

Jon Nakamatsu

Sunday, July 13, 2008 4:00 pm

Portland International Piano Festival
Miller Hall, World Forestry Center

Program

- HAYDN** Sonata in C minor, Hob. XVI:20
Moderato
Andante con moto
Finale: Allegro
- BEETHOVEN** Sonata in C-sharp minor, Op. 27, No. 2 ("Moonlight")
Adagio sostenuto
Allegretto; Trio
Presto agitato
- CHOPIN** Andante spianato et Grande polonaise brillante in E-flat Major, Op. 22

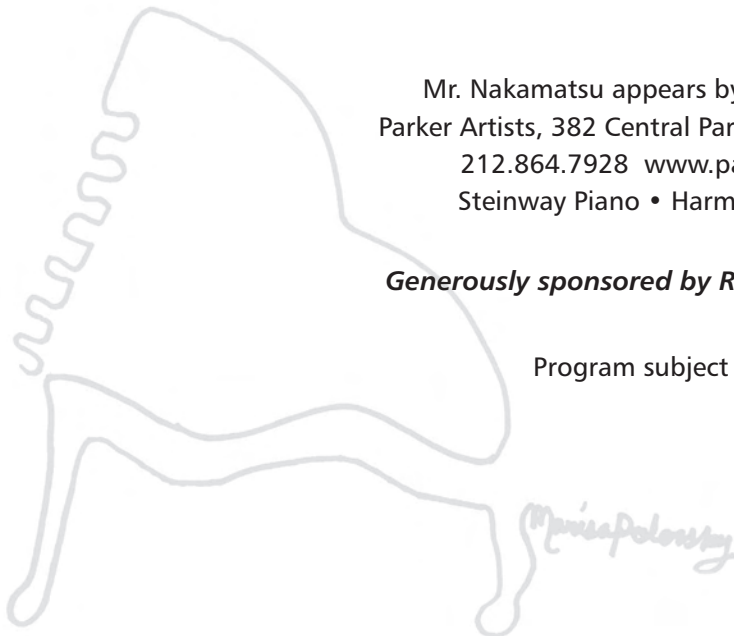
Intermission

- TJEKNAVORIAN** Five Dances from *Dances fantastiques*, Op. 2
Danse rythmique
Danse gracieuse
Danse lyrique
Danse elègياque
Danse d'extase
- LISZT** Impromptu (Nocturne) for Princess Gortschakoff, LW256
Valse Impromptu in A-flat Major
Après une lecture de Dante ("Fantasia quasi sonata"), from *Années de Pèlerinage*

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Program Notes

Joseph Haydn

(Born March 31, 1732, in Rohrau; died May 31, 1809, in Vienna)

Sonata in C minor, Hob. XVI:20

Although Haydn was not really a pianist, in the course of his long life as a musician he wrote more than fifty works that explore and display the greatly varied forms that can be called piano sonatas. There are some with two movements and some with four, and among the usual three movements, there is an enormous choice of structures for each. In general, Haydn composed his piano sonatas for the pleasure of the performer, and they were to be played at home in private music rooms, rather than in public concerts. Especially in his later years, Haydn wrote many sonatas with specific performers in mind, often highly gifted women whose influence on the art of music is a part of history that has not yet been written.

He composed the C minor Sonata in 1771, but it is in a style so new and difficult (for its time), that Haydn withheld it from publication for nine years. This is the music of his “romantic crisis,” when he wrote symphonies and other major works that are full of urgent passion and dramatic tension — original and adventurous compositions that were the product of ten years of experimentation in form and expression in a search for a personal emotive style. The masterpieces that emerged became models for young Mozart, who in 1771, at age fifteen, was already an important composer. His study of Haydn’s new way to use the language of music was very important to Mozart’s growth as a composer.

Haydn collected this sonata and five later sonatas into a set, and published them with a dedication “to the very illustrious ladies, Catherine and Marianne von Auenbrugger, by their most humble and obsequious servant.” The Auenbruggers were gifted sisters about whom Haydn wrote (to the publisher) that their opinion of his work “is most important, for their manner of playing and their genuine insight into music are the equal of those

of the greatest masters. They deserve to be famous throughout Europe.”

This sonata is a formidable piece in a style so advanced that early scholars found great difficulty in attempting to deduce to what period of Haydn’s work it belonged. The long themes that are its subject matter, and their extended developmental treatment, make this a huge work that looks as far ahead as Beethoven. In the first movement, the writing for the instrument is extremely complex. The *Moderato* tempo that sets its serious mood also stretches the music over great time spaces. The *Andante con moto* movement is a little slower than the first movement, yet contrastingly spare in texture, and simple in construction. It explores the extreme ranges of the keyboard of that time. The *Finale: Allegro* is a powerful movement in a sonata-form structure like that of the first movement.

Ludwig van Beethoven

(Born December 16, 1770, in Bonn; died March 26, 1827, in Vienna)

Sonata in C-sharp minor, Op. 27, No. 2 (“Moonlight”)

In 1800 and 1801 Beethoven wrote two unconventional piano sonatas that were published in 1802 as his Op. 27, each bearing the subtitle *Sonata quasi una fantasia* (a sonata like a fantasy). The second of the pair is now popularly known as the Moonlight Sonata. *Fantasia* (fantasy) was a term then loosely used for several different kinds of freely formed pieces. These were often improvisational in character and highly personal in expression, and they were usually based on musical ideas that did not lend themselves to the organized, structural discipline of the sonata, or to the analytical process of development.

In Op. 27, No. 1, Beethoven used the basic ideas of the fantasy sonata that later composers would adopt with varying degrees of emphasis. He incorporated several movements, played without pause between them, but subject to occasional interruption by themes that are carried forward from one movement to another. Important later works of similar kind include Schubert’s

"Wanderer" Fantasy of 1822, Schumann's C Major Fantasy of the late 1830s, and Liszt's "Dante" Sonata of the 1840s which, in a reversal of Beethoven's formulation, Liszt subtitled *Fantasia quasi sonata* (a fantasy like a sonata).

The Moonlight Sonata is one of the masterpieces of early Romanticism. Beethoven tried to deny its greatness, saying (about ten years after it was written) with his habitual gruffness, "Everyone is always talking about the C-sharp minor Sonata, but I have written really better things." A critic reviewing the first edition wrote, "It is hardly possible that anyone whom Nature has not denied any feeling for music will not be profoundly moved by the opening *Adagio* of this Sonata." The Viennese found it pastoral (or sylvan) and, at first, nicknamed it the "Leafy Arbor" Sonata, after the kind of place where they thought it might have been composed. Berlioz said that it was like a sunset on the Roman *campagna*. An early Beethoven biographer claimed that its subject was death — the death of a friend or the death of the Commendatore in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. About five years after Beethoven died, Ludwig Rellstab, an influential figure of the Romantic era — a soldier, philosopher, historian, mathematician, novelist, poet, dramatist, composer, and critic — wrote that the music made him think of "a boat passing the wild country around Lake Lucerne by moonlight." It was this description that gave the sonata the name "that has stuck with it": Moonlight Sonata.

The sonata is dedicated to Countess Giulietta Guicciardi (1784–1856), who in 1852 told a historian that Beethoven had her in mind when he composed it, more than fifty years earlier. They had met when he was thirty, and she was about sixteen. She was a pretty and talented girl who took piano lessons from him, and acquired enough skill to play his chamber music. Beethoven once said that she was "a sweet, fascinating girl whom I love and who loves me," but in 1803 she entered into what proved to be an unsuccessful marriage with an altogether unmemorable composer named Gallenberg, whose only advantage over Beethoven was that he was a

Count. For twenty years they lived in Italy, where she developed a reputation as an adventuress. When she returned to Vienna and sought out Beethoven again, he preferred not to see her.

The beautiful opening, *Adagio sostenuto*, is an extended prelude to the second movement. Berlioz said it was "one of those poems that human language does not know how to qualify." The accompaniment figure of triplets continues (almost hypnotically) throughout the movement, sometimes even seeming more important than the melody, until the second-to-last bar. As Charles Rosen notes in his book on Beethoven's piano sonatas, it is one of the first works to "take account of the fact that the sympathetic vibration of the strings of the piano when the pedal is held down, the dampers raised, is not instantaneous, but grows with time, demanding a few fractions of a second to become more audible and make its full effect." The character of the movement is actually based on this little delay in the vibration of the open strings. The resulting blurring of the previously played harmony with the new harmony creates a novel effect.

Beethoven said that an abbreviated, gentle scherzo, *Allegretto*, the second movement, must follow it immediately, without pause; and Liszt once described the *Allegretto* (somewhat cryptically) as "a flower between two chasms." The dynamic level never rises above a soft *piano*, until the middle section of this graceful and melancholy movement. After a brief pause comes the climactic finale, *Presto agitato* — a suddenly contrasting, ferociously tumultuous movement. This is the longest movement of the sonata, and the most conventional one (the music is organized structurally in the sonata-allegro form). Rosen comments, "It must have been with music like this finale that Beethoven smashed the hammers and strings of his instruments, as he was reputed to do. The contrast between the opening and closing movements of this sonata exceeds anything else conceived for the keyboard until then."

Frédéric Chopin

(Born ca. March 1, 1810 in Zelazowa Wola, Poland; died October 17, 1840 in Paris)

Andante spianato et Grande polonaise brillante in E-flat Major, Op. 22

In 1831, when he arrived in Paris, Chopin completed the composition of a Grande polonaise brillante for piano and orchestra. Not even his greatest admirers claimed that Chopin wrote particularly well for orchestra, but at that time, the quality of the orchestral accompaniment was not critically important. A light background appropriate to Chopin's own style of piano performance was what was needed, and what he wrote. He placed the emphasis on his piano technique, and it varied greatly within a small range: it was fleet, fluid, light in touch, yet small in tone. The *polonaise* began as a peasant dance and evolved into a sophisticated salon dance. In this Polonaise, Chopin gave new character to the style of the dance, expanding the form from the small pieces he had previously written by that name — here he highlighted the virtuoso elements, and increased the dimensions of the work. The piece has a three-part scheme with binary form in the Polonaise proper. The orchestral part had such little importance for the effect that Chopin intended to create, that he often played the Polonaise, as you hear it today, as an unaccompanied piano solo.

In 1834 Chopin wrote an Andante for piano, an idyllic, rippling, nocturne-like piece that he named Andante spianato. He took the modifying word *spianato* from Italian to indicate a smooth and even level. Whether Chopin intended the term to be interpreted as applying to the characteristic qualities of performance, or to signify that the Andante was to be played without the subtle rhythmic irregularities of a rubato (ordinarily an essential element of his performance style), cannot be determined. Chopin originally wrote and played the Andante and the Polonaise as two separate and discrete pieces, but after a while he began to play them together and, in 1836, he even published them as a pair connected by a bridge passage.

Loris Tjeknavorian

(Born on October 13, 1937 in Broudjerd, Iran)

Five Dances from *Danses fantastiques*, Op. 2

Tjeknavorian studied violin and piano at the Tehran Conservatory of Music, and composition at the Vienna Music Academy. Shortly after his graduation, four of his piano compositions were published in Vienna. From 1961 to 1963, Tjeknavorian taught music theory at the Tehran Conservatory of Music, and was appointed director of the National Music Archives in Tehran, where he collected and researched traditional Iranian folk music and national instruments. In 1963, in Austria, Carl Orff granted him a scholarship which allowed him to live in Salzburg, where he completed his opera, *Rostam and Sohrab* and wrote about 150 piano pieces (all based on traditional Armenian folk music) for the Orff Schulwerk.

In 1965 Tjeknavorian began studying conducting at the University of Michigan. In 1966–67 he was composer in residence at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, and following that, head of the instrumental and opera departments at Moorhead University. In 1970, the Iranian Cultural Minister offered Tjeknavorian a position as composer in residence as well as principal conductor to the Rudaki Opera House Orchestra in Tehran. Since then, Tjeknavorian has conducted orchestras internationally, and his compositions have been performed by many orchestras, including the London Symphony Orchestra, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Halle Orchestra, the Philharmonic Orchestra Helsinki, the American Symphony Orchestra in New York; the Tehran, Johannesburg, Haifa, and Mexico Symphony Orchestras; the London Percussion Virtuosi, the Strasbourg Percussion Ensemble, and the English Chamber Orchestra. From 1989 to 2000 he was Principal Conductor and Artistic Director of the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra, but he resigned to devote more time to composing and conducting other orchestras.

Tjeknavorian has a personal connection to the pianist Jon Nakamatsu and to his teacher, Marina Derryberry, who attended the Tehran Conservatory

— but they lost contact until seven years ago when Tjeknavorian came to San Francisco to conduct an opera. Nakamatsu explains, “He eventually sent me scores. The pieces of his I will be performing were originally a ballet score for which he made this alternate setting. It’s what you might imagine if you melded Western tradition with a composer whose identity is totally Eastern. It’s very accessible. Audiences really take to it.”

Franz Liszt

(Born October 22, 1811, in Raiding, Hungary; died July 31, 1886, in Bayreuth, Germany)

Impromptu (Nocturne) for Princess Gortschakoff, LW256

Liszt dedicated this Impromptu (Nocturne) to Princess Olga Gortschakoff, the wife of the Russian ambassador Baron Felix von Meyendorff, who served at the court of Weimar; Princess Gortschakoff was twenty-seven years Liszt’s junior. Liszt had met the Meyendorffs in Rome in 1863, and noticed that Olga Meyendorff Gortschakoff, an aspiring pianist, “joins to many other attractions a most original pianistic talent.” Her feelings toward the composer, over the years, ripened into a deep and lasting devotion. After three years in Weimar, her husband was transferred, and she might never have seen the composer again, but for the baron’s unexpected death. After it, she returned to Weimar to be near Liszt, who was then sixty years old, but nevertheless enthused by her presence. Soon gossip flew that the two were romantically involved.

Olga Gortschakoff Meyendorff held many soirées at her home, at which her attraction to Liszt was evident. A contemporary acquaintance of both commented: “She is enthusiastic, and even more than enthusiastic (it is said!) about Liszt. The fact is that the Great Master is full of attentions to her so that he spends long hours at her place and she at his. This alone tells you that she is a very distinguished woman and as Liszt was telling me this morning (he came to spend an hour with me at my hotel), a richly gifted woman, highly

educated, and remarkable in character and mind.”

The Impromptu was composed in 1872, but not published until 1877, as the fourteenth part of a series that Breitkopf & Hartel called *Der Improvisator: Phantasien und Variationen*. The Impromptu is an expressive composition in the nocturne style of the late nineteenth century. A very brief late work of only about three minutes’ duration, it reflects Liszt’s meditative ruminations. It begins *Animato, con passione*, with the left hand playing a rolling arpeggio while the melody soars and then descends to the low register of the keyboard, before it ascends again. There is colorful harmonic character, and a three-against-two rhythmic pattern in the center yields to a harplike sound that produces an ethereal texture distinctive to the nocturne. This theme gives way to a melody of descending thirds that continues until the end of this charming work. Overall, the composition has a sweetness in its declamatory style.

Valse Impromptu in A-flat Major

The light and delicate Valse Impromptu, *Sempre scherzando*, is not a waltz of the Viennese type; instead it takes on the character of a brilliant etude full of translucent shimmering. In this work, the keyboard does all the dancing, with the melodic figures in the right hand and the flow of its piquant harmony in the left. The composition contains many appoggiaturas. Although published in 1850, it is said to have had an earlier version.

Après une lecture de Dante* (“Fantasia quasi sonata”), from *Années de Pèlerinage

As a young man, Liszt was known to have admired the works of Dante, and late in life he wrote a huge symphony based on Dante’s *Divine Comedy*; but the title by which we know this piece, *Après une lecture de Dante*, has its source in a poem by Victor Hugo, a meditation on Dante’s life and work. The poem begins, “When the poet paints hell, he paints his own life; his life, a fleeing shadow pursued by spectres; a mysterious forest where his terrified feet wander, stumbling from well-worn paths; a dark journey, obstructed by strange encounters; a spiral with vague boundaries and enormous depths, whose hideous circles go

forever onward into a gloom where moves the vague and living hell!”

Liszt’s subject here is perhaps as much Hugo as Dante, or Hugo’s vision of Dante. The work is a large virtuoso piece — a free, but powerful, rhapsodic development of several themes in sections that follow each other in an uninterrupted sequence. The sections are all related by the consistent use of four themes and their variants. In the slow introduction, *Andante maestoso*, the first theme is made up of full octaves descending by tritones. Early theorists called this group of descending intervals *diabolus in musica* (the devil in music), and it is here used to depict Dante’s *Inferno*. The other themes consist of a chromatically curling melody, a hymn, and one that sometimes is taken to represent the ill-fated Francesca da Rimini and her lover Paolo, whose story Dante tells in the fifth canto of *The Inferno*.

Liszt created the original version of this work in 1839, and played it in public that year; but he withheld it from publication until 1858, when he felt at last that he had sufficiently refined and tested it. The work finally became part of the second year of his great collection, *Années de Pèlerinage* (years of pilgrimage), which consists of pieces on Italian subjects.

Liszt derived his idea of a *Fantasia quasi sonata* from the important works in which the late Viennese classicists had begun to break down the traditional sonata and to organize it in different ways. The greatest examples are the Moonlight Sonata of 1802, which Beethoven called *Sonata quasi una*

fantasia, and Schubert’s Wanderer Fantasy of 1822. Liszt’s work is a large, sectional work in cyclic form, that in size and scope can be understood either as a sonata or a multimovement fantasia. It is a precursor of the orchestral symphonic poem, a form that Liszt invented and named.

— Program notes by Susan Halpern, © 2008

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