



SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Presents

Veniamin Blokh, Piano

Friday, July 1, 2022

7:00 p.m.

Van Cliburn Concert Hall

Program

Flute Sonata in E-Flat Major, BWV 1031 (Arr. W. Kempff)

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1675–1750)

II. Siciliano

Piano Sonata No. 3 in Bb major, K. 281

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756–1791)

I. Allegro

II. Andante amoroso

III. Rondo

Polonaise-Fantaisie in A-flat major, Op. 61

Frédéric Chopin
(1810–1849)

Intermission

Prélude, Choral et Fugue, FWV 21

César Franck
(1822–1890)

I. Prélude. Moderato

II. Choral. Poco più lento— Poco allegro

III. Fugue. Tempo I

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an Artist Diploma in Piano Performance. Veniamin Blokh is a student of Professor John Owings.
The use of recording equipment or taking photographs is prohibited.
Please silence all electronic devices including watches, pagers, and phones.

PROGRAM NOTES

The **Sonata in E flat major for flute or recorder, BWV 1031** is a work in three movements, usually attributed to Johann Sebastian Bach, although some question his authorship of the piece and hold his son Carl Philipp Emmanuel as the true composer. The work was written around 1730 and it was published only a hundred and thirty years later, in 1860. Siciliano, in G minor, is the second movement of the Sonata.

The siciliana or siciliano is a musical style or genre often included as a movement within larger pieces of music starting in the Baroque period. It is in a slow 6/8 or 12/8 time with lilting rhythms, making it somewhat resemble a slow jig or tarantella, and is usually in a minor key. It was used for arias in Baroque operas, and often appears as a movement in instrumental works. Loosely associated with Sicily, the siciliana evokes a pastoral mood, and is often characterized by dotted rhythms that can distinguish it within the broader musical genre of the pastorale.

In his letters Mozart described his early Piano Sonatas K. 270-284 as being “difficult sonatas.” He was probably referring both to the refinements of performance and to the demands of aesthetics and interpretation, as he also gave these works unusually rich markings as far as dynamics and articulation were concerned. The **Piano Sonata No. 3 in Bb major, K. 281** was written during the visit Mozart paid to Munich for the production of *La finta giardiniera* from late 1774 to the beginning of the following March. It is the earliest examples we have of Mozart's keyboard composition and reflect the influence of Haydn in its prevailing good nature. It is in the deeply felt second movement of K. 281 that we find the first evidence of Mozart coming into his own compositional voice, as well as an expectation that this music was likely intended for performance on the new instrument. The movement, euphoniously headed *Andante amoroso* (amoroso = lovingly) begins with a crescendo and decrescendo, possible only on the piano or clavichord - but is there a better way to describe this tender, lyrical music? The outer movements of the sonata would have served as calling cards for the young virtuoso declaring his lyricism and dexterity.

The **Polonaise-Fantaisie in A flat major Op 61** was Chopin's last extended work, written in 1846, three years before his death. By both its title and structure, it is in a class of its own. It is an exploratory, original work which, judging from the manuscript, caused Chopin some difficulty before he arrived at a satisfactory version. Although the distinctive rhythm of the polonaise is present in the opening theme, elsewhere it is often absent altogether, the ‘fantasy’ part of the title implying a feeling of rhapsodic improvisation. Through thematic recall and his innate sense of form, pacing and proportion, Chopin manages to achieve a remarkably cohesive whole. The work brushes against a great variety of keys, moods and motifs, and leads into a grandiose closing apotheosis as if at the end of a long journey.

The short list of solo piano pieces in Franck's catalog reflects his disenchantment with the instrument. There are multiple entries dated from his touring years in his early 20s, one when he was about 43, then three when he was in his early 60s; the **Prelude, Chorale, and Fugue**, written in 1884, is the first of the latter group. In writing a prelude and fugue (the chorale was added as an afterthought), Franck was obviously paying homage to Bach. The actual composition, however, points to a number of other allegiances, namely Beethoven, Schumann, and Liszt, the latter man occupying a special place in Franck's heart for having befriended him at the beginning of his career. Yet, whatever the influences, the music is pure Franck, which is to say that it engages repeatedly in conflicts between organ loft ruminations and fervent rapture, sets up arguments in a harmonic language of intense chromaticism, and freely employs cyclical form, wholly endorsed by both Liszt and Wagner.

The Prelude, in B minor, begins with and is dominated by fleet figurations that are interrupted twice by a strong motivic idea that anticipates the subject of the Fugue. The Chorale, in the distant key of E-flat major, seems to strive for Bachian sturdiness but is most notable for achieving Franckian mysticism and loftiness, the latter by way of an imposing seven-note motif that is brought back in the Fugue and then combined with the fugal subject in grand manner.

Franck's writing for the keyboard reflects his own formidable skill at both the piano and the organ. His vacillations between religiosity and virtuosity probably are unavoidable given his role as the high priest of French music and his early life as a crowd-pleasing performer. At any rate, the Prelude, Chorale, and Fugue, with its many intimations of the masterworks to come – the Symphonic Variations for Piano and Orchestra, the Symphony in D minor, and the Violin-Piano Sonata – remains Franck's most viable solo piano piece, a distinctive work masterfully crafted.