

Thursday, March 19, 2009, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Murray Perahia, *piano*

PROGRAM

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) Partita No. 6 in E minor, BWV 830

Toccata
Allemande
Courante
Air
Sarabande
Tempo di Gavotta
Gigue

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) Sonata No. 15 in D major, Op. 28,
“Pastorale” (1801)

Allegro
Andante
Scherzo: Allegro vivace
Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

INTERMISSION

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel,
Op. 24 (1861)

This concert is part of the Koret Recital Series.

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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) Partita No. 6 in E minor, BWV 830

With the condescending pronouncement, “Since the best man could not be obtained, mediocre ones would have to be accepted,” City Councilor Platz announced the appointment of Johann Sebastian Bach in 1723 as Cantor for Leipzig’s churches. Platz’s “best man” was Georg Philipp Telemann, then the most highly regarded composer in all Germany, and the local disappointment at not being able to pry him away from his post as Hamburg’s music director was only one of the many difficulties that Bach faced during his first years on the job in Leipzig. Bach’s new duties centered on directing the music for the Sunday worship at the town’s four churches, principally St. Thomas, where the service usually stretched to four hours and required copious amounts of music, a sizeable portion of which the new Cantor was required to compose. Bach was responsible to the city’s ecclesiastical Consistory in fulfilling these duties, which he had to balance with his teaching at the church’s school, run by the town council. He was also charged with providing some of the music for Leipzig University’s chapel, administered by that institution’s board of governors. His dealings with none of these bodies was eased by his volatile, sometimes even belligerent temper, and his relations with his superiors were almost constantly strained. The most serious of these animosities erupted in a petition to the land’s highest authority, Augustus “the Strong,” Elector of Saxony, asking him to adjudicate a dispute over his assignments and pay with the University authorities, who were much concerned with Bach’s paucity of formal education. Bach lost.

Much of Bach’s early activity in Leipzig was carried out under the shadow of the memory of his predecessor, Johann Kuhnau, a respected musician and scholar who had published masterly translations of Greek and Hebrew, practiced as a lawyer in the city, and won wide fame for his keyboard music. In 1726, probably the earliest date allowed by the enormous demands of his official position for new sacred vocal music, Bach began a series of keyboard suites that were apparently intended to compete with those of Kuhnau. In addition to helping establish his reputation in Leipzig, these

pieces would also provide useful teaching material for the private students he was beginning to draw from among the University’s scholars, who were less hampered by bureaucratic exigencies than their superiors in recognizing Bach’s genius. (Several of his secular cantatas were written for commissions from the University students.) The Partita No. 1 in B-flat major (BWV 825) issued in that year was the first of his compositions to be published, with the exception of two cantatas issued during his short tenure in Mühlhausen many years before (1707–1708). Bach funded the venture himself, and even engraved the plates (to save money) with the help of his teenage son Carl Philipp Emanuel, who was then learning that exacting craft. (Copies could be had directly from the composer, cash in advance.) Bach published an additional Partita every year or so until 1731, when he gathered together the six works and issued them collectively in a volume entitled *Clavier-Übung* (“Keyboard Practice”), a term he borrowed from the name of Kuhnau’s keyboard suites published in 1689 and 1692. The Partitas of what became Part I of the *Clavier-Übung* were well received; Johann Nikolaus Forkel, in the first full biography of Bach (1802), reported that “the works made in their time a great noise in the musical world. Such excellent compositions for harpsichord had not been seen or heard before, so brilliant, agreeable, expressive and original are they. Anyone who could play them well could make his fortune in the world thereby, and even in our times, a young artist could gain acknowledgement by doing so.” Bach continued his series of *Clavier-Übung* with three further volumes of vastly different nature: Part II (1735) contains the *Italian Concerto*, the ultimate keyboard realization of that quintessential Baroque orchestral form, and an *Overture (Suite) in the French Manner*; Part III (1739), for organ, the *Catechism Chorale Preludes*, several short canonic pieces and the “St. Anne” Prelude and Fugue; and Part IV (1742), the incomparable *Goldberg Variations*.

The term “partita” was originally applied to pieces in variations form in Italy during the 16th century, and the word survived in that context into Bach’s time. The keyboard Partitas of the *Clavier-Übung*, however, are not variations but suites of dances, a form that in France occasionally bore

the title of *Partie*, meaning either a movement in a larger work or a musical piece for entertainment. The French term was taken over into German practice in the late 17th century as *Parthie* to indicate an instrumental suite, and Bach's "Partita" seems to have been a corruption of this usage. (He had earlier used the title for three of his works for unaccompanied violin.) Bach referred to these pieces as *galanteries* or "entertainment pieces," and loosened the usual German succession of dances (*Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Gigue*) to include such alternate movements as *Rondeau, Capriccio, Burlesca, Aria* and *Gavotte*. Each of the six Partitas opens with a movement of different character: *Preludium, Sinfonia, Fantasia, Overture, Preambulum* and *Toccata*. The dances that follow these preludial movements differ from one work to the next, but satisfy the demand for stylistic variety and formal balance. Charles Sanford Terry wrote, "Bach's keyboard suites contain not far short of 200 movements. They exhibit extraordinary fertility of invention, vivid imaginative power and complete technical mastery of the forms they employ."

The Partita No. 6 in E minor is one of Bach's most introspective keyboard compositions. It opens with an unusual *Toccata*, a form that typically admits only free, quasi-improvisatory figural work (as is heard in the first and last sections), but here expanded to incorporate a vast fugue as the central argument of the movement. The following *Allemande* is deeply expressive and richly decorated. The *Courante* is built around a precisely controlled chain of nervous rhythmic syncopations. The brief *Air* is a *moto perpetuo* piece rooted in largely scalar figurations. Next comes a *Sarabande*, whose elaborate melodic filigrees temper its essentially tragic nature. Two fast movements close the E minor Partita: a *Gavotta* of vigorous rhythmic energy and a *Gigue* in imitative style.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
Sonata No. 15 in D major, Op. 28, "Pastorale"

Composed in 1801.

The year of the completion of the Op. 28 Piano Sonata—1801—was an important time in

Beethoven's creative development. He had achieved a success good enough to write from Vienna to his old friend Franz Wegeler in Bonn, "My compositions bring me in a good deal, and may I say that I am offered more commissions than it is possible for me to carry out. Moreover, for every composition I can count on six or seven publishers and even more, if I want them. People no longer come to an arrangement with me. I state my price, and they pay." At the time of this gratifying recognition of his talents, however, the first signs of his fateful deafness appeared, and he began the titanic struggle that became one of the gravitational poles of his life. The following year, driven from the social contact on which he had flourished by the fear of discovery of his malady, he penned the "Heiligenstadt Testament," his *cri de cœur* against this wicked trick of the gods. "I shall grapple with fate; it shall never pull me down," he resolved, and then told his friend Wenzel Krumpholz, "I am dissatisfied with the works I have written so far. From now on I want to strike out along a new road." The next five years were the most productive he ever knew. "I live only in my music," he explained, "and I have scarcely begun one thing before I start another." The Symphonies Nos. 2–5, a dozen piano sonatas, the Fourth Piano Concerto and the Triple Concerto, *Fidelio*, many songs, chamber works and keyboard compositions were all composed between 1802 and 1806. The Op. 28 Sonata of 1801, written immediately after the formal experiments of Op. 27, No. 1, and Op. 27, No. 2 ("Moonlight"), was Beethoven's last such work in the traditional four movements and his farewell to conventional Classicism, the closing utterance of his stylistic "first period." Maynard Solomon, in his study of the composer, wrote, "Like so many of Beethoven's works that follow hard upon a dramatic achievement, Op. 28 celebrates the peace that comes from fulfillment of a difficult creative effort and withdraws to a relative traditionalism, from which Beethoven will gain strength for a new creative surge."

The Op. 28 Sonata was first published in August 1802 by the Bureau des Arts et l'Industrie in Vienna without a sobriquet, but Broderip & Wilkinson issued the score in London three years later as the "*Sonata Pastorale*." Beethoven apparently

did not object to the title, and it seems especially well suited to both the halcyon music that opens the work and to the rustic movement, with its skipping rhythms and its bagpipe-like drone in the bass, that serves as its finale. The Sonata was dedicated to Joseph Edler von Sonnenfels, an adviser to Emperor Joseph II, secretary of Vienna's Academie des Beaux Arts and a leading Freemason whose writings about the lodge's ideals of equality, freedom and universal brotherhood resonated powerfully with the fiercely libertarian Beethoven.

Gently pulsing repeated notes in the bass give a certain urgency to the graceful main theme of the opening movement. Ribbons of scales provide a transition to the long melodic arches of the second theme, which proves to be not in the expected major key but in a shaded minor one, a forward-looking technique that shows Beethoven stretching the bounds of musical expression even in a movement as conventionally constructed as this one. The development section, largely based on permutations of the main theme, passes through some dramatic moments before quieting for a few broken phrases that return the music, through some subtle harmonic alchemy, to the home key for the start of the recapitulation of the exposition's materials. The *Andante*, one of Beethoven's favorite movements according to his student Carl Czerny, is in a three-part form (A–B–A) that contrasts a somber processional melody in its outer sections with the bright, delicate arabesques of its central episode. The brief *Scherzo*, a lesson in musical economy, is built entirely from two four-measure motives, one of falling octaves, the other of descending arpeggios; a restless trio provides contrast. The finale is a rondo that takes a sweetly flowing strain as its returning theme.

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)
Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel,
Op. 24

Composed in 1861. Premiered in November 1861 in Hamburg by the composer.

It was upon his skill as a pianist and composer for piano that Brahms's early reputation was founded.

As a teenager in Hamburg, he studied the classics of the keyboard literature with Eduard Marxsen (the city's most illustrious piano teacher and a musician whose excellent taste and thorough discipline helped form his student's elevated view of the art), but was at the same time forced to earn money for the always-pinched household budget by playing in what were euphemistically called "dance halls" in the rough dock district, work he began when he was just 13. He gave his first public recital in September 1848, when he was 15 (significantly, the program included a fugue by Bach), and a year later presented a second concert which featured another selection by Bach and Beethoven's "Waldstein" Sonata. In 1850, he met the violinist Eduard Reményi, who had been driven to Hamburg by the civil uprisings in Hungary in 1848, and three years later they undertook a concert tour through Germany, a venture that not only allowed Brahms to extricate himself from the waterfront taverns, but also to meet Joseph Joachim, who, at 22, only two years his senior, was already regarded as one of the leading violinists of Europe. Joachim introduced him to Robert and Clara Schumann, who were overwhelmed by Brahms's talent when he played them some of his own compositions, including his first published works—the C major (Op. 1) and F-sharp minor (Op. 2) Piano Sonatas. It was because of the Schumanns' encouragement that he began his First Piano Concerto in 1854; Brahms was soloist in the work's premiere on January 22, 1859, in Hanover.

One of the pieces that Brahms wrote for his tours through northern Europe during the next decade was the splendid *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel* of 1861. Though published without a dedication, the work was composed as a birthday tribute to his dear friend Clara Schumann, who wrote in her diary after visiting Brahms at his home just outside Hamburg in November 1861, "Interesting talk with Johannes on form. How is it the older masters are perfect in their use of form while modern composers are confined within the most rigid small forms? He, himself, emulates the older masters, and especially admires Clementi's large, free employment of form." The *Handel Variations* exemplifies Brahms's interest in the grand formal gesture, which he here informed

with his strict control of motivic development, his supple but rigorous exercise of formal structure and his rich harmonic palette. Though composed when he was only 28, the work testifies to Brahms's mastery of the traditional modes and forms of musical expression, and even excited the admiration of Richard Wagner when the two met at the redoubtable Richard's villa in the Viennese suburb of Penzing on February 6, 1864. After Brahms played the *Handel Variations* for him, Wagner stated: "It shows what still can be done with the old forms by somebody who knows how to handle them."

Brahms borrowed the theme for this work from Handel's Suite in B-flat major, which in its original version, published in 1733, served as the basis of a set of five variations. The theme and the first variation pay homage to the 18th-century style of their model, but then veer into Brahms's world of Romanticism while preserving the 16-measure, two-part structure of the original melody. The 25 variations encompass a wide range of keyboard styles, expressive moods and pianistic hues before they are capped by a stupendous fugue in four voices whose subject is freely based on the opening notes of the theme. The *Handel Variations* has often been compared to Bach's *Goldberg Variations* and Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* in its scope and achievement, and drew the following praise from Brahms's biographer, Richard Specht: "The *Handel Variations*, in its purely pianistic problems, in the powerful and healthy concision of variants resembling a series of portraits by old masters, in its sonority and manifold architecture, surpasses even the boldest of Beethoven's works in the form."

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In the more than 30 years he has been performing on the concert stage, American pianist **Murray Perahia** has become one of the most sought-after and cherished pianists of our time, performing in all of the major international music centers and with every leading orchestra. He is the Principal Guest Conductor of the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, with whom he has toured as conductor and pianist throughout the United States, Europe, Japan and Southeast Asia.

Born in New York, Mr. Perahia started playing piano at the age of four, and later attended Mannes College, where he majored in conducting and composition. His summers were spent in Marlboro, where he collaborated with such musicians as Rudolf Serkin, Pablo Casals and the members of the Budapest String Quartet. He also studied at the time with Mieczyslaw Horszowski. In subsequent years, he developed a close friendship with Vladimir Horowitz, whose perspective and personality were an abiding inspiration. In 1972, Mr. Perahia won the Leeds International Piano Competition, and in 1973 he gave his first concert at the Aldeburgh Festival, where he worked closely with Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears, accompanying the latter in many lieder recitals. Mr. Perahia

was co-artistic director of the Festival from 1981 to 1989.

Mr. Perahia's 2008–2009 season began with a European tour as soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Bernard Haitink. He then embarked on a recital tour of Asia, traveling to Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei, Singapore and Seoul. Mr. Perahia and Maestro Haitink reunited in Chicago in November for three concerts with the Chicago Symphony featuring Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4. In March 2009, Mr. Perahia performs recitals across the United States, including at New York's Avery Fisher Hall. Mr. Perahia's European performance schedule included recitals in Paris, Madrid, Copenhagen and London.

Mr. Perahia has a wide and varied discography. His two latest solo recordings feature Beethoven's Piano Sonatas Opp. 14, 26 and 28 and Bach's Partitas 2, 3 and 4. He is the recipient of two Grammy Awards, for his recordings of Frederic Chopin's complete Etudes Opp. 10 and 25 and Bach's English Suites Nos. 1, 3 and 6, and numerous Grammy nominations. Mr. Perahia has also won several *Gramophone* Awards. In 1998, Sony Classical released a four-disc set commemorating 25 years of his recordings issued by the label.

Recently, Mr. Perahia embarked on an ambitious project to edit the complete Beethoven Sonatas for the Henle Urtext Edition. He also produced and edited numerous hours of recordings of recently discovered master-classes by the legendary pianist Alfred Cortot, which resulted in the highly acclaimed Sony CD release, *Alfred Cortot: The Master Classes*.

Mr. Perahia is an honorary fellow of the Royal College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music, and he holds an honorary doctorate from Leeds University. In 2004, he was awarded an honorary KBE by Her Majesty The Queen, in recognition of his outstanding service to music. This season, Mr. Perahia was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award from the London Jewish Cultural Centre.