

Andrew Chen Solo Piano Recital

Sunday, October 25th, 2020
Piedmont Piano Company

Program

Fantasy in C Minor, K. 396 (1782)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

3 Mazurkas, Op. 59 (1845)
Barcarolle, Op. 60 (1846)

Frédéric Chopin
(1810-1849)

--Intermission--

Étude (2014)
Fantasy (2018)

Andrew Chen
(1997-)

Le Tombeau de Couperin (1914-1917)

- I. Prelude
- II. Fugue
- III. Forlane
- IV. Rigaudon
- V. Minuet
- VI. Toccata

Maurice Ravel
(1875-1937)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Fantasy in C Minor K. 396

The fantasy is a musical composition that is rooted in the art of improvisation. Unlike the kind of improvisation in jazz music, the fantasy is a written improvisation with a form that is less restrictive, allowing the composer to imagine trajectories of his/her music beyond established traditions.

This piece by Mozart was published in 1802 after his death; it was based on a fragment of a violin and piano sonata written in 1782, so technically it was not imagined as a “fantasy” by Mozart himself. The remainder was written by Maximilian Stadler, a Benedictine priest, composer, and musician. The name “Fantasy” was given by Stadler as well, and that name might be referring to the freely arpeggiated figure at the opening of the piece.

The somber mood of this fantasy defies the misconceived impression that Mozart’s works are “happy” or “cheerful,” and it reveals Mozart’s darkest and most tragic emotions to listeners.

Frédéric Chopin

3 Mazurkas, Op. 59

The mazurka is a Polish national folk dance in triple meter, meaning the pulse is divided into three, like a waltz. But while the waltz usually emphasizes the first out of every three beats, the mazurka usually emphasizes the second or third beat out of every three beats. However, this is not a strict requirement, and there are many exceptions.

In the hands of Chopin, the mazurkas no longer were just folk dances belonging to his native Poland, but they instead became a world of their own, giving listeners a glimpse into Chopin’s deepest internal emotions and struggles. Chopin wrote mazurkas throughout his life, and they come in all sorts of flavors and temperaments, whether they be lively, triumphant, introspective, melancholy, or bittersweet. And while they sound simple, that simplicity is deceptive, as there are so many harmonies, voices, and details in these pieces that are incredibly difficult to master all at once.

The set of mazurkas to be performed today is considered one of Chopin’s late works. Even within this set of three mazurkas lie so many different moods, harmonies, and textures, which is a testament to Chopin’s ultimate mastery of composing in this dance form.

Frédéric Chopin

Barcarolle, Op. 60

The barcarolle was originally a traditional folk song sung by Venetian gondoliers. But this song form was then utilized by composers throughout Europe, and the music written in the barcarolle form (which is usually in 6/8 meter) generally gives listeners a swaying feel, similar to waves of water when rowing a boat. Chopin never actually visited Venice, yet his Barcarolle is incredible in its lyricism and textures, allowing listeners to imagine a gondolier on a boat singing freely amidst waves that are occasionally turbulent but generally calm and supportive. As yet another one of Chopin's late works, this work is yet another example of Chopin's mastery of achieving exceptional lyrical beauty, harmonic complexity, and musical imagery.

Andrew Chen

Étude / Fantasy

Starting the second half of the recital, I'd like to introduce to you two of my own compositions. The first is an étude I wrote in high school. (An étude is a type of music composition that is usually short but of considerable difficulty, designed to allow musicians to practice a certain technique. But études aren't necessarily just boring technical exercises; they can still be quite complex and beautiful, as can be heard in the études of Chopin, Liszt, Debussy, Rachmaninoff, Scriabin, and many other composers.) After the étude is my own take at a fantasy, which I wrote in college. My compositional style in both of these works is especially inspired by the music of early 20th-century French composers, such as Debussy, Ravel, and even Satie.

Maurice Ravel

Le Tombeau de Couperin

Le Tombeau de Couperin is a suite of six pieces inspired by traditional forms of Baroque music of the 17th century. Ravel dedicated each of the six pieces to each of six friends of his who died fighting in World War I.

Ravel starts off the suite with a prelude, which in Baroque music usually is a short piece serving as an introduction to grander and more complex movements; however, this prelude is arguably grand, complex, and beautifully written on its own.

The second piece is a fugue, which is a composition that utilizes one or two musical subjects and weaves them into multiple voices that interact with each other. Listeners will hear a single main theme, hear a second voice that repeats the theme but in a different pitch, and will eventually hear a total of three voices juggling the main themes while maintaining their own independent movements.

The third piece is a forlane, which is a lively Italian folk dance in 6/8 meter. This piece is a fine display of Ravel's exceptional ability to incorporate his eccentric harmonies into traditional dance forms.

The fourth piece is a rigaudon, a lively French Baroque dance in 2/4 meter that was originally danced by couples in the 17th century and remained popular as a court dance in the 18th century.

The fifth piece is a minuet, which is an elegant couple dance in 3/4 meter that originated from France and was very popular among the aristocracy especially in France and England.

Lastly is the toccata, which is a virtuoso piece typically for a keyboard instrument and usually fast, light, and incredibly difficult to perfect. This toccata is filled with repeated notes from the start, juggles between moods of liveliness and introspection, and culminates in an exhilarating chorus of chords featuring insane leaps of the hands.

The general mood of the whole suite is a little melancholy but in essence a nostalgic reflection towards the past, with glimmers of hope for the future.