal exchanges, an empty bar of rests—all without making huge demands in technical prowess and using the familiar form and time signature of a minuet and trio. Next is a peaceful boat song in 9/8 time beginning in A flat major; it has two episodes with more intense expression in F sharp minor. Following this comes the piece that was probably written earliest in this set, previously published in a collection from 1823 with the title “Air russe.” It is in 2/4 dance rhythm, beginning in F minor but ending with a gentle F major chord.

The fourth piece begins a moderately fast perpetual motion, with triadic right-hand sixteenth notes and left-hand staccato eighths in C sharp minor. The subdued middle section in D-flat major is based on a syncopated rhythm in every bar. A little coda recalls the sunny middle section but then ends in darkness. The only fast piece in the set is #5 Allegro vivace in F minor, paced like an exciting horseback ride through the countryside and ending cheerfully in F major. The final number, using ABA minuet and trio form, was first published with the mournful title “The troubadour’s complaint” in 1824.

Schubert-Liszt: 4 Lieder, S. 558

Der Wanderer, Op. 15, D. 489

Ständchen von Shakespeare, D. 889

Gretchen am Spinnrade, Op. 2, D. 118

Auf dem Wasser zu Singen, Op. 72, D. 774

Liszt called Schubert “*the most poetical composer who has ever lived.*” In the decade of 1838-47, years when he was travelling extensively as a virtuoso, Liszt wrote down fifty-three transcriptions for solo piano of Schubert’s songs; today we hear four of these from a collection of twelve Liszt published in 1838. The arrangements capture the essence of the originals with great sensitivity, proof of the respect he had for the songs. First is “Der Wanderer,” the song which also inspired Schubert’s *Wanderer Fantasy*,

with a poem describing the bleak feelings of someone living in exile; in the more-optimistic middle section, the poet recalls his homeland.

Shakespeare wrote a verse for his play *Cymbeline* in which a lover addresses his beloved while the lark begins its song in the morning. Schubert set a German translation of this verse to music with the title “Serenade.” Liszt supplies two variations in his piano arrangement, highlighting the lightness and grace of this cheerful good morning song.

The celebrated Lied “Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel,” written when Schubert was just 17 years old, sets a text from Goethe’s *Faust*, describing the young woman’s unrest and passion awakened by the romantic attentions of Faust. Liszt respects many details of Schubert’s song, intensifying the figurations and climaxes for piano solo performance. “To be sung upon the waters” compares the transient joys of life to a boat gliding on shimmering water.

Rachmaninoff: 13 Preludes, Op. 32

In 1892, when he was 19 years old, Rachmaninoff wrote a Prelude in C sharp minor that quickly became the biggest hit of his career, one of the most popular piano solos of the twentieth century. Because he sold the rights to the publisher, he never made much money from it, but about ten years later, around the time of his marriage to his cousin Natalia, he returned to writing piano preludes. From the careful choice of keys in that collection of ten, it seems the composer already had in mind to complete twenty-four preludes, one in each key in the manner of Chopin and JS Bach. He finished the project with the thirteen Preludes of Op. 32 in the summer of 1910. Earlier that year, he had made his first tour of America, and he was relieved to be able to retreat to Ivanovka, his estate in the Russian countryside, and devote himself to composition.

“*To say what you have to say, and to say it briefly, lucidly, and without circumlocution, is still the most difficult problem facing the artist,*” Rachmaninoff once wrote. These superb miniatures show he was up to the challenge. Each one typically based on a single tiny motive, the preludes are arranged alternating major and minor keys, juxtaposing strongly contrasted moods.

The cycle starts with a flourish and some sparkling chromatic figuration in C major, in a piece lasting just one minute. The second prelude (B flat minor) has the same dotted rhythm in almost every bar, and a rather wistful mood. Trumpet calls evoke a kind of wild march in the third Prelude (E major), full of majestic leaping octaves. Ominous triplet chords propel the Prelude in E minor, even in its slower middle section, building to a huge climax toward the end and then dying away.

BIOGRAPHY

That storm is followed by the ethereal calm of the Prelude No. 5 in G major, enhanced by delicate ornaments like the twittering of birds. Rachmaninoff played this fifth Prelude more often than any others in the set.

With the F minor Prelude, we are hurled into a tempest, dark and aggressive. Next is the F major Prelude, a gentle duet for soprano and tenor spiked with a restless syncopated accompaniment. No. 8 is a toccata in A minor, a torrent of sixteenth notes, virtuosic and rather sinister. Left hand scales in A major are the foundation of the ninth Prelude.

For many, including Rachmaninoff himself, the tenth prelude in B minor is the best of the set. Somber and profound, with the tolling of church bells deep in the bass, it has an impressive middle climax, a fleet cadenza, a return to the opening and two final sighs of regret. No. 11 (B major) is rather subdued with a hint of old chant melodies in the shapes of its melody. The G sharp minor Prelude is popular, with the tinkling bells of its right-hand figuration set against the melancholy lyricism of a left-hand melody. The cycle closes in D flat major with a piece that has references to his famous Prelude in C sharp minor written 18 years earlier. It begins and ends in grand solemnity with massive chords.

Ruth Enns,
Vancouver Academy of Music
September 2023



Lilya Zilberstein won the Busoni Competition in 1987, after which the first prize was not even awarded for another five years.

Zilberstein regularly appears with major orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, to name just a few, and has collaborated with conductors Claudio Abbado, Gustavo Dudamel, James Levine, and Michael Tilson Thomas, among many others.

Her recitals take place in major music centres the world over, and she performs solo recitals as well as in chamber music performances with Martha Argerich and Maxim Vengerov. A prolific recording artist, Zilberstein has recorded 20 albums for Deutsche Grammophon, and on EMI Classics. She also contributed to Deutsche Grammophon's recordings of the complete works of Chopin, released in 1999. More recently, her recording of Brahms' Sonata for two pianos with Martha Argerich was released on EMI Classics.

We are overjoyed that we finally managed to invite Ms. Zilberstein back to Vancouver, and that she has included Vancouver as one of the stops of her very busy international touring schedule in 2023.

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LILYA ZILBERSTEIN

Piano



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