

Sunday, November 2, 2008, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Conrad Tao, *piano*

PROGRAM

- Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) Piano Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57, “Appassionata” (1804–1806)
Allegro assai
Andante con moto
Allegro ma non troppo — Presto
- Conrad Tao (b. 1994) Fantasy-Sonata (2008) (United States premiere)
Moderato
Intermezzo: Presto
Andante con moto
Finale: Presto — Allegro

INTERMISSION

- John Corigliano (b. 1938) Etude Fantasy (1976)
For the Left Hand Alone
Legato
Fifths to Thirds
Ornaments
Melody
- Serge Rachmaninoff (1873–1943) From *Six Moments Musicaux*, Op. 15 (1896)
No. 1 in B-flat minor: Andantino
No. 4 in E minor: Presto
- Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849) Andante Spianato and Grande Polonaise Brillante, Op. 22 (1834, 1831)

This concert is part of the Koret Recital Series.

Cal Performances’ 2008–2009 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) Piano Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57, “Appassionata” (1804–1806)

Beethoven’s Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57, colloquially known as the “Appassionata,” has long been regarded as one of the great sonatas of Beethoven’s middle period. It was begun in 1804 and completed in 1806. The “Appassionata” had a feverishly intense storminess unseen in Beethoven’s earlier works. In fact, the sonata was considered Beethoven’s most intense work until the massive “Hammerklavier” Sonata of 1817–1818. During the composition of the “Appassionata,” Beethoven came to grips with his progressing deafness, and the music reflects on that.

The first movement of the sonata begins with a mysterious first theme, which consists of descending and ascending arpeggios in both hands separated by two octaves. The hauntingly simple theme and the unusual separation of the hands create a sense of emptiness. Beethoven employs several sudden dynamic changes; the music constantly switches between the two extremes of loud and soft. Throughout the movement, Beethoven uses the lowest F of the piano, which at the time was the lowest note available on the piano. The unusually long coda contains quasi-improvisational arpeggios which span most of the early 19th-century piano’s range, and Beethoven repeatedly uses the low F of the piano before bringing the movement to a quiet close.

The second movement is a set of variations on a remarkably simple theme consisting of common chords. There are four variations on this theme, each growing in rhythmic intensity until the third variation, which consists of rapid embellishments in 32nd notes, with the two hands switching parts. The final variation is a relaxed restatement of the theme without repeats and with the phrases displaced in register. Beethoven ends the second movement almost inexplicably, on a diminished seventh chord that is at once mysterious and almost out of place. A second statement of the same chord appears, much louder, and leads into the third movement, which begins with the exact same chord repeated in rapid succession. The perpetual motion of the third movement is constant

except for a few very brief breaks. The music remains at a low dynamic for an extended period of time, making the moments of fortissimo more intense and meaningful. A faster coda brings in a new theme which leads into an extended cadence back into the home key of F minor. The finale of the “Appassionata” was unusual for Beethoven because it ends on a tragic note, which seemingly had never happened before in Beethoven’s works in sonata form. The “Appassionata” lives up to its name (which, admittedly, was not Beethoven’s at all but that of a publisher), with fiery passion and anger present in equal measure.

John Corigliano (b. 1938) Etude Fantasy (1976)

The *Etude Fantasy*, written by John Corigliano in 1976 for pianist James Tocco, is, as the composer states, “a set of five studies combined into the episodic form and character of a fantasy.” The piece is striking and exciting from the first etude, which is written for the left hand alone. The main material that interconnects the five movements is introduced in this etude. Within the approximately four-minute span of the etude are a variety of colors and characters, often appearing suddenly with little warning; the ferocity and wide palette of sounds in the movement make practicing it very enjoyable. The second etude, a study in legato, consists of several descending voices in long, melodic lines. I have always thought that this movement provides a sort of relief from the relentlessly vicious quality of the first etude.

The third etude emerges in a playful manner; I treat it like a scherzo. It begins with much scampering, eventually forming a melody in the top voices. A buildup leads to a “slithery” middle section that is punctured by sudden outbursts, after which the melody returns and the etude ends in the same vein that it began. The opening material of the fantasy returns in the fourth etude, a study in ornamentation. Trills, grace notes, tremolos, glissandos and roulades adorn the opening six-note row, among other things, developing into a hysterical middle section where the four fingers of the left hand play a drum-like cluster of notes as the thumb alternates

with the right hand in rapid barbaric thrusts. The opening row returns again in a highly ornamented fashion, giving way to a sonorous climax. This etude is remarkably exciting and loud, and is great fun to play—partly because it gives me a chance to pound the piano and know that I am interpreting the piece in the right way.

The fifth movement is a study of melody, in which the melodic line is surrounded by various figures. The atmosphere is desolate and non-climactic—I view it as the somber aftermath of the frenetic energy in the fourth etude. The *Etude Fantasy* ends quietly with the opening six notes played backwards accompanying a mournful and persistent two-note ostinato, which disappears into emptiness.

Conrad Tao (b. 1994) Fantasy-Sonata (2008)

I began writing the *Fantasy-Sonata* in late 2007 and finished it in the spring of 2008. It consists of four movements and was premiered in Mexico City and at the Verbier Festival in the 2008 summer season. This performance is the United States premiere of the work.

The first movement is an exploration of musical color and rhythmic intensity. It begins with a series of parallel chords that serves as the binding material for the whole sonata, which is immediately followed by a fast coloratura passage similar to those in Chopin's music, but noticeably more dissonant. The theme is pulled apart and twisted in a variety of ways but always remains. Therefore, the colors that decorate the music are interconnected by that theme, giving the movement a sense of unity along with its constant change of mood, dynamic and tempo. A stark middle section punctured by hints of jazz takes center stage—the theme returns in different forms. The theme is then heard again, however, it is flipped upside-down and is much more cheerful than the opening statement. It begins the final section of the movement, characterized by sudden changes in dynamic and glissandi in the piano. A soaring passage ups the pace; the music spins almost uncontrollably and morphs into a smooth, watery reappearance of the theme

in the left hand as the right hand plays a series of quick notes softly. The movement ends quietly.

The second movement, an intermezzo, is brief and sarcastic; the pianist's fingers scamper up and down the keyboard like a rat—quickly and quietly. Sudden dynamic changes puncture the movement. The movement spins into a frenetically charged section with hints of the opening theme from the first movement. A series of loud chords bring the insanity to a halt before a final, significantly slower, section begins; the movement ends awkwardly.

The third movement is a quiet reprieve from the rhythmic intensity of the outer movements. A watery opening theme reminiscent of the first movement is juxtaposed with short, jagged interruptions that appear periodically. The theme returns three times, each one more intense than the one before. This leads into the fourth movement, a brisk finale that opens with a crashing chord before leading into a rapidly changing development upon material from earlier movements. The music is alternately confident and anxious, and eventually quiets down and leads into the coda, a *maestoso*, or majestic, restatement of the main theme in retrograde with more pianistic fireworks, bringing the *Fantasy-Sonata* to a triumphant close.

Serge Rachmaninoff (1873–1943) Six Moments Musicaux (1896)

The six pieces known as the *Moments Musicaux* were written in an impressively short span of time, composed between October and December 1896. During this time, Rachmaninoff was experiencing some pecuniary troubles; it did not help that he had been robbed of money on a train trip earlier that year. The *Moments* were composed hastily and all dedicated to his contemporary, Aleksandr Viktorovich Zatyayevich.

Despite the short amount of time that Rachmaninoff had to finish the six pieces, the *Moments* are anything but flimsy; each has a distinct form, displays considerable thematic development, and requires technical and musical virtuosity. The two *Moments* that I am playing, Nos. 1 and 4, are greatly contrasting in character. The first, in the slightly mournful, contemplative key

Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849) Andante spianato and Grand Polonaise, Op. 22 (1831, 1834)

Chopin composed the Grand Polonaise in E-flat major in 1831 for piano and orchestra, and the preceding "*Andante spianato*" was composed in 1834. The piece has been regarded since as one of the most brilliant polonaises ever written; however, the piece is rarely heard with an orchestra, due to the fact that the orchestra's role in the piece is rather minor. Majority of the performances of the Grand Polonaise consist of simply a soloist.

I have always been enthralled by the opening *Andante*—its ethereal quality is captivatingly beautiful. The left hand creates a smooth blanket of sound as the right hand sings a melody. The piece continues in this vein for a while, adorned often by ornamental passages in the piano, before a mazurka-like middle section begins. This brief, lilting dance provides a slight contrast to the singing quality that appears earlier. The *Andante* ends with the same texture as the beginning, giving way to the Polonaise. In the original score of the piece, the Polonaise begins with an orchestral introduction. Therefore, I have the responsibility of painting a picture that has all the different colors of the orchestra. The polonaise is exciting and grand in nature, with a touch of royalty. In the middle of the polonaise, a singing melody in the more serious key of C minor appears, but the cheerful character that appeared earlier cannot stay away for long, and the piece ends with a dazzling array of pianistic fireworks. It is a piece that is pleasurable for both the pianist and the audience, and I love to play it.

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J. Henry Fair

Hailed by renowned music critic Harris Goldsmith as “the most exciting prodigy to ever come my way” (*Musical America*), 14-year-old American pianist **Conrad Tao** showed an interest in music at a very early age, when he was found playing children’s songs on the piano at about 18 months of age. He was born in Urbana, Illinois, started violin lessons at age three and formal piano lessons at three-and-a-half, gave his first public piano recital at age four, and performed a recital at the World Piano Pedagogy Conference in Orlando, Florida, at age seven. At age eight, he made his concerto debut with the Utah Chamber Music Festival Orchestra, performing Mozart’s Piano Concerto in A major, K. 414.

At age 10, Mr. Tao was featured on the NPR program *From the Top* as both pianist and composer, and he was featured again on PBS’s *From the Top: Live from Carnegie Hall* TV series in 2007 as violinist, pianist and composer. Mr. Tao’s recital at The Juilliard School’s Paul Hall in 2006 has been featured on NPR’s *Performance Today*. Mr. Tao is the winner of the Juilliard Pre-College Division’s Gina Bachauer Piano Competition and

the Prokofiev Concerto Competition in 2006. In 2008, he was named a Davidson Fellow Laureate by the Davidson Institute for Talent Development.

Past concerto performances include those with the Aspen Festival Orchestra under Leonard Slatkin, the California Symphony, the Corpus Christi Symphony Orchestra, the Miami International Piano Festival Orchestra, the Orlando Philharmonic, the Pennsylvania Sinfonia, the Philadelphia Orchestra under Christoph Eschenbach, the Columbus ProMusica Chamber Orchestra, the Russian National Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony and the Orchestra of St. Luke’s, among others. He has also given solo recitals in Juilliard’s Paul Hall, Rockefeller University in New York City, Chicago’s Music in the Loft concert series, the Lincoln Theater in Miami Beach, Fort Lauderdale’s Broward Center for the Performing Arts, and made his debut in Italy last summer, resulting in an immediate return engagement in December.

Highlights of the past summer season include recital debuts at the Verbier Festival in Switzerland and the Festival Internacional de Piano “Blanco y Negro” in Mexico City, Mexico, a pre-concert recital at the Mostly Mozart Festival in Avery Fisher Hall in New York, and concerto performances with the Napa Valley and San Francisco symphonies. In May, Mr. Tao toured China with the Juilliard Orchestra, performing Prokofiev’s Piano Concerto No. 3 under the baton of Xian Zhang in Beijing, Suzhou and Shanghai.

In his upcoming seasons, Mr. Tao will be making debuts with the Symphony of the Americas as both violin and piano soloist, the Lexington Philharmonic, Santa Fe Pro Musica and the Fort Worth Symphony under Miguel Harth-Bedoya, as well as return engagements with the Columbus ProMusica Chamber Orchestra and the California Symphony. He also makes recital debuts at the Harriman-Jewell Concert Series in Kansas City, Cal Performances, the Ravinia Festival in Chicago and the Louvre in France, among others.

As an accomplished composer, Mr. Tao has won national prizes since the age of seven, and his compositions have been featured on Chicago WFMT radio’s 50th anniversary program and the national radio program *From the Top*. At age 10, his piano composition, *Silhouettes and Shadows*, won

the BMI Carlos Surinach Prize as the youngest winner of BMI’s prestigious award for young composers in the Western Hemisphere. Mr. Tao is a five-time consecutive winner of the ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer award since 2004 and his composition, *Sonata for Two Pianos*, was featured at the 2004 award ceremony and performed at the Aspen Music Festival in 2005. He has given two composition recitals in New York City featuring eleven of his original compositions. In February 2007, two new compositions, *Duet for Erhu and Violin*, a work commissioned by the Art Institute of Chicago, and *Two Worlds* for string quartet, had their world premieres at the Art Institute of Chicago’s “Midwest Meets East” concert. His first piano concerto, *The Four Elements for Piano and Orchestra*, was commissioned by the ProMusica Chamber Orchestra of Columbus, Ohio, and premiered in October 2007.

As an award-winning violinist, Mr. Tao won the 2003 Walgreens National Concerto Competition, which led to the performance of the

Mendelssohn Violin Concerto in E minor with the Midwest Young Artists Concert Orchestra at age eight. This past January, he performed both the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto in E minor and the Piano Concerto No. 1 in G minor at the same concert with the Miami Piano Festival Orchestra at Boca Raton and Naples, Florida. He was a recipient of violins from the Stradivari Society for three years. Mr. Tao is currently playing an 1899 Giulio de Gani violin, on loan to The Juilliard School from Carol Wipf, courtesy of the Juilliard Rare Instrument Collection.

Conrad Tao is currently enrolled in Juilliard’s Pre-College Division, where he studies piano with Yoheved Kaplinsky and violin with Catherine Cho. He studies composition privately with Christopher Theofanidis in New York City. A former student at the Music Institute of Chicago, Mr. Tao studied piano with Emilio del Rosario, violin with Desiree Ruhstrat and composition with Matthew Hagle. He currently resides in New York City with his parents and sister.