

October 27, 2016 at 8:00pm

Pre-concert Talk by Ruth Ochs at 7:00pm

Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

3RD PERFORMANCE OF THE 123RD SEASON / HISTORY IN THE MUSIC-MAKING

SERGEI BABAYAN, piano

DANIIL TRIFONOV, piano

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810 – 1856)

Andante and Variations in B-flat Major for Two Pianos, Op. 46

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797 – 1828)

Fantasie in F Minor for Piano Four Hands, D. 940

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833 – 1897)

Selections from 21 Hungarian Dances, WoO. 1

No. 9 in E Minor: Allegro non troppo

No. 10 in E Major: Presto

No. 17 in F-sharp Minor: Andantino

No. 18 in D Major: Molto vivace

No. 21 in E Minor: Vivace

—INTERMISSION—

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873 – 1943)

Suite No. 1 in G Minor “Fantasie-Tableaux” for Two Pianos, Op. 5

Barcarolle

A Night for Love

Tears

Russian Easter

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Suite No. 2 in C Minor for Two Pianos, Op. 17

Introduction

Waltz

Romance

Tarantella

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

TONIGHT'S PROGRAM

By Paul Schiavo ©2016

The Nineteenth Century saw a dramatic expansion of nearly all aspects of Western music. Orchestras became larger, new harmonies and harmonic relationships became available, and the scale on which composers executed their work grew significantly. It is not surprising, then, that this period also saw the emergence of music for piano duo. True, Mozart had written several pieces for two pianos, notably his fine Sonata in D Major of 1781, but these proved isolated and exceptional works. Even Beethoven, Mozart's heir in many respects, left nothing for piano duo among his many keyboard compositions.

The proliferation of music for two pianists was closely linked to the rise of Romanticism as the dominant ethos of European culture during the nineteenth century. In music, the Romantic sensibility dictated more powerful gestures, richer harmonies, more luxuriant textures, and greater brilliance than composers had previously imagined, and these were more readily attained by two pianists than one. The music performed this evening, surveying the Romantic piano duo literature, reveals how successfully some of its finest creators used the medium.

PERFORMERS AS TEACHERS

Daniil Trifonov coaches student members
of the Princeton Pianists Ensemble
Friday, October 28, 2016 at 9:30AM
Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

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**Andante and Variations in
B-flat Major, Op. 46 (1844)
ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810 – 1856)**

Robert Schumann played the piano more than capably, and his wife, Clara, was one of the great pianists of the Nineteenth Century. In view of this, and the fact that the Schumanns often hosted musical gatherings in their home, it is surprising that the composer's substantial body of keyboard music includes only one piece for piano duo. This is his *Andante and Variations*, Opus 46. Schumann did not even conceive this music for two pianos alone. He composed it in 1843 for an ensemble of horn, two cellos, and two pianos. But he grew dissatisfied with this initial version and in 1844 recast the work in the form we know it today.

Schumann, like Beethoven and Schubert before and Brahms after him, found the theme-and-variations format a stimulating framework for musical invention. The subject for his Opus 46 is one of those melodies embodying Romantic reverie that

Schumann often devised for his piano music. Marked "Andante espressivo," it is given out by the two players in alternating phrases.

The initial variation is simply decorative. Schumann maintains the contours of the original theme but adds ornamental figures that draw echoic response from the other instrument. But the ensuing paraphrases leave the subject theme behind and weave substantially new invention over its harmonic framework. Notable is the fifth variation, which shifts to the minor mode and uses a tolling motif clearly derived from the "Funeral March" movement of Chopin's B-flat Minor Piano Sonata. (Schumann openly admired his Polish contemporary's music.)

The original melody, slightly altered, reappears in the sixth variation but nearly vanishes again in the scampering seventh. Clarion calls in the eighth variation remind us of the music's original scoring with horn, and the lightly tripping final variation leads to a reprise of the subject melody and a luminous conclusion.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Fantasie in F Minor, D. 940 (1828)

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797 – 1828)

During the last year of his life, Franz Schubert produced a body of music extraordinary in both its size and quality. Among the compositions completed in the twelve months before his untimely death are a series of superb songs culminating in the *Schwanengesang* cycle; the two Piano Trios and the String Quintet in C Major, works in which Schubert brought a symphonic breadth of thinking to the realm of chamber music; the Mass in E-flat Major, along with several shorter choral pieces; a number of pieces for solo piano, including the great trilogy of last sonatas; and a sonata movement, a Rondo, and the extraordinary Fantasie in F Minor, all for piano four-hands.

This late harvest of music is all the more remarkable in view of Schubert's shattered health. By early 1828, the syphilis he had contracted nearly a decade earlier had ravaged his central nervous system, producing headaches, despondency and bouts of delirium. In November the composer took to his bed, and on the 19th of that month he died. The combination of Schubert's achievements in 1828 with the pathos of his biography give his final year "an overwhelmingly tragic aspect," as his biographer Maurice Brown put it.

Do we hear something of this "tragic aspect" in the opening moments of the F Minor Fantasie? We should be careful about projecting our thoughts and feelings about the composer onto his music. Still, the first portion of this composition treats a melody that

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can only be described as a poignant lament. This melody dominates the initial minutes of the Fantasie. Schubert elaborates it at some length, extending and altering its phrases with unexpected harmonic shading. Then, after the briefest of pauses, he begins it again, this time in the brighter major mode, but the relaxation this brings proves fleeting. The music veers suddenly into stormy terrain, and the ensuing minutes bring an alteration of quiet anguish and violent outbursts.

Rumbling trills and steely chords signal the start of the second part of the work. Again Schubert briefly lightens the music, here with an aria-like melody, but he quickly pushes this aside and returns to the more dramatic thoughts he had just left. The third movement, which also follows without pause, rides waltz rhythms, though the music, and

particularly its harmonic coloring, are richer and more complex than that dance normally provides.

The final part of the Fantasie is a varied reprise of its opening. Schubert begins by restating the sorrowful melody heard at the outset, but then launches into a vigorous and impassioned contrapuntal development that lasts almost to the composition's haunting final moments.

Selections from 21 Hungarian Dances, WoO. 1

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

A native of Hamburg, a longtime resident of Vienna, and a champion of the German classical tradition descended from Bach, Haydn and Beethoven, Brahms nevertheless had a deep fondness for the gypsy music

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

of Hungary. Periodically he evoked this folk music in his own works, his *Zigeunerlieder* (Gypsy Songs), Opus 103, and the finale of his Violin Concerto being prominent examples. But Brahms' most vivid rendition of the gypsy manner came in his Hungarian Dances.

Brahms published these twenty-one dances, arranged for piano four-hands, in two installments, issued in 1869 and 1880 respectively, though he wrote them at different times over the course of his career. Most of the pieces use authentic Hungarian folk tunes as melodic material, though Brahms generally compliments this with ideas of his own invention.

The first of the dances we hear present features common to most of Brahms' Hungarian Dances: three sections in succession, each treating a distinct melodic idea, then concluding with a reprise of the opening. The composer refrains from developing his material in any way. Instead, he enhances it with counter-melodies and the kind of harmonic elaboration we hear at the very end of the piece. In the dance that follows, a bright major-key consequent

of its predecessor, Brahms employs another characteristic procedure, moving the melody among different registers of the piano.

Our third Hungarian Dance, No. 17 in F-sharp Minor, is especially elaborate. Beginning as a plaintive minor-key song, whose second verse Brahms skillfully embellishes, it then moves to a new section in which a vigorous dance tune frames a gentle and winsome melody set against crystalline counterpoint. Each of the final two Hungarian Dances we hear are simple and lively and use the piano's high register to fine effect.

Suite No. 1 in G Minor “Fantasie-Tableaux” for Two Pianos, Op. 5 (1893) **SERGEI RACHMANINOFF** (1873-1943)

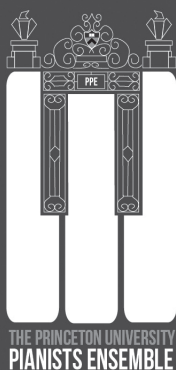
Although Sergei Rachmaninoff wrote much of his music for the keyboard, he rarely composed for piano duo, and only early in his career. His principal works for two pianos are the pair of suites that form the second half of our concert. The first dates from 1893.

Rachmaninoff's title for this piece, *Fantasia-tableaux* ("Fantasy Pictures"), implies aural evocations of particular images. Such was indeed the composer's intent, but the "pictures" he hoped to impart were neither scenes from nature nor renderings by painters. Rather, they came to Rachmaninoff by way of poetry. Each of the suite's four movements is prefaced by verses that establish a mood and, if we are susceptible to the sort of Romantic suggestion Rachmaninoff evidently felt, a visual image for the music that follows.

Rachmaninoff called the first piece "Barcarolle." While its music aspires to the type of fluid Romantic piano writing we find in the barcarolles of Chopin and

Fauré, the verses that precede it, by the Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov, remind us that its title originally designated a Venetian gondoliers' song. Lermontov's lines translate:

A cool evening's ripple,
Barely a sound beneath
the gondola.
That song again! And again
the strains of the guitar!
In the distance, now melancholy,
now gay,
Was heard the familiar sound
of the barcarolle.
The gondola glides along,
And the time for loving slips away;
Again the oars part the water.
Lost passion is never rekindled.



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McAlpin Hall in Woolworth Center of Musical Studies

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The second movement bears a quotation, in English, from Byron:

It is the hour when from the boughs
The nightingale's high note is heard;
It is the hour when lovers' vows
Seem sweet in every whisper'd
word;
And gentle winds, and waters near,
Make music to the lonely ear.

Rachmaninoff's music conveys this scene vividly; we even hear the song of a nightingale punctuating the tranquil atmosphere. A central episode turns to more agitated sounds, but Rachmaninoff returns to the movement's initial material, rounding this portion of the work into the kind of A-B-A format we often encounter in

Romantic character pieces of this sort.

The third movement takes its inspiration from the poem *Slyozy* ("Tears") by Fyodor Tyutchev:

Human tears, oh human tears,
You flow in springtime and autumn;
You flow unknown, you
flow unseen,
Eternal, incalculable —
You flow like showers of rain
In late autumn, in evening.

Its musical substance grows largely from a four-note motif reportedly sounded by the bells of the Cathedral of Saint Sophia in the composer's native city of Novgorod.



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The final piece effects a marked change of mood. Here Rachmaninoff presents a sonorous picture of a Russian Easter festival. The prefatory verses are by Alexy Khomyakov:

And the mighty peal resounded
across the land,
And the whole world, vibrating,
trembled with it.
Melodious silver thunderclaps
told the news
Of the holy festival.

The climactic moment brings a quotation of an old Russian hymn melody, "Christ is Risen."

Suite No. 2 in C Minor
for Two Pianos, Op. 17 (1900–01)
SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873–1943)

Rachmaninoff wrote his Second Suite for two pianos between December 1900 and April 1901. At this time he also was composing his Second Piano Concerto, and the Suite shares much of the textural richness and virtuoso keyboard writing of that very popular work. Unlike the First Suite, this later

work entails no literary or pictorial references. Instead, the music is shaped primarily by rhythm.

Rachmaninoff establishes the rhythmic vitality of this composition as a whole during the opening movement. This takes the form of a march, but one with a distinctly Russian character. In the second movement, Rachmaninoff raises to new heights Chopin's conception of the waltz as virtuoso keyboard piece, with a rapid *moto perpetuo* figuration all but blurring the underlying waltz pulse.

After these two extremely energetic movements, the composer provides a slow interlude in the ensuing Romance. Its initial and concluding sections are formed largely from scale figures rising at different speeds, while the central episode brings a hint of Spanish fantasy. In the finale, Rachmaninoff pays homage to Liszt, his great predecessor among virtuoso pianist-composers, who previously had used the rhythms of that most vigorous of Italian dances, the *tarantella*, to fashion a pianistic *tour de force*.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



SERGEI BABAYAN, Piano

Sergei Babayan brings a deep understanding and insight to a stylistically diverse repertoire, which includes a performance history of 54 concertos. *Le Figaro* has praised his “unequaled touch, perfectly harmonious phrasing and breathtaking virtuosity.”

Highlights of the 2016/2017 season include recitals in Montreal, Vancouver, St. Paul, Durham and Charleston; duo recitals with Daniil Trifonov; chamber music performances in Los Angeles and Fort Worth; and a return to the Verbier Festival for a recital in August 2017. In the spring of 2016, Mr. Babayan’s recording of the



Prokofiev Piano Concerto No. 5 with the Mariinsky Orchestra conducted by Valery Gergiev was released on the Mariinsky label.

Last season, Mr. Babayan’s schedule included concerto performances with the Rotterdam Philharmonic conducted by Valery Gergiev and with the Camerata Israel in Tel Aviv; performances at the “Progetto Martha Argerich” in Lugano, Switzerland; at the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland, a return to Wigmore Hall in London; and recitals and chamber music performances in Los Angeles and Atlanta, among others.

Mr. Babayan has performed with the world's foremost orchestras, including the London Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Orchestra of the Mariinsky Theatre and the Warsaw Philharmonic. His engagements have brought him to preeminent international concert venues including Salle Gaveau in Paris, Wigmore Hall in London, Carnegie Hall in New York City, Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg and the Konzerthaus in Berlin,

Born in Armenia into a musical family, Babayan began his studies there with Georgy Saradjev and continued at the Moscow Conservatory with Mikhail Pletnev, Vera Gornostayeva and Lev Naumov. Following his first trip outside of the USSR in 1989, he won consecutive first prizes in several major international competitions including the Robert Casadesus International Piano Competition (renamed the Cleveland International Piano Competition), the Hamamatsu Piano Competition, and the Scottish International Piano Competition. This concert marks Mr. Babayan's Princeton University Concerts debut.

DANIIL TRIFONOV, Piano

Russian pianist Daniil Trifonov (dan-EEL TREE-fon-ov) has made a spectacular ascent in the world of classical music since winning First Prize at both the Tchaikovsky and Rubinstein Competitions in 2011 at the age of 20. Combining consummate technique with rare sensitivity and depth, his performances are a perpetual source of awe. "He has everything and more ...tenderness and also the demonic element. I never heard anything like that," declared pianist Martha Argerich, while the *Financial Times* (London) observed, "What makes him such a phenomenon is the ecstatic quality he brings to his performances....Small wonder every western capital is in thrall to him."

The 2016-17 season brings the release of *Transcendental*, a double album that not only represents Trifonov's third title as an exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist, but also the first time that Liszt's complete concert etudes have been recorded for the label. In concert, the pianist—the winner of *Gramophone's* 2016 Artist of the Year award—plays Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto under Riccardo Muti in the historic gala finale of the Chicago Symphony's 125th anniversary

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

celebrations. Having scored his second Grammy Award nomination with Rachmaninoff Variations, he performs Rachmaninoff for his debut with the Berlin Philharmonic under Sir Simon Rattle at the orchestra's famous New Year's Eve concerts, scheduled to air live in cinemas throughout Europe.

He also makes debuts with the Melbourne and Sydney Symphonies, and returns to the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Gustavo Dudamel and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. He headlines the Munich Philharmonic's "Rachmaninoff Cycle" tour with longtime collaborator Valery Gergiev. He will play Mozart with the New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra and Philadelphia Orchestra, as well as with the Staatskapelle Dresden and London's BBC Proms.

An accomplished composer, Mr. Trifonov also reprises his own acclaimed concerto in Kansas City. He makes recital debuts at London's Barbican and Melbourne's Recital Centre; appears in Berlin, Vienna, Florence, Madrid, Oslo, Moscow and other European hotspots; and returns for the fourth consecutive year to the mainstage of New York City's Carnegie Hall. In addition to tonight's concert, he will also give a duo recital with Sergei Babayan in Sarasota,

Florida and looks forward to returning to the Tanglewood, Verbier, Baden-Baden, and Salzburg Festivals.

Trifonov has won medals at three of the music world's most prestigious competitions, taking Third Prize in Warsaw's Chopin Competition, First Prize in Tel Aviv's Rubinstein Competition, and both First Prize and Grand Prix – an additional honor bestowed on the best overall competitor in any category – in Moscow's Tchaikovsky Competition. In 2013 he was also awarded the prestigious Franco Abbiati Prize for Best Instrumental Soloist by Italy's foremost music critics.

Born in Nizhny Novgorod in 1991, Trifonov began his musical training at the age of five, and went on to attend Moscow's Gnssin School of Music as a student of Tatiana Zelikman, before pursuing his piano studies with Sergei Babayan at the Cleveland Institute of Music. He has also studied composition, and continues to compose. When he premiered his own piano concerto in 2013, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* marveled: "Even having seen it, one cannot quite believe it. Such is the artistry of pianist-composer Daniil Trifonov." Tonight's concert marks Mr. Trifonov's Princeton University Concerts debut.