



Friday, February 1, 2019, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Yefim Bronfman, *piano*

PROGRAM

Claude DEBUSSY (1862–1918) *Suite bergamasque*, L. 75
Prélude
Menuet
Clair de lune
Passepied

Robert SCHUMANN (1810–1856) *Humoreske* in B-flat Major, Op. 20
Einfach
Hastig
Einfach und zart
Innig
Sehr lebhaft
Mit einigem Pomp
Zum Beschluss

INTERMISSION

Franz SCHUBERT (1797–1828) *Sonata* in C minor, D. 958
Allegro
Adagio
Menuetto: Allegro – Trio
Allegro

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Suite bergamasque, L. 75

Claude Debussy

The title that Debussy chose for himself—*musicien français*—points directly to the heart of his music and the center of his philosophy of art. His entire career as composer and critic was dedicated to finding a uniquely French musical language, free of the Germanic influence he believed had dominated Gallic composers since the late 18th century. He therefore sought to revive the old, long-dormant traditions of French Renaissance and Baroque music, though more for their spirit than for their techniques and forms. “French music is all clearness, elegance; simple, natural declamation,” he wrote. “The aim of French music is, before all, to please. The musical genius of France may be described as a fantasy of the senses.” He viewed the two greatest masters of French Baroque music—Jean Philippe Rameau and François Couperin—as the lodestars guiding his quest. The evaluation he gave in 1912 of Rameau might very well have been written about himself: “Rameau’s major contribution to music was that he knew how to find ‘sensitivity’ within harmony; and that he succeeded in capturing effects of color and certain nuances that, before his time, musicians had not clearly understood.”

During his early years, Debussy turned to the refined style of Couperin and Rameau for inspiration in his instrumental music, and several of his works from that time are modeled on the Baroque dance suite, including the *Suite bergamasque*. The composition’s title derives from the generic term for the dances of the district of Bergamo, in northern Italy, which found many realizations in the instrumental music of the 17th and 18th centuries. The rustic inhabitants of Bergamo were said to have been the model for the character of Harlequin, the buffoon of the Italian *commedia dell’arte*, which became the most popular theatrical genre in France during the time of Couperin and Rameau. Several of Watteau’s best-known paintings take the *commedia dell’arte* as their subject. The poet Paul Verlaine (1844–96) evoked the bittersweet, pastel world of Watteau and the *commedia dell’arte* with his atmospheric, evanescent verses, which Debussy began setting as early as 1880.

In 1882 he wrapped the words of Verlaine’s *Clair de lune* (*Moonlight*) with music, and made another setting of it a decade later as the third song of his first series of *Fêtes galantes*:

Your soul is a rare landscape
with charming maskers and mummers
[‘masques et bergamasques’]
playing the lute and dancing, almost
sad beneath their fantastic disguises.

While singing in minor mode
of victorious love and life in its season,
they do not seem to believe in their
happiness,
and their song mingles with the moonlight.

With the calm moonlight, sad and lovely,
that sets the birds in the trees to dreaming,
and the fountains to sobbing in ecstasy,
the great fountains, svelte among the
marbles.

Debussy best captured the nocturnal essence of Verlaine’s poem not in his two vocal settings, however, but in the famous (and musically unrelated) *Clair de lune* that serves as the third movement of his *Suite bergamasque*. The suite, composed in 1890 and revised for its publication in 1905, surrounds the gossamer strains of *Clair de lune* with three dance-inspired movements indebted to the spirit and forms of Couperin: a flowing prelude; a wistful minuet; and a piquant closing passepied.

Humoreske in B-flat Major, Op. 20

Robert Schumann

By the middle of 1838, Robert Schumann’s parallel passions for music, writing, and Clara Wieck had brought the 28-year-old composer to a crucial point in his life. Denied by the adamant intervention of Clara’s father from having her hand in marriage, resigned to never becoming the piano virtuoso he had dreamed of becoming since childhood, and seeking a more vibrant musical milieu than Leipzig as the base for the journal *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (*New Journal for Music*), which he had edited since its inception in 1833, Schumann decided

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that a move to Vienna might improve his fortunes. On August 5, 1838, he wrote to his friend Joseph Fischhof, then living in Vienna, “Don’t be frightened, if, in two months, somebody knocks at your door—my ghost, my very self; still more, if he tells you that he shall probably settle in Vienna next year and *forever*.”

Hoping both to re-establish the *Zeitschrift* and to achieve sufficient financial and artistic success to force Papa Wieck into consenting to his marriage to Clara, Schumann arrived in Vienna at the end of September. “I have been received with great kindness, even by the minister of police, who gave me an audience the day before yesterday,” he reported to his brother Eduard in Zwickau, the family’s hometown. “He said that there was no objection to my living here, and that I might set to work as soon as an Austrian publisher could be found. If I could not find one, however, I might meet with great difficulties, being a foreigner, & etc.... You would hardly believe how many petty factions and coteries there are here: to get a firm foothold, one must have a great deal of the snake about him, which I don’t think I have.” He found rooms with a family named Cavalcabo, whose daughter Julia was taking lessons from Franz Xaver Mozart, Wolfgang’s son, and demonstrating some talent as a composer for piano and voice. Schumann became friendly with Franz Xaver and was warmly greeted by a number of other prominent local musicians and artists, but he remained cautious about Vienna. “I shouldn’t like to live here long and *alone*,” he confided to his brother, Eduard. “Serious men and Saxons are seldom wanted or understood here.” By Christmas, it had become clear to Schumann that his Viennese venture would fail—he could find no significant way in which to advance his career, there was no promising situation for the *Zeitschrift*, and he missed Clara terribly, all the more since the Viennese adored her playing and continually interrogated him to learn more about her. He lingered in the imperial city until March 30, 1839, when news that Eduard had become seriously ill took him posthaste to Zwickau; he arrived just after his brother had died. Saddened by his loss and by the disappointment

in Vienna, Schumann returned to Leipzig, where, after six more months of waiting to outlast Wieck’s intransigence and legal obstacles, he finally married his beloved Clara on September 12th, the eve of her 21st birthday.

Though Schumann did not realize his most immediate goals during his Viennese incursion, the enterprise was not without value. He brought home two important souvenirs—a steel pen he found on the grave of Beethoven, with which he wrote his First Symphony in 1841; and the score for the late Franz Schubert’s never-performed Symphony in C Major, unearthed from the piles of manuscripts preserved by that composer’s brother, Ferdinand, and heard for the first time, at Schumann’s insistence, at Felix Mendelssohn’s Leipzig Gewandhaus concert of December 12, 1839. In addition, Schumann composed several piano works in Vienna, including the finale of the Sonata in G minor (Op. 22), *Arabesque* (Op. 18), *Blumenstück* (Op. 19), *Humoreske* (Op. 20), *Nachtstücke* (Op. 23), the opening sections of the *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* (*Carnival Jest from Vienna*, Op. 26), and a number of smaller pieces. Of the *Humoreske*, written at the beginning of 1839 and dedicated to Julia Cavalcabo, he wrote to Clara, “All week I have scarcely left my piano, composing and laughing and crying, all at once. My *Humoreske* is the result, and you will find all of these things in there.” Schumann told a Belgian acquaintance, Simonin de Sire, that the title was intended to convey “a happy combination of *Gemütlichkeit* [i.e., genial, cozy feelings] and wit.”

Though its name implies something diminutive, the *Humoreske* is comparable in scale and form to the large piano cycles, those peerless collections of aphoristic character pieces that had occupied Schumann since his *Papillons* (*Butterflies*) of 1832. As with his other cycles, the *Humoreske* embraces a wide variety of strongly contrasted moods, whose extremes Schumann himself personified as the fictional characters Florestan (“impetuous and mercurial”) and Eusebius (“dreamy and romantic”). Though the individual episodes do not have any immediately discernible formal tissue linking them, their foundation in the pervasive tonality

of B-flat and their natural growth from one section to the next suggest not so much an amorphous series of independent movements as a set of free variations in search of a theme. The *Humoreske*, like the other piano masterworks Schumann created from the seething cauldron of his emotions during the years of his early maturity, is music of rich and intense expression, inventive formal design, and a superb sense of the keyboard's most sumptuous sonorities.

Sonata in C minor, D. 958

Franz Schubert

In the hall of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna on March 26, 1828, immediately after completing his magnificent Symphony in C Major (justifiably dubbed “The Great” by later generations), Franz Schubert gave the only public concert entirely of his works held during his lifetime. The event, prompted and sponsored by his circle of devoted friends, was a significant artistic and financial success, and he used the proceeds to celebrate the occasion at a local tavern, pay off some old debts, acquire a new piano, and buy tickets for Nicolò Paganini's sensational debut in Vienna three days later. Despite the renewed enthusiasm for creative work that that concert inspired in him, and encouraging signs that his music was beginning to receive recognition outside of Vienna, Schubert's spirits were dampened during the following months by the perilous state of his health. His constitution, never robust, had been undermined by syphilis, and by the summer of 1828, he was suffering from headaches, exhaustion, and frequent digestive distress. In May, he received invitations from friends to summer in both Graz and Gmunden in order to refresh himself with the country air, but he had to refuse his hosts because he lacked money to pay for the transportation. He settled instead for a three-day excursion in early June with the composer-conductor Franz Lachner to nearby Baden, where he wrote a Fugue in E minor for organ, four hands (D. 952, his only work for organ), which he tried out with his companion on the instrument in the 12th-century Cistercian abbey at neighboring Heiligenkreuz on June 4th. Between his return to the city a few

days later and August, he composed the Mass in E-flat, made a setting in Hebrew of Psalm 92 for the City Synagogue of Vienna, created a number of short pieces for piano, wrote all but one of the 13 songs published after his death in the collection *Schwanengesang*, did extensive work on what proved to be his last three piano sonatas (D. 958–960), and began his String Quintet in C Major.

At the end of August, Schubert felt unwell, complaining of dizziness and loss of appetite, and his physician advised that he move for a time to a new house outside the city recently acquired by the composer's brother Ferdinand. Though Ferdinand's dwelling was damp and uncomfortable and hardly conducive to his recovery, Franz felt better during the following days, and was able to participate in an active social life and attend the premiere of a comedy by his friend Eduard von Bauernfeld on September 5th. Schubert also continued to compose incessantly, completing the three piano sonatas on the 26th, and performing them at the house of Dr. Ignaz Menz the following day. The Quintet in C Major was finished at that same time; it and the sonatas were the last instrumental works he completed. On October 31st, Schubert fell seriously ill, his syphilitic condition perhaps exacerbated by the typhus then epidemic in Vienna, and he died on November 19, 1828, at the age of 31. He had originally intended that the three sonatas be dedicated to Johann Hummel, a pianist, composer, student of Mozart, and important supporter during his last years, but when Diabelli published them in 1838 as “Schubert's Last Compositions: Three Grand Sonatas,” Hummel was already dead, so the pieces were instead inscribed to another champion of Schubert's music, Robert Schumann.

“All three of the last sonatas are works in which meditation, charm, wistfulness, sadness and joy are housed in noble structures,” wrote George R. Marek. Though each follows the traditional four-movement Classical pattern of opening sonata-allegro, lyrical slow movement, scherzo (minuet in the C-minor Sonata), and lively finale, this is music less concerned with the titanic, visionary, long-range formal struc-

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tures of Beethoven (whom Schubert idolized) than with the immediately perceived qualities of melody, harmonic color, piano sonority, and the subtle balancing of keys—what Hans Költzsch in his study of Schubert's sonatas called “the nascent present.” This characteristically Schubertian predilection is particularly evident in the development sections of the opening movements, which eschew the rigorous thematic working-out of the Beethovenian model in favor of a warm, even sometimes dreamy, lyricism whose principal aims are to examine fragments of the movement's melodies in different harmonic lights and to extract the instrument's most ingratiating sonorities. Schubert's closest approach to Beethoven's weight of utterance comes in the opening Allegro of the Sonata in C minor—the work may even be a tribute of sorts to the older com-

poser, who died in March 1827, just a year before this piece was begun. The movement's essential tunefulness and its concern with matters of hearth and heart rather than with grandeur and sublimity, however, mark it unmistakably as a creation of Schubert. The following Adagio is a gentle, major-key song, poignantly inflected with delicate minor-mode borrowings, which becomes animated in its central section before resuming the initial quietude for its closing phrases. Though given the old name of Menuetto, the third movement displays such forward-looking devices as irregular phrasing and sudden contrasts of dynamics. The finale is rambunctious and incessantly active not only in its rhythmic motion but also in its wide exploration of colorful harmonic territories.

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Internationally recognized as one of today's most acclaimed and admired pianists, **Yefim Bronfman** stands among a handful of artists regularly sought by festivals, orchestras, conductors, and recital series. His commanding technique, power, and exceptional lyrical gifts are consistently acknowledged by the press and audiences alike.

In celebration of the 80th birthday of Maestro Yuri Temirkanov, Bronfman's 2018–19 season begins with a European tour with Saint Petersburg Philharmonic. This is followed by a Scandinavian tour with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and with orchestral concerts in Europe during the season including Paris (Orchestre National de France), London (LPO), Cologne (WDR), Rome (Santa Cecilia), Berlin (Philharmonic), and the Vienna Philharmonic on tour. In the US he will return to orchestras in Cleveland, New York, Los Angeles, Houston, St. Louis, Cincinnati, San Francisco, and Dallas, and in recital can be heard in New York (Carnegie Hall), Stanford, Aspen, Madrid, Geneva, Cologne, Leipzig, Munich, Berlin, Naples, Rome, and on tour in the spring with mezzo-soprano Magdalena Kozena.

Bronfman has 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 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.

Born in Tashkent in the Soviet Union, Yefim Bronfman immigrated to Israel with his family in 1973, where 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 School of Music, and the Curtis Institute of Music, under Rudolf Firkusny, Leon Fleisher, and Rudolf Serkin. He is a 2015 recipient of an honorary doctorate from the Manhattan School of Music.

Yefim Bronfman became an American citizen in July 1989.