

February 4, 2016 at 8:00pm

Pre-concert talk by Professor Scott Burnham at 7:00pm
Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

PADEREWSKI MEMORIAL CONCERT

IGOR LEVIT, *piano*

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

Partita No. 4 in D Major, BWV 828

Ouverture
Allemande
Courante
Aria
Sarabande
Menuet
Gigue

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797 – 1828)

Moments musicaux, D.780

No. 1 in C Major
No. 2 in A-flat Major
No. 3 in F Minor
No. 4 in C-sharp Minor
No. 5 in F Minor
No. 6 in A-flat Major

– INTERMISSION –

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770 –1827)

Piano Sonata No. 17 in D Minor, Op. 31, No. 2 “The Tempest”

Largo-Allegro
Adagio
Allegretto

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891 – 1953)

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

Allegro inquieto; Andantino
Andante caloroso
Precipitato

Please join us for a post-concert reception with Mr. Levit in the Richardson Lounge following the performance.

ABOUT IGOR LEVIT

By Linda Holt, writing for The Princeton Packet, January 31, 2016, reprinted with permission



Only 28 years old, Igor Levit has already received rave reviews from the usually constrained *New York Times* and *New Yorker*. He's blown the minds of Beethoven experts with his transcendent performances of the last piano sonatas. He played Bach's "Goldberg" Variations with the infamous performance artist, Marina Abramović; subbed for pianist Maurizio Pollini

in Vienna's Musikverein; and wowed young people at a Park Avenue Armory concert in New York City. He plays Schubert sensitively, but nearly batters the piano in discordant explosions of sound from contemporary experimental composer Frederic Rzewski.

"I can't remember a time when I did not play," says Igor Levit, the hottest rising star in the classical piano firmament. "It's such a passion for me, and yet I feel there is nothing special about what I do, nothing extraordinary. It's almost unthinkable that I couldn't or wouldn't play the piano. It's what I do every day." Tonight Mr. Levit is making a rare East Coast appearance outside of New York City as he makes his debut on the Princeton University Concerts series.

First taught by his pianist mother when he was 3, Mr. Levit lived in Russia until he was 8. In 1995, the family moved to Germany, where he studied at the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover, where he received highest honors. It was in his teens when Mr. Levit had two epiphanies that contributed to his unique vision, technical mastery, and mature expression. "I always loved Beethoven, always, I could feel comfortable in his music like none other," Mr. Levit says. "Then, when I was 13 or so, I had this point-of-no-return experience. It was John Eliot Gardiner conducting the *Missa Solemnis*." He calls that solemn mass, composed in Beethoven's later years, "the holiest piece of music." "From that moment, my approach to this music changed completely.

There is a kind of existentialism in his music, but most important for me — and I could probably give you a billion examples of this — there is an incredibly human approach. It is music that does not stand above all of us, yet is about all of us. He tells us something about ourselves, that's why it is so incredibly alive, contemporary. And that is why I've always felt so close to him. It's good for me to work on Beethoven and to play Beethoven."

The second epiphany came with studies in his late teens with Matti Raekallio, who teaches at Juilliard. "I first met Matti when I was 18, and that was extremely important for me," he says. "At that time, I wasn't in really good shape for many reasons. When I met Matti, it was just like an explosion, everything fell into place. Over the years I've known him, now a little over 10 years, he wasn't just my teacher, but one of my very dearest friends."

After winning first prize at the International Hamamtsu Piano Academy Competition in Japan, Mr. Levit went on to win several prizes in the 2005 Arthur Rubenstein Competition in Tel Aviv (he was the youngest contestant). The year 2014 marked an astonishing variety of debuts: filling in for Maurizio Pollini in Vienna, and for Hélène Grimaud with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra — both in March — and his New York City recital debut at the Park Avenue Armory. He has performed in leading concert venues in London, Berlin, Amsterdam, and other international concert halls.

This past December, he appeared in an event with Marina Abramović, the notorious performance artist, whom he met through Alex Poots, the former director of the Park Avenue Armory. In the performance piece, Mr. Levit played the "Goldberg" Variations by Bach on a motorized platform while audience members, bereft of their cell phones, lay immobile in deck chairs. *The New York Times* quoted Ms. Abramović, who is more than 40 years older than Levit, as stating, "Nobody from classical music would ever accept this except someone who is as young and experimental and enthusiastic as Igor."

As though his performing schedule is not demanding enough, Mr. Levit also released a recording of the last five Beethoven sonatas (Sony Classical), which won the *BBC Music Magazine* Newcomer of the Year 2014 Award, the Royal Philharmonic Society's Young Artist Award 2014 and the ECHO 2014 for Solo Recording of the Year (19th Century Music/Piano). His recording of Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Partitas was released in August 2014. "I like to record," he says, "but it is a completely different experience from live performance. The people I record with, we become a team. Andreas (Neubronner),

the sound engineer, and Thomas (Hübsch), the piano technician, we work together, we become close friends in this process. But recording does not replicate the experience of playing with a live audience. In both forms, though, in recording and in the concert hall, it's about sharing music with others."

After Princeton Levit will be appearing in other cities in the United States and Canada, including San Francisco, Vancouver, and New York City. I asked him how Prokofiev, whose music is sometimes called cold or mechanistic, wound up on the program. "There's a famous quote by Galina Vishnevskaya, the soprano and wife of cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, to the effect that there is this very incredible thing, that Prokofiev's music is like melting ice," he says. "It is hard and cold, but it is melting, and it must be warm to melt. There's an incredible heat in it, a huge amount of energy and emotion."

But it is in Beethoven where listeners will find Mr. Levit's unique interpretive power. "The first movement of Beethoven's 17th piano sonata, it's like one eight-and-a-half minute long improvisation," he says, "where time, feelings, sound have no limits. And he goes very, very far, he doesn't have any limitations. I think he himself said, 'from this moment on, he will walk a new path.' I think this sonata very much shows us how radical, how free, how sincere and how honest this guy really was."

Tonight's concert marks Igor Levit's Princeton University Concerts debut.

The Paderewski Memorial Concert is funded in part by an endowment from The Paderewski Foundation, Edward and Jeannette Witkowski, Founders. It honors the memory of Ignacy Jan Paderewski: Polish pianist, composer, and statesman. Born in Poland in 1860, Paderewski was a student of Leschetizky, and rapidly rose to international fame – indeed, his name is still synonymous with virtuosity.

Following World War I, he laid aside his concert career, holding the offices of Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland. As such, he was a signer of the Treaty of Versailles, becoming friendly with President Woodrow Wilson whose support had been influential in the establishment of Poland as an independent state. On Tuesday, November 10, 1925, Paderewski performed here in Alexander Hall in tribute to Wilson, who had died the previous year.

Princeton University Concerts thanks The Paderewski Foundation for its generous support of tonight's concert.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

By Peter Laki, ©2016

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (Eisenach, 1685 – Leipzig, 1750) Partita No. 4 in D Major, BWV 828 (1729)

In the world's first dictionary of music, published by Johann Gottfried Walther in 1732, the entry on Johann Sebastian Bach mentions only a single set of compositions: the six partitas for keyboard, the only works by Bach then in print. Walther was a cousin of Bach's who had stood godfather to one of Walther's sons. He must therefore have had more knowledge about Bach's works than he let on in his dictionary. Yet for many music-lovers outside Leipzig, who had never heard the Thomaskantor improvise on the organ or direct one of his cantatas on Sunday morning, the 1731 publication of the six partitas, as "Op. 1," provided the first glimpse of the 46-year-old master whose virtuosity on the keyboard was already legendary throughout the German lands.

Actually, the publication of the partitas had begun in 1726. Bach had been bringing out one partita every year, printed at his own expense, and issued a collected edition when the set was complete. The title page read in German: "Keyboard Practice [Clavier-Übung] consisting of Preludes, Allemandes, Courantes, Sarabandes, Giges, Minuets and other Galanteries composed for the pleasurable diversion of music-lovers by Johann Sebastian

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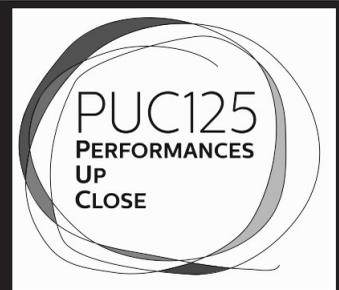
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Bach, Acting chapel master to the Court of Saxe-Weissenfels and Conductor of the Leipzig Musical Choir.” Bach eventually published three more volumes of “Keyboard Practice” which include such masterpieces as the Italian Concerto and the Goldberg Variations. A fifth volume, *The Art of Fugue*, was unfinished at the time of Bach’s death.

The partitas are akin to Bach’s earlier “English” and “French” suites for keyboard but, in the words of David Schulenberg (*The Keyboard Music of J. S. Bach*, Schirmer 1992), “the technical demands are greater...most of the dances are longer and diverge even farther from the traditional models than in the previous sets.”

In the D-major work, which Schulenberg calls “the most splendid of the Partitas,” Bach took greater liberties with the traditional dance forms than anywhere else. In several of the partitas, the opening prelude has been expanded into a larger form, as in the “Sinfonia” of No. 2 or the “Toccatà” of No. 6. The “Overture” of No. 4 is perhaps the most elaborate of them all, beginning with a grandiose slow introduction featuring the typical dotted rhythms of French Baroque overtures and continuing with an extended fugal section. The “Allemande” and the “Courante” are both highly unusual: the first, instead of moving in equal sixteenth-notes as Allemandes normally do, presents a beautifully ornamented and freely meandering melodic line, while the second enlivens the pattern of the French Courante with many metric ambiguities (which would make it very difficult indeed to dance to!) and with a persistently returning “trumpet-call” motif. Next comes an “Aria,” a short piece that is not a dance but similar in style to the first movement of the “Italian Concerto.” The “Sarabande” becomes another richly ornamented instrumental song. The dance character is much clearer in the “Minuet,” even though this movement also has its share of ornamental figurations. The “Gigue,” like many of Bach’s Giges, is a fugal movement whose energetic theme is elaborated in three-part counterpoint.

FRANZ SCHUBERT

(Himmelpfortgrund [now part of Vienna], 1797 – Vienna, 1828)

Moments musicaux, D. 780 (1823-1828)

The keyboard music of the Classical composers was almost entirely dominated by the multi-movement sonata. With the exception of the fantasy, most other shorter piano works (rondos, variations) could be considered potential sonata movements. The short, independent character piece is a 19th-century invention. Its first master—after a few

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INSIDE THE SHOSTAKOVICH PRELUDES AND FUGUES

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lesser figures preparing the way—was Franz Schubert, with his two sets of impromptus, his magnificent *Three Piano Pieces*, and the popular *Moments musicaux*.

The six “musical moments” were written over a period of five years, and published in Vienna in 1828, the year of Schubert’s death, with the faulty French title *Moments musicaux*. Two of the pieces, however, had been printed separately earlier: No. 3 under the title *Air russe* in 1823, and No. 6 as, surprisingly, *Les Plaintes d’un Troubadour* (“The Lament of a Troubadour”) in 1824. Neither of these titles appears to have been given by Schubert, but they are an interesting indication of how 19th-century ears heard this music. With the exception of No. 5, these short works are really “double-character” pieces, as each has a *trio* (middle section) that contrasts with the opening. (In No. 3, this contrast is not very pronounced.) In the first piece, music that constantly changes is contrasted with music that stays the same. The opening material shifts back and forth between unaccompanied and accompanied melody, and between major and minor keys, while the trio is a single continuous melody with a constant (well, *almost* constant) accompaniment in triplets. The intensely lyrical second movement follows an ABABA scheme—that is, each section is repeated one extra time. Each repeat, moreover, is varied: the “A” melody is significantly expanded, and the “B” section grows from *pianissimo* to *forte*. The conclusion of each section, however, is invariably soft and subdued.

No. 3 is probably the best known (and also the shortest) piece in the set. A simple and uniform dance rhythm is heard throughout, and the “A” and “B” sections, as well as the concluding coda, follow one another in a completely seamless fashion. The unique charm of the piece is greatly enhanced by a typical Schubertian alternation between major and minor sonorities, which gives the little dance tune a somewhat wistful coloring.

No. 4 opens as a kind of *toccata*, a perpetual motion with an uninterrupted series of fast sixteenth-notes in a minor key. For his “B” section, Schubert turns to a syncopated dance

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melody in the major. After the recapitulation, the composer reminds us once more, ever so briefly, of the trio section, before the final closure.

No. 5 turns Schubert's favorite dactylic rhythm (long-short-short) into a galloping "Allegro vivace." This pattern changes only slightly in the course of the piece, which is kept in the minor mode throughout, except for the very end.

No. 6 is, in many ways, the most extraordinary piece in the set. Its deep melancholy and its numerous harmonic irregularities prompted Princeton musicologist Edward T. Cone, in an article first published in 1982, to advance a bold hypothesis that can be neither proved nor disproved. Cone showed how in this work, whose main tonality is A-flat major, the foreign note E at first appears almost as an "aside," only to grow gradually in importance before it finally makes a jarring appearance in *fortissimo* that completely disrupts the flow of the harmony. (The whole procedure is repeated without any changes after the brief respite offered by the quiet, lyrical trio.) In Cone's words:

"As I apprehend the work, it dramatizes the injection of a strange, unsettling element into an otherwise peaceful situation. At first ignored or suppressed, that element persistently returns. It not only makes itself at home but even takes over the direction of events in order to reveal unsuspected possibilities. When the normal state of affairs eventually returns, the originally foreign element seems to have been completely assimilated. But that appearance is deceptive. The element has not been tamed; it bursts out with even greater force, revealing itself as basically inimical to its surroundings, which it proceeds to demolish."

From here, it is only a small step to realize that Schubert wrote this piece shortly after he found out that he had contracted syphilis. Can there be a connection, conscious or subconscious, between a "foreign element" invading the piece and the then-incurable disease invading the composer's body?

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LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (Bonn, 1770 – Vienna, 1827)
 Sonata No. 17 in D Minor, Op. 31, No. 2 “The Tempest” (1802)

Around the time he penned his intensely moving Heiligenstadt Testament, the famous unmailed letter in which he poured out his heart about his encroaching deafness, Beethoven told his pupil Carl Czerny: “I am not very well satisfied with the work I have done thus far. From this day on I shall take a new path.” That “new path” is readily apparent in the three piano sonatas published as Op. 31, which include, in addition to the sonata heard tonight, two other highly innovative pieces in G and E-flat, respectively.

The second of the three sonatas, in D Minor, has become known as “The Tempest” because Beethoven supposedly told his secretary Anton Schindler to read Shakespeare’s eponymous play if he wanted to know what the sonata was all about. It is not clear what we should make of this information, but one thing is certain: we shouldn’t go looking for any direct echoes of Prospero and Miranda. Perhaps the connection is less with the play itself than with the image of the tempest as such—and commentators from the last 200 years have been unanimous in describing this sonata (and its first movement in particular) as “stormy.”

“ The first movement of Beethoven’s 17th piano sonata, it’s like one eight-and-a-half minute long improvisation,” he says, “where time, feelings, sound have no limits. And he goes very, very far, he doesn’t have any limitations. I think he himself said, ‘from this moment on, he will walk a new path.’ I think this sonata very much shows us how radical, how free, how sincere and how honest this guy really was.”

– Pianist Igor Levit

The opening of the sonata is nothing short of revolutionary, with its abrupt tempo changes and alternations between mysterious arpeggios and a short melody of great urgency. In the words of Princeton Professor Scott Burnham, this is “music on the verge.” After the relentlessly agitated exposition ends, the mysterious arpeggios of the beginning return, much expanded, and introducing a development section where the “storm” intensifies. But it is contrasted with an astonishing unaccompanied recitative, which sounds like a lament, completely disrupting the flow of the music before the recapitulation restores the original momentum.

The central Adagio—which begins with a broken chord just like the first movement—is an extremely intense lyrical statement, a moment of calm in the midst of the storm, though not without its own tensions and dramatic climaxes. The closing Allegretto is a perpetual motion (though not an excessively fast one), combining relentless energy with a dream-like, Romantic sensibility. One of the most prophetic Beethoven sonatas, “The Tempest” picks up where the earlier “Pathétique” sonata had left off, and is a direct precursor of the “Appassionata,” which came just a few years later.

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

(Sontsovka, Ukraine, 1891 – Nikolina Gora, nr. Moscow, 1953)

Piano Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major, Op. 83 (1939-42)

Prokofiev’s Seventh Sonata is, without a doubt, one of the peaks of 20th-century piano literature. It is an intensely emotional statement, written in a harmonically advanced style and making exceptional technical demands on the performer.

Like the Sixth and the Eighth Sonatas, the Seventh is a product of the war years. Even more than its companions, it conveys, as pianist Boris Berman has put it in his seminal book on the Prokofiev sonatas, “the anguish and the struggle of the war years as they were experienced in real time.” The first performance was given by Sviatoslav Richter in Moscow on January 18, 1943, while the Battle of Stalingrad was raging 600 miles to the southeast (it would end with a decisive Soviet victory two weeks later). Richter found particularly poetic words to describe the sonata:

“With this work we are brutally plunged into the anxiously threatening atmosphere of a world that has lost its balance. Chaos and uncertainty reign. We see murderous forces ahead. But this does not mean that what we lived by before thereby ceases to exist. We continue to feel and love. Now the full range of human emotions bursts forth. Together with our fellow men and women, we raise a voice in protest and share the common grief. We sweep everything before us, borne along by the will for victory. In the tremendous struggle that this involves, we find the strength to affirm the irrepressible life-force.”

“ There’s a famous quote by Galina Vishnevskaya, the soprano and wife of cellist Rostropovich, to the effect that there is this very incredible thing, that Prokofiev’s music is like melting ice,” he says. “It is hard and cold, but it is melting, and it must be warm to melt. There’s an incredible heat in it, a huge amount of energy and emotion.

– Pianist Igor Levit/
Cellist Mstislav Rostropovich

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The first movement follows classical sonata form in its broadest outlines, but the contrast between its two themes is extreme, emphasized by the tempo change from a nervous *Allegro inquieto* to a much slower, delicate *Andantino*. The wild dissonances of the first theme make way for a plaintive song, and these two opposite poles define the expressive range of the movement.

Marked *Andante caloroso* (“*Andante* with warmth”), the second movement begins with a beautiful, romantic opening melody and becomes darker and darker until the music explodes in a cry of great anguish. Berman describes this moment as a “picture of complete devastation” and the stubborn

repeat of a descending minor-second figure as bells ringing in the “belfry of a burned-out village.” The recapitulation is interrupted after just a few measures: one feels that “the peaceful mood of the beginning is out of place after the tragedy we have just witnessed.”

The celebrated final movement, *Precipitato*, is a wild toccata in 7/8 time, with relentless, dissonant ostinato chords. Although the tempo never changes, there is a brief moment when the texture thins out for a brief *espressivo* moment, after which the chords return with even more power than before.