music dance theater
Cal Performances
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

Sunday, February 12, 2017, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Felix Broede—SONY Music Entertainment

Lucas Debargue, *piano*

Domenico SCARLATTI (1685–1757)	Sonata in C Major, K. 132
Frédéric CHOPIN (1810–1849)	Ballade No. 4 in F minor, Op. 52
Maurice RAVEL (1875–1937)	*Gaspard de la Nuit*, Three Poems for Piano Ondine: Lent Le Gibet: Très lent Scarbo: Modéré

INTERMISSION

Nicolas MEDTNER (1880–1951)	Piano Sonata in F minor, Op. 5 Allegro Intermezzo: Allegro Largo — Finale: Allegro risoluto

Funded, in part, by the Koret Foundation, this performance is part of Cal Performances' 2016/17 Koret Recital Series, which brings world-class artists to our community.

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Sonata in C Major, K. 132
Domenico Scarlatti

Domenico Scarlatti, born in Naples in the same year as Handel and Bach, was the son of the celebrated Italian opera composer Alessandro Scarlatti. A pupil of his father, Domenico held important positions in Naples and Rome, including that of *maestro di cappella* at the Vatican. In addition to his sacred music, he was known for his operas and the quality of his harpsichord playing, at which he bested Handel in a friendly contest in 1709. (Handel was held superior at the organ, however.) Around 1719 Scarlatti was engaged as music master by the Princess Maria Barbara of Portugal and moved to Lisbon. When Maria Barbara married the heir to the Spanish throne in 1729, Scarlatti accompanied her to Madrid, where he spent the rest of his life, helping to found the Spanish school of instrumental composition. His works in Madrid were confined almost exclusively to instrumental music, notably some 600 sonatas for harpsichord (or *Exercises*, as they were called upon their publication in 1738) composed for Maria Barbara. These splendid pieces pioneered such keyboard techniques as crossing hands, runs in thirds and sixths, leaps wider than an octave, and rapid repeated notes. Though forward-looking in their musical style and expressive content, the sonatas were conservative in their use of the one-movement, binary dance form of the Baroque era.

Ballade No. 4 in F minor, Op. 52
Frédéric Chopin

A "ballad," according to the *Random House Dictionary*, is "a simple, narrative poem of popular origin, composed in short stanzas, especially one of romantic character and adapted for singing." The term was derived from an ancient musico-poetic form that accompanied dancing ("ballare" in medieval Latin, hence "ball" and "ballet"), which had evolved into an independent vocal genre by the 14th century in the exquisitely refined works of Guillaume de Machaut and other early composers of secular music. The ballad was well established in England as a medium for the recitation of romantic or fantastic stories by at least the year 1500; it is mentioned by Pepys, Milton, Addison, and Swift, often disdainfully because of the frequently scurrilous nature of its content. The form, having adopted a more refined demeanor, became popular in Germany during the late 18th century, when it attracted no less a literary luminary than Goethe, whose tragic narrative *Erlkönig* furnished the text for one of Schubert's most beloved songs. Chopin seems to have been the first composer to apply the title to a piece of abstract instrumental music, apparently indicating that his four Ballades hint at a dramatic flow of emotions such as could not be appropriately contained by traditional Classical forms. (Such transferral of terms between artistic disciplines was hardly unknown during the Romantic era. Liszt, the first musical artist in history with enough nerve to keep an entire public program to himself, dubbed his solo concerts "musical soliloquies" at first, and later gave them the now-familiar designation, "recitals."—"How can one recite at the piano?" fumed one British critic. "Preposterous!") Brahms, Liszt, Fauré, Grieg, Vieuxtemps, and Frank Martin all later provided instrumental works with the title Ballade.

In the Ballades, "Chopin reaches his full stature as the unapproachable genius of the pianoforte," according to Arthur Hedley, "a master of rich and subtle harmony and, above all, a poet—one of those whose vision transcends the confines of nation and epoch, and whose mission it is to share with the world some of the beauty that is revealed to them alone." Though the Ballades came to form a nicely cohesive set unified by their temporal scale, structural fluidity, and supranational idiom, Chopin composed them over a period of more than a decade. He once suggested to Robert Schumann that he was "incited to the creation of the Ballades" by some poems of his Polish compatriot Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), whom he met and played for in Paris around 1835. The English composer and author Alan Rawsthorne noted, however, that "to pin down these Ballades to definite stories is gratuitous and misleading, for in suggesting extra-musical connotations the attention is distracted from the purely musical scheme which is… com-

Opposite: photo by Evgeny Evtyukhov

pelling in itself and completely satisfying." Rather than obscuring the essential nature of these pieces, the apparently opposing views of Schumann and Rawsthorne lead directly to the very heart of Chopin's achievement: the near-perfect melding of Romantic fantasy and feeling with an Apollonian control of form and figuration. By no other composer in the history of the art has the delicate balance between emotion and intellect been so finely achieved as by Chopin—heart and head are weighed perfectly in his, the most precisely calibrated of all musical scales.

The Ballade No. 4 (F minor, Op. 52) dates from the summer of 1842, when Chopin was staying with George Sand at her country villa in Nohant, near Châteauroux, some distance south of Paris in the province of Berry; she and Delacroix, a house guest at the time, provided the work's first audience. The composer performed the Ballade with great success at his public concert with Pauline Viardot at the Salle Pleyel in Paris on February 21, 1842; Breitkopf und Härtel issued the score that same month. The composition was dedicated to Baroness de Rothschild, one of Chopin's earliest and most ardent Parisian patrons. No poetic source is known for the Fourth Ballade, nor is one really needed for this music of drama and authority that is so richly expressive of feelings hardly capturable by words. The pianist and scholar Paul Badura-Skoda spoke of the music's "real explosive power"; Chopin's biographer Casimir Wierzynski called it "a true musical novel, boundlessly rich." It is a fitting capstone to this superb collection of masterworks, of which Frédérick Niecks wrote, "None of Chopin's compositions surpass in masterliness of form and beauty and poetry of content his Ballades. In them he attains, I think, the acme of his power as an artist."

***Gaspard de la Nuit,* Three Poems for Piano**
Maurice Ravel

Aloysius Bertrand was a master of the macabre, a sort-of French Edgar Allan Poe. Bertrand (1807–41), born in Paris, published a set of spectral tales in 1835 titled *Gaspard de la Nuit* (*Gaspard [Kaspar] of the Night*) in which he sought to recreate in literary terms "the manner of Rembrandt and Callot." (Jacques Callot was a 17th-century French etcher and engraver whose masterpiece is a series of grotesque engravings depicting the *Miseries of War*.) Ravel's biographer Scott Goddard noted that Bertrand "had the uncanny ability of writing intimately and precisely of people who lived, and of things that were done, in the dim, irreclaimable past. *Gaspard de la Nuit* consists of a number of minute tales of life in Medieval Europe, and never was the raconteur's art used with a more certain skill than in those paragraphs, where, in ten lines, often in as many words, the atmosphere of a moment is caught and the quality of a mood crystallized. Gaspard is the personification in human form of the Prince of Darkness." Ravel, who had a pronounced taste for the exotic, came to know Bertrand's poems through his long-time friend and musical ally, the pianist Ricardo Viñes, and during the summer of 1908, he created musical analogues of three of them. Bertrand's extravagant verses inspired from Ravel music that the composer said requires "transcendent virtuosity" to perform, and which is, according to the esteemed French pianist Alfred Cortot, "among the most astonishing examples of instrumental ingenuity ever contrived by the industry of composers."

The first piece, *Ondine*, one of musical Impressionism's greatest aquatic evocations, concerns the legendary water nymph who falls in love with a mortal, is disappointed by him, and then returns beneath the waves. In *Le Gibet* ("The Gallows"), a solemn bell-tone sounds throughout. "It is the clock that tolls from the walls of the city beyond the horizon," explains Bertrand's poem, "and the corpse of a hanged man that is reddened by the setting sun." *Scarbo*, a tour-de-force of piano virtuosity, depicts a fantastic dwarf who, wrote Bertrand, "shines in the sky… hums in the shadow of my alcove… scratches the silk of my bedcurtains with his nail… and pirouettes on one foot."

Piano Sonata in F minor, Op. 5
Nicolas Medtner

To a small group of faithful followers, Nicolas Medtner was the creative and pianistic equal of his two famous Russian contemporaries,

Alexander Scriabin and Sergei Rachmaninoff; to most music lovers he is almost unknown. Medtner, born in Moscow on January 5, 1880 into a family of German extraction, had begun playing piano under his mother's guidance by age six, and showed enough promise to be given lessons by his uncle, a professional pianist and composer. Medtner entered the Moscow Conservatory in 1892 to study piano and composition, and graduated in 1900 with the gold medal bestowed upon the institution's best student pianist. He toured successfully through the European musical capitals for the next three years, but in 1903 he began publishing his works and decided to make his career thereafter primarily as a composer. His music attracted the attention of the famous Polish virtuoso Josef Hofmann and of Sergei Rachmaninoff, who was to become a life-long friend and champion. ("You are, in my opinion, the greatest composer of our time," Rachmaninoff told him.)

Medtner established a fine reputation in Moscow—in 1909, he won the Glinka Prize for some Goethe songs and was appointed to the piano faculty of the Conservatory—but he found little acceptance of his music elsewhere. The turmoil of World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution severely disrupted his life, and in 1921 he moved to Berlin, where he was able to survive only with financial help from Rachmaninoff. Following a tour to America in 1924 (organized by Rachmaninoff), he tried living in Paris, but had no more luck there than in Germany. In 1928, a year after making what turned out to be his farewell tour of Russia, he appeared successfully in London, where he was made an Honorary Member of the Royal Academy of Music. After undertaking another American tour in 1929 (Rachmaninoff helped out again when Medtner's fees were not paid) and several years of unsettled living in France, Germany, and Britain, Medtner moved permanently to London in 1935. He inspired devotion from a handful of adherents—the pianist Edna Iles gave him sanctuary at her country home in Warwickshire during the Blitz of September 1940—and he enjoyed an extraordinary stroke of good fortune in 1946 when the Maharajah of Mysore sponsored the foundation of a Medtner Society to allow the composer to record many of his most important works. A series of heart attacks impaired Medtner's health and limited his playing during the last years before his death, in London on November 13, 1951.

Medtner's musical style, like that of Rachmaninoff and Scriabin, is rooted in the Russian romantic tradition, though he lacked the innate lyricism and overt passion of the former and the mysticism and harmonic daring of the latter. He wrote songs, a piano quintet, and a few works for violin and piano, but the bulk and essence of his creative output rests in his compositions for piano: three concertos, 14 sonatas, and nearly 100 smaller pieces.

Medtner's Sonata in F minor, his earliest large-scale piece and the first of his piano sonatas, found its origin in a *Moment Musical* he composed around 1895, when he was a 15-year-old student at the Moscow Conservatory. That piece was reworked into the Sonata's Intermezzo and the other movements written between 1901 and 1903; he premiered the work at a private concert in the home of Moscow composer Georgy Catoire on December 13, 1903 and played it publicly in recitals in Moscow and Berlin late the following year. The F-minor Sonata, Medtner's only such piece in the classical four movements, is the equal of Rachmaninoff's early works in its harmonic subtlety, ambitious scale, and understanding of the piano if not in its melodic inventiveness, though it surpasses them in both motivic development and contrapuntal surety.

The first movement is in a thoroughly developed sonata form, with a turbulent, darkly hued main theme and a lyrical, falling-scale subsidiary subject that recurs as a unifying factor later in the work. Both themes are skillfully worked out in the dramatic development section, which builds to a full recapitulation of the earlier materials and a dynamic close. The Intermezzo, which Barrie Martyn, in his study of the composer, called "quietly menacing," is based on a muscular theme that is developed throughout the extended middle section and clearly reprised near the end. The movement ends, however, with a surprising slow coda that sternly transforms the theme before fragment-

ing into isolated gestures that are finally reduced to a single dying note, as though the certainty of the preceding music had all just been feigned, a hyperactive facade concealing troubling doubt. A measure of spiritual renewal seems to be achieved with the Largo—the ethereal, delicately chiming second theme of its sonata form is marked *pietoso* ("compassionately")—but this assurance, too, is ultimately undermined by a repetition of the Intermezzo's stern, doubting coda. Emotional resolution is finally won with the closing movement. The main theme is agitated and in the work's fundamental minor key, but the mood brightens with the second subject, which is taken whole from that of the first movement. The development starts as a precise four-voice fugue based on a rhythmic motive from the main theme before going on to treat both subjects. The main theme is recapitulated as expected but then the music stops to recall the opening of the Largo. Rather than giving way this time to doubt, however, the work abandons its somber original key for the optimism of F Major and a triumphant peroration based on the second theme.

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Though placing only fourth at the 15th International Tchaikovsky Competition in 2015, **Lucas Debargue** was the *only* musician across all disciplines who was awarded the coveted Moscow Music Critics' Prize as a pianist "whose incredible gift, artistic vision, and creative freedom have impressed the critics as well as the audience."

Directly following the competition he was invited to appear as soloist with the leading orchestras in the most prestigious concert halls in Russia, France, Canada, Germany Italy, the UK, Mexico, Japan, South Korea, China, and the United States; and with such illustrious conductors as Valery Gergiev, Vladimir Jurowski, Andrey Boreyko, Tougan Sokhiev, Vladimir Fedoseev, Vladimir Spivakov, Gidon Kremer, and Vassili Petrenko, among others.

In March of 2016 SONY Classical released Debargue's first CD—works of Scarlatti, Liszt, Chopin, and Ravel—to wide critical acclaim; the following September, the label released the pianist's second CD, featuring works of Bach, Beethoven, and Medtner.

Born in 1990, Lucas Debargue began piano at age 11 at the Compiegne Conservatory in the class of Christine Muenier. He was quickly fascinated by the virtuoso repertoire but it was 10 years later, after he had become a holder of a scientific baccalaureate and of a bachelor of arts degree (from the Paris 7 Diderot University) that he decided to return to studying piano at the professional level.

After a year of studies at the Beauvais Conservatory in 2011, Debargue met his current mentor, the celebrated Russian professor Rena Shereshevskaya. This encounter was fortuitous, as she quickly recognized in Debargue a piano interpreter with a great future and accepted him in her class at the Alfred Cortot Paris Superior Music School to prepare him for grand international competitions. In his studies Debargue was supported by the Cortot School and by the Zaleski Foundation. In 2014 he won the First Prize at the Gaillard International Piano Competition (France) before becoming the prize winner at the 15th Tchaikovsky Competition. In parallel with the studies at the Cortot School Debargue obtained a license degree at the Paris National Superior Music Conservatory.

With a passion for literature, painting, film, and jazz, as well as for pursuing other creative work, Debargue is eager to discover rare music (Medtner, Roslavetz, Maykapar) and to develop personal interpretations of a carefully selected repertoire. He also composes his own music.

In April 2016 Debargue obtained a Diplôme Supérieur de Concertiste and a special Prize Cortot at the Paris Cortot Music School. He continues to work with Rena Shereshevskaya in post-graduate courses at the same school.

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