

Tuesday, October 11, 2011, 8pm  
Zellerbach Hall

## Yefim Bronfman, *piano*

### PROGRAM

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) Piano Sonata No. 3 in F minor, Op. 5 (1853)

Allegro maestoso  
Andante espressivo  
Scherzo: Allegro energico  
Intermezzo (Rückblick): Andante molto  
Finale: Allegro moderato ma rubato

Franz Liszt (1811–1886) Selections from the *Twelve Transcendental Etudes* (1826, 1837–1838; rev. 1851)

IV. Mazeppa: Allegro  
XI. Harmonies du Soir: Andantino  
XII. Chasse-Neige: Andante con moto

### INTERMISSION

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953) Piano Sonata No. 8 in B-flat major, Op. 84 (1939–1944)

Andante dolce  
Andante sognando  
Vivace

*Funded by the Koret Foundation, this performance is part of Cal Performances' 2011–2012 Koret Recital Series, which brings world-class artists to our community.*

*This performance is made possible, in part, by Patron Sponsors Peter and Donna Zuber.*

*Cal Performances' 2011–2012 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.*

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)  
Piano Sonata No. 3 in F minor, Op. 5

*Composed in 1853.*

In April 1853, the 20-year-old Johannes Brahms set out from his native Hamburg for a concert tour of Germany with the Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi. The following month in Hanover they met Joseph Joachim, whom Brahms had heard give an inspiring performance of the Beethoven Violin Concerto five years earlier in Hamburg. Brahms was at first somewhat shy in the presence of the celebrated virtuoso, but the two men warmed to each other when the young composer began to play some of his recent music at the piano. Before the interview was done, Joachim had been overwhelmed by his visitor: “Brahms has an altogether exceptional talent for composition, a gift which is further enhanced by the unaffected modesty of his character. His playing, too, gives every presage of a great artistic career, full of fire and energy... In brief, he is the most considerable musician of his age that I have ever met.” The following summer Brahms and Joachim spent eight weeks at Göttingen, discussing music, studying scores, playing chamber works together, and setting the foundation for a creative friendship that would last for almost half a century. Joachim learned of Brahms’s desire to take a walking tour through the Rhine Valley, and he arranged a joint recital to raise enough money to finance the trip. Along with the proceeds of the gate, Joachim gave Brahms as a parting gift several letters of introduction, including one to Robert and Clara Schumann in Düsseldorf.

On the last day of September 1853, Brahms met the Schumanns for the first time. “Here is one of those who comes as if sent straight from God,” Clara recorded in her diary. Brahms spent a delightful month in Düsseldorf, seeing the Schumanns almost every day, sharing meals, talking, joining their family walks, and playing music with them. Robert was simply overwhelmed by Brahms’s talent, a conviction that he shared with the musical world in his famous article *New Paths*, which appeared

in the October 23 edition of his journal, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (“New Journal for Music”): “It seemed to me that there would and indeed must suddenly appear one man who would be singled out to articulate and give the ideal expression to the tendencies of our time, one man who would show us his mastery, not through a gradual process, but, like Athene, spring fully armed from the head of Zeus. And he has come, a young man over whose cradle Graces and Heroes stood guard. His name is *Johannes Brahms*.” Brahms was inspired by Schumann’s unstinting advocacy, and he threw himself into the composition of a new F minor Piano Sonata, his third work in the form in two years, which he played for Robert and Clara “from his head” on November 2, the eve of his departure from Düsseldorf. Brahms then made his way to Leipzig, the center of European music publishing, where, with Schumann’s blessing and the instant renown imparted by the *Neue Zeitschrift* article, his first two Piano Sonatas, a set of six songs and the Scherzo in E-flat minor were accepted by the prestigious firm of Breitkopf und Härtel; they were issued in December as, respectively, Opp. 1–4. By the end of the year, Brahms had completed the notation of his Third Piano Sonata, and the score was published as his Op. 5 by the Leipzig firm of Senff in February 1854 with an appreciative dedication to Countess Ida von Hohenenthal, who had acted as his hostess in Leipzig and who also hired the composer’s younger brother, Fritz (a piano teacher in Germany and Caracas, known in his later years as “the wrong Brahms”), as music tutor for her children. The F minor, the largest of his keyboard works, was Brahms’s last piano sonata, though the following year he did attempt a sonata for two pianos that was eventually transformed into the Piano Concerto No. 1.

The F minor Piano Sonata was among the creations upon which Brahms’s fame was founded—Clara Schumann, one of the era’s most esteemed piano virtuosos, immediately took it into her repertory and performed it with great success across northern Europe; Eduard Hanslick, the leading music critic of the time, said that “it belongs to the most inward experiences

that recent piano music has to offer”; Richard Specht believed that the work and its immediate companions “are the most wonderful beginning ever made by any master”; and Brahms’s modern biographer Malcolm MacDonald said that “it stands with Liszt’s B minor Sonata and the *Grande Sonate* of Alkan as one of the three greatest piano sonatas of the mid-19th century.” Even the redoubtable Richard Wagner, after hearing Brahms play the Sonata in recital in Vienna in January 1863, is said to have “overwhelmed him with praise,” and pronounced that the Sonata “shows what may still be done with the old forms, provided that one knows how to treat them.”

The F minor Sonata is remarkable for the way in which Brahms harnessed the surging Romantic language of his youthful style into the logical constructions of Classical form. (This was precisely the quality that so excited Schumann’s admiration.) It is this masterly balance of ardent emotional expression and intellectual formal necessity—of heart and head—that imparts such power to this music. Also evident here is Brahms’s ability to blend rigorous counterpoint with singing lyricism, a technique that generates the thematic material of the sonata-form opening movement: a dramatic, leaping motive as principal subject; and a chordal strain (to which the leaping motive in the bass acts as accompaniment) as complementary theme. These two expressive states—drama and lyricism—contend in the development section before the recapitulation of the themes, somewhat abbreviated, closes the movement.

The tenderly eloquent *Andante* is headed with lines by the German poet Sternau: *The evening falls, the moonlight shines, Two hearts, joined in love, Embrace each other blissfully.* This poignant nocturne (which may have been sketched as early as 1852 in Hamburg) extends across a sonata form modified so that the second theme of the exposition, a quiet melody in sweet sixths divided equally between the two hands, is replaced in the recapitulation by a hauntingly beautiful strain of folkish simplicity in full chords. The *Scherzo* is Brahms’s tribute to the Florestan-esque character pieces of impetuous

nature that loom so large in Schumann’s output. Ominous, sometimes demonic, it is one of the most vehemently expressive pieces that Brahms ever wrote, and his sense of Classical formal propriety required him to balance it with a sedate central *Trio* that glides smoothly along in an almost hymnal manner.

Instead of proceeding directly to the finale, Brahms next inserted a movement titled *Intermezzo*, which “looks back” (*Rückblick*) to the *Andante* by transmuting its theme into a tragic threnody accompanied by the cadence of distant funeral drums. Though he did not ascribe a literary reference to this sullen music, it may perhaps be related to an entry in a notebook wherein he collected poems that struck him as suitable for songs, in which the earlier lines from Sternau were followed by the next stanza of the poem: *If ye knew how soon, How soon the trees are withered, And the wood is bare, How soon comes the dreary day When the heart’s beat is dumb.* The finale, blended from elements of rondo and sonata forms, is built upon the contrast between the tensely rhythmic opening theme and two lyrical melodies revealed in later episodes of the movement. The Sonata ends with a brilliant, major-key coda whose flamboyant virtuosity documents the technical panache that marked Brahms’s pianism as a young man.

**Franz Liszt (1811–1886)**  
**Selections from the *Twelve Transcendental Etudes***

*Composed in 1826 and 1837–1838; revised in 1851.*

In 1826, when, at the age of 15, Liszt was being displayed in Paris as a child prodigy by his father, he composed a set of *Twelve Etudes*. The pieces were published in Marseilles as his Op. 1 the following year with a dedication to Mlle. Lydie Garella, then one of his most favored piano duet partners. Five years later, in Paris in 1831, Liszt heard Nicolò Paganini play for the first time, and he spent the next several years trying to find keyboard equivalents for the dazzling feats that the legendary violinist

accomplished on his instrument. To that end, Liszt undertook a thorough transformation of his old Op. 1 *Etudes* in 1837, and produced one of the most awesome documents of instrumental virtuosity of the Romantic century—the *Twelve Transcendental Etudes*.

Liszt’s Op. 1 *Etudes* found their principal influences in the finger-exercising teaching pieces of his teacher Carl Czerny and the lyrical effusions of fashionable Italian opera. (Liszt’s dozens of arrangements, paraphrases, fantasias and reminiscences on operatic themes were among the most popular numbers on his recitals.) He had originally intended to produce a cycle of 48 numbers which, like the two books of Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*, would include two pieces in each of the major and minor keys (C major, A minor; F major, D minor; B-flat major, G minor, etc.), but he completed only twelve movements, giving them no titles except for their tempo markings. He took up the *Etudes* again in 1837, by which time his affair with the Countess Marie d’Agoult, wife of the equerry to the Dauphin of France, had progressed to the point of the imminent birth of their second child, an event that they chose to await among the Italian lakes—Cosima, later the wife of both Hans von Bülow and Richard Wagner, was born at Como on Christmas Eve. In addition to the inspiration provided by the enrichment of his family life and the spectacular northern Italian scenery, Liszt may also have returned to the genre of the *Étude* out of a certain sense of professional pride and one-upmanship, since Frédéric Chopin had issued his Op. 25 *Études* earlier that year with a dedication to none other than Countess d’Agoult. Liszt retained the thematic materials and key structures of his earlier pieces (he added a title to only one—*Mazeppa*, associated with Victor Hugo’s swashbuckling poem about the 16th-century Polish hero), but created in his *Études d’Exécution Transcendante* piano works of almost symphonic breadth whose difficulty of performance led Robert Schumann to call them “*Sturm- und Graus-Etuden* [‘Studies of Storm and Dread’], suitable for perhaps only ten or twelve players in the whole world.” Hector Berlioz believed that “no one else in the world

could flatter himself that he could approach being able to perform them.” Liszt returned yet again to the *Transcendental Etudes*, in 1851, when he alleviated some of their technical difficulties, tightened their formal structures, and added poetic titles to all but two of them. (Both the 1837 and 1851 versions were dedicated to Czerny.) Even in this “simplified” final form, the version usually heard today in the concert hall, the *Transcendental Etudes* remain among the most imposing technical and interpretative challenges in the piano’s realm.

*Mazeppa* is associated with the Polish nobleman Ivan Stepanovich Mazeppa (1644–1709), who served during his younger years as a page at the court of King John Casimir of Poland, where he had an affair with the wife of an older courtier. The furious count had Mazeppa tied naked to a wild horse which was sent racing into Ukraine. For three days, the horse galloped across the steppes before succumbing to exhaustion. Mazeppa was rescued and restored to health by Cossacks, and eventually became their chief. In order to win Ukrainian independence from Russia, he fought with Charles XII of Sweden against Czar Peter the Great at the Battle of Pultowa. Byron and Victor Hugo immortalized Mazeppa’s exploits in romantic poems, Pushkin made him the central figure in the drama *Pultowa* (which served as the basis of Tchaikovsky’s opera *Mazeppa*), Horace Vernet painted two depictions of Mazeppa, the Russian author Bulgarin made a novel of the subject, and Mazeppa figured in Voltaire’s *History of Charles the Twelfth*. Liszt reworked this movement into his Symphonic Poem No. 6 in 1851. The lovely *Harmonies du Soir* (“Evening Harmonies”) conjures a peaceful evening scene through which tolls the sound of distant bells. *Chasse-Neige* (“Hunt—Snow”) is an almost Impressionistic evocation of a winter landscape.

**Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953)**  
**Piano Sonata No. 8 in B-flat major, Op. 84**

*Composed in 1939–1944. Premiered on December 30, 1944, in Moscow by Emil Gilels.*

Prokofiev returned to Russia from his years in the West in 1933, and by 1939, when the Eighth Sonata was conceived, he had become the leading composer of his country with works written in what he called “a style in which one could speak of Soviet life.” *Lt. Kijé, Peter and the Wolf* and *Romeo and Juliet* are among the best-known realizations of his populist art. Many of Prokofiev’s efforts during the early years of the Second World War continued in the same vein, including the Piano Sonatas Nos. 6, 7 and 8, all begun in 1939, but completed, respectively, in 1941, 1942 and 1944; inevitably, they were dubbed the “War Sonatas.” These three works were his first contributions to the piano sonata genre in 16 years, and the revitalization of his interest in the form may well have been inspired by his recently conceived love affair with Mira Abramovna Mendelson. Prokofiev first met Mira during the summer of 1939 while vacationing alone at Kislovodsk in the Caucasus. She was 24 at the time, just completing her student work at the Moscow Institute of Literature, and he was exactly twice her age, 48. They first worked together on fashioning an opera libretto from Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s comedy *The Duenna*, but something in addition to shared literary interests further drew them together, and during the following months, they became more than just friends. Prokofiev, stealing time from his wife, Lina, and his two sons, sought out situations to meet Mira, and by the spring of 1940, he had fallen in love with her. A family friend of the Prokofievs reported at that time seeing the composer walking with a young woman she did not recognize. What surprised her more than the woman’s presence, however, was the unfamiliar expression on Prokofiev’s face—happy and relaxed and lighthearted. “He had always been rather grim and serious,” she said, “but after meeting Mira, he became more affectionate and friendly. The change in him

was very noticeable.” By 1941, Prokofiev had left Lina and was living with Mira, who proved to be a devoted and caring companion until the composer died twelve years later. Lina, a French national, became caught up in Stalin’s terrible political machine, and was arrested on trumped-up charges of espionage in 1948. (A year before, the Supreme Soviet issued a retroactive decree forbidding Soviet citizens to marry foreign nationals, thus suddenly annulling the Prokofievs’ marriage. Mira and Sergei formalized their relationship with a civil ceremony on January 13, 1948.) Lina was released, and returned to the West in 1972, always claiming to be the composer’s only legitimate wife. It was at the beginning of his new life with Mira that Prokofiev conceived his Sonatas Nos. 6, 7 and 8; he dedicated the Eighth Sonata to her.

Large parts of the Sonata No. 8 were sketched in 1939, but Prokofiev then set the score aside until the summer of 1944, when he completed it at the “Composers’ Home” run by the Soviet government at Ivanovo, 50 miles west of Moscow. He tried out the new work for the Composers’ Union that October, after returning to Moscow, but his previously fearsome piano technique had slipped badly into disrepair by that time, and he entrusted 28-year-old Emil Gilels with the public premiere, given in the Grand Hall of the Moscow Conservatory on December 30, 1944. The Sonata inspired considerable praise from press and public alike, and it was honored with a Stalin Prize, First Class the following year.

The Eighth Sonata is regarded as one of Prokofiev’s greatest contributions to the genre, “the richest of all—an abundance of riches,” according to the eminent Soviet pianist Sviatoslav Richter. Barbara Nissman, another leading interpreter of Prokofiev’s piano music, called the Sonata “a masterwork of the 20th-century keyboard literature; it expands the sonata, not only in terms of structure but as a total concept; it is the equivalent of a large-scale symphony for piano.” The composer’s claim that the work is “primarily lyrical in character” is borne out by the opening movement, which exhibits an abundance of fine melodies couched in rich

polyphonic settings. Its sonata form rises to a level of considerable intensity in the development section, but the pervading nature of the movement’s exposition and recapitulation is of a character that matches the music’s performance instruction: *dolce* (“sweetly”). The second movement, *Andante sognando* (“dreamily”) is a lovely instrumental song with just enough prickly harmonic piquancies to keep it from lapsing into unabashed nostalgia. The finale is in a large three-part form, with two subjects in each of the outer portions (a rippling triplet strain and an energetic passage seeded by a bounding octave motive) surrounding a central section which includes reminiscences of themes from the first movement.

© 2011 Dr. Richard E. Rodda



**YEFIM BRONFMAN** is widely regarded as one of the most talented virtuoso pianists performing today. His commanding technique and exceptional lyrical gifts have won him consistent critical acclaim and enthusiastic audiences worldwide, whether for his

Dario Acosta

solo recitals, his orchestral engagements or his rapidly growing catalog of recordings.

Mr. Bronfman's 2011–2012 U.S. season begins with the Chicago Symphony's opening Gala conducted by Riccardo Muti, followed by return engagements to the orchestras in Los Angeles, Boston, Philadelphia, Toronto, Portland and Kansas City, and a residency with the Cleveland Orchestra in Miami, Cleveland and New York focusing on the concertos and chamber music of Brahms. A recital tour in winter will culminate with Carnegie Hall, followed by the world premiere of Magnus Lindberg's concerto, commissioned for him by the New York Philharmonic, with whom he will tour the West Coast in the spring.

In Europe, he will complete a two-season project of the three Bartók concertos with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Esa-Pekka Salonen in London, Spain, Brussels and give recitals in Amsterdam, Vienna, Frankfurt, Milan and Lucerne. In partnership with Emmanuel Pahud he will visit Spain, Turkey, Denmark and London, where he will return in the spring for concerts with the London Symphony conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas, followed by a tour with the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks and Mr. Salonen. In recognition of the 75th anniversary of the Israel Philharmonic, he will join the orchestra in two orchestral concerts and in a solo recital in December.

His 2010–2011 U.S. season highlights included recitals in Los Angeles and San Francisco as well as performances of Tchaikovsky's first piano concerto with the orchestras of Houston,

Cincinnati and Saint Louis and Brahms's second with the orchestras of Atlanta, New York and Los Angeles. He also made return concerto appearances in Seattle, New Jersey, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Toronto, Montreal and Washington. With long-time friend and collaborator Pinchas Zukerman, he appeared in duo recital in Princeton, Kansas City, Chicago, Boston and Carnegie Hall.

In Europe, he toured with the Vienna Philharmonic, playing the concerto written for him by Mr. Salonen. In partnership with Berlin's Staatskapelle and Daniel Barenboim all three Bartók concertos were again featured in programs in Berlin, Vienna and Paris. Return engagements in Europe included the Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw, Israel Philharmonic, London Symphony, Frankfurt Radio and Munich Philharmonic.

Orchestral highlights of the 2009–2010 season included two performances at the Tanglewood Festival with the Boston Symphony under James Levine and Michael Tilson Thomas and the New York Philharmonic's first European tour with Music Director Alan Gilbert. As "Artiste Étoile" in residence at the Lucerne Festival, he appeared with a wide range of repertoire in recital, chamber music and with the London Philharmonia under Mr. Salonen, the Lucerne Academy Orchestra and Pierre Boulez, and the Vienna Philharmonic conducted by Zubin Mehta. In summer 2009, he was the featured soloist at the Berlin Philharmonic's annual *Waldbühne* concert conducted by Sir Simon Rattle and televised live throughout Europe. Similarly, in summer 2010, he soloed with the Vienna Philharmonic under Franz Welser-Möst at their televised outdoor concert from Schönbrunn Palace. Both performances are now available on commercial DVDs.

Mr. Bronfman works regularly with an illustrious group of conductors, including Daniel Barenboim, Herbert Blomstedt, Christoph von Dohnányi, Charles Dutoit, Christoph Eschenbach, Valery Gergiev, Mariss Jansons, Lorin Maazel, Kurt Masur, Zubin Mehta, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Yuri Temirkanov, Franz

Welser-Möst and David Zinman. Summer engagements have regularly taken him to the major festivals of Europe and the United States.

He has also given numerous solo recitals in the leading halls of North America, Europe and the Far East, including acclaimed debuts at Carnegie Hall in 1989 and Avery Fisher Hall in 1993. In 1991, he gave a series of joint recitals with Isaac Stern in Russia, marking Mr. Bronfman's first public performances there since his emigration to Israel at age 15. That same year, he was awarded the prestigious Avery Fisher Prize, one of the highest honors given to American instrumentalists. In 2010, he was honored as the recipient of the Jean Gimbel Lane Prize in Piano Performance from Northwestern University.

Widely praised for his solo, chamber and orchestral recordings, he received a Grammy Award in 1997 for his recording of the three Bartók piano concertos with Mr. Salonen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. His discography also includes the complete Prokofiev piano sonatas; all five of the Prokofiev piano concertos, nominated for both Grammy and *Gramophone* awards; and Rachmaninoff's Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 3. His most recent releases are Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 with Mariss Jansons and the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks; a recital disc, *Perspectives*, to complement Mr. Bronfman's designation as a Carnegie Hall "Perspectives" artist for the 2007–2008 season; and recordings of all the Beethoven piano concertos as well as the Triple Concerto together with violinist Gil Shaham, cellist Truls Mørk and the Tönhalle Orchestra Zürich under David Zinman for the Arte Nova/BMG label.

His recordings with Isaac Stern include the Brahms violin sonatas from their aforementioned Russian tour, a cycle of the Mozart sonatas for violin and piano, and the Bartók violin sonatas. Coinciding with the release of the *Fantasia 2000* soundtrack, Mr. Bronfman was featured on his own Shostakovich album, performing the two piano concertos with the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Mr. Salonen and the Piano Quintet. In 2002, Sony Classical

released his two-piano recital (with Emanuel Ax) of works by Rachmaninoff, which was followed in March 2005 by their second recording of works by Brahms. Two thousand eight saw the release of the Tchaikovsky Trio in A minor with partners Gil Shaham and Truls Mørk and a Schubert and Mozart disc with the Zukerman Chamber Players.

A devoted chamber music performer, Mr. Bronfman has collaborated with the Emerson, Cleveland, Guarneri and Juilliard quartets, as well as the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. He has also played chamber music with Yo-Yo Ma, Joshua Bell, Lynn Harrell, Shlomo Mintz, Jean-Pierre Rampal and Mr. Zukerman, and tours regularly in duo with Mr. Ax.

Yefim Bronfman immigrated to Israel with his family in 1973, and made his international debut two years later with Zubin Mehta and the Montreal Symphony. He made his New York Philharmonic debut in May 1978, his Washington recital debut in March 1981 at the Kennedy Center and his New York recital debut in January 1982 at the 92nd Street Y.

Mr. Bronfman was born in Tashkent, in the Soviet Union, on April 10, 1958. In Israel, he studied with pianist Arie Vardi, head of the Rubin Academy of Music at Tel Aviv University. In the United States, he studied at the Juilliard School, Marlboro and the Curtis Institute, and with Rudolf Firkušný, Leon Fleisher and Rudolf Serkin.

Yefim Bronfman became an American citizen in July 1989.