

Sunday, November 10, 2024, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Behzod Abduraimov, *piano*

PROGRAM

César FRANCK (1822–1890) Prélude, Fugue, and Variations, Op. 18
(arr. Bauer) (1860–1862)
Prélude. Andantino
Lento
Fugue. Allegretto ma non troppo
Variation. Andantino

Modest MUSSORGSKY (1839–1881) *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874)
[Promenade]
The Gnome
The Old Castle
The Tuileries: Children quarrelling after play
Cattle
Ballet of the chicks in their shells
Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuÿle
Limoges, the Market Place
Roman Catacombs –
 With the dead in a dead language
The Hut on Fowl's Legs (Baba Yaga)
The Great Gate at Kiev

INTERMISSION

Florence PRICE (1887–1953) *Fantasia nègre* No. 1 in E minor (1929)

Sergei PROKOFIEV (1891–1953) 10 Pieces from *Romeo and Juliet*,
Op. 75 (1937)
Folk Dance
Scene: The Street Awakens
Minuet: Arrival of the Guests
Juliet as a Young Girl
Masquers
Montagues and Capulets
Friar Laurence
Mercutio
Dance of the Girls with Lilies
Romeo and Juliet Before Parting

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César Franck
Prélude, Fugue, and Variations, Op. 18
Arranged by Harold Bauer

As a child and a young man, the Belgian-born César Franck was a prodigious virtuoso pianist, exploited mercilessly by his ambitious father who moved his family to Paris in order to capitalize on his son's talent. However, by 1845 when Franck was still only in his early 20s, the pressure to perform had broken his health, and he retreated from the piano for nearly four decades. His chosen instrument became the organ, on which he also developed virtuoso mastery; at the magnificent new instrument at Paris' Basilica of St. Clotilde, he thrilled the congregation with his after-service improvisations.

Thus, Franck's Prélude, Fugue, and Variation was actually born as a work for organ, the third of the *Six Pieces* drawn from the composer's improvisations on St. Clotilde's organ during the period of 1860–1862 and compiled for publication in 1868. It was dedicated to his colleague Camille Saint-Saëns, also an accomplished organist. Today it is more often heard on the piano in the standard transcription by Harold Bauer. Once forced to write lightweight salon music, Franck was by now determined to create keyboard pieces of Teutonic substance rather than French frivolity, for the composers he most revered were Bach and Beethoven. And on several occasions, he turned to Bach for inspiration and specifically to his preludes and fugues as a formal model.

Nevertheless, Franck's style here is purely Romantic rather than neo-Baroque. The Prélude unfurls as a lilting, lyrical reverie whose B-minor key adds a melancholy coloration. Keep its charming melody in mind, for it will provide the theme for the Variation coming later. This is followed by a solemn, weighty interlude that provides an introduction for the Fugue. The Fugue itself begins much more modestly and quietly with the

entrances of the different voices clearly marked out. A pensive working out of the fugal theme gradually builds to the stately grandeur predicted by the introduction. But this instantly melts away into the Variation on the Prélude's theme. Here the complexity of cross rhythms in the counterpoint add fascination to the theme's gentle simplicity.

Modest Mussorgsky
Pictures at an Exhibition

Modest Mussorgsky was the most original of the Russian nationalist composers of the latter half of the 19th century known as "The Mighty Handful." An untutored genius, he cared nothing for correct Germanic forms and harmonic practices, or beautiful sounds and sensuous scoring. Although born an aristocrat, he revered the spirit of the Russian peasant and believed music should not merely entertain but promote the cause of social justice. Increasingly debilitated by alcoholism, he died at age 42, leaving behind a slender but revolutionary bundle of works that influenced many 20th-century composers.

One of his closest friends, the artist and architect Victor Hartman, also died young of an aneurism at age 39 in 1873. A devastated Mussorgsky helped organize an exhibition of Hartman's paintings in St. Petersburg the following year. He then decided to "draw in music" (his words) 10 of them in a solo piano work he composed rapidly in June 1874. Apparently, he had no plans to orchestrate his *Pictures at an Exhibition*, which was not published until after his death. It remained little known outside of Russia.

All this changed in 1922 when Russian conductor Serge Koussevitzky commissioned Maurice Ravel to score *Pictures* for his Paris ensemble. And it is in this technicolor arrangement that the work is best known today. But the rough virtuosity of Mussorgsky's keyboard original is far more representative of the composer's spirit.

The following descriptions of the 10 movements (preceded by a Promenade) draw on the words of Russian art critic Vladimir Stasov, friend to both Hartman and Mussorgsky:

Promenade: Mussorgsky depicts “himself...as he strolled through the exhibition, joyfully or sadly recalling the talented deceased artist...he does not hurry, but observes attentively.” This music returns throughout the piece as a linking device, changing to reflect the composer’s different responses to the pictures. By 1874, Mussorgsky had grown fat, heard in the music’s stately, lumbering gait.

The Gnome: “A fantastic lame figure on crooked little legs... This gnome is a child’s toy, fashioned, after Hartman’s design, in wood for the Christmas tree...in the style of the nutcracker, the nuts being inserted in the gnome’s mouth....The gnome accompanies his droll movements with savage shrieks.”

The Old Castle: This is a sketch of a medieval Italian castle; a troubadour is singing in the foreground to a guitar accompaniment.

The Tuileries: Stasov wrote that this high-spirited episode is based on a picture of children playing with their nurse in Paris’ Tuileries Gardens.

Cattle: This melancholy piece portrays a heavy Polish ox-drawn wagon, its wheels groaning as it moves.

Ballet of the chicks in their shells: “In 1870, Hartman designed the costumes... for the ballet *Tribli* at the Maryinsky Theatre. ... In the cast were a number of boy and girl pupils...arrayed as canaries. Others were dressed up as eggs.” Hartman’s sketches in which the children’s arms and legs protrude from the egg shells inspired this chirping piece.

Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle: “Victor Hartman gave Mussorgsky two of his sketches from real life, those of the rich and the poor Jew” from Sandimir, Poland. Mus-

sorgsky named the two and deftly characterized the haughty rich man, Goldenberg, dismissing the whining pleas of the poor Schmuyle.

Limoges, the Market Place: “Old women quarreling at the market in Limoges.”

Roman Catacombs – With the dead in a dead language: Hartman’s picture shows the artist, a friend, and a guide examining the Roman catacombs by lamplight. A pile of skulls is heaped in one corner; Mussorgsky imagines that they begin to glow from within.

The Hut on Fowl’s Legs (Baba Yaga): Powerful and grotesque, “this piece is based on Hartman’s design for a clock in the form of Baba-Yaga’s hut on hen’s legs, to which Mussorgsky added the ride of the witch in her mortar.” Baba-Yaga is a Russian fairy-tale witch who lures children into the woods, eats them, then crushes their bones in a giant mortar in which she rides through the forest.

The Great Gate of Kiev: The grand finale, based on the “Promenade” music, depicts Hartman’s competition design for a ceremonial arch in Kiev to commemorate Tsar Alexander II’s escape from an assassination attempt. It is “in the massive old Russian style in the form of a Slavonic helmet.” Since Kiev is the historic seat of Russian orthodoxy, Mussorgsky incorporates a Russian Orthodox hymn-tune. Ringing with an imitation of church bells, the work climaxes in a blaze of Slavic glory.

Florence Price

Fantasia nègre No. 1 in E minor

As both a woman and an African American, Florence Price was a dual pioneer in the world of American classical music at a time when there were formidable obstacles in place against both groups. Born and raised in Little Rock, she began playing the piano at 4 and had her first composition published at 11. By the time she was 14, Price

had graduated at the top of her high school class and matriculated at Boston's esteemed New England Conservatory of Music. In 1906, before she was 20, she had graduated with honors; nevertheless, during part of her time there, she pretended to be Mexican to counter the prejudice against her race.

Most of Price's career was spent in Chicago, where she became friends with both the writer Langston Hughes and the great contralto Marian Anderson, both of whom had a hand in promoting her composing career. After her *Symphony in E minor* won first prize in the Wanamaker Foundation Awards in 1932, conductor Frederick Stock selected it for performance in 1933 at the Chicago World's Fair by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra—the first composition by an African-American woman ever to be played by a major American orchestra.

Over the course of her career, Price wrote some 300 pieces in a variety of genres. But after her death, her music was largely forgotten for decades. With the coming of the 21st century, its rediscovery began when new owners of her summer home found major, previously unpublished works and sent them to the University of Arkansas. There musicologists found a treasure trove of works, revealing an appealing voice that brilliantly combined classical technique with African-American spirituals and other folk material. Subsequently, a well-deserved Florence Price revival has rapidly spread throughout American music centers and beyond.

Written in 1929 and dedicated to her student Margaret Bonds, who gave the first public performance and became an important pianist and composer herself, the *Fantasia nègre* ("Negro Fantasy") No. 1 in E minor was Price's first major piano work; it was soon followed by three more works by the same name. In improvisatory fantasy style, it embroiders stunningly virtuosic variations on the melody of the traditional African-American spiritual "Sinner, Please Don't Let this Harvest Pass."

Sergei Prokofiev

10 Pieces from Romeo and Juliet, Op. 75

As he returned to the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s after years of exile in the West, Sergei Prokofiev chose *Romeo and Juliet* as a gift to his homeland, honoring the Russian tradition of full-length story ballets such as *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*. In Paris, he had already proven his skills in creating dance music with the ballets *Pas d'acier* and *The Prodigal Son* for Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes.

With a commission from Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet in hand and the love story driving his imagination, Prokofiev wrote most of the two-hour-plus score rapidly over the summer and early fall of 1935. But when he played the music for the Bolshoi staff on October 4th, they were dismayed: Prokofiev had originally given his ballet a happy ending in which Juliet awakens in time to prevent Romeo's suicide! More trouble arose as the ballet went into rehearsal. Bewildered by Prokofiev's complicated rhythms, the dancers complained that the music was "undanceable," and the Bolshoi eventually dropped the production. But Prokofiev believed deeply in his score—a magnificent blending of his melodic gifts, sophisticated wit, and cinematic skill of painting pictures with music—and in 1936, he created two orchestral suites to advertise his masterpiece. We often hear these, but more rarely the superb *10 Pieces from Romeo and Juliet* for piano he created and performed publicly the following year. Hearing these previews before actually seeing the ballet, audiences fell in love with the music, and ultimately, Leningrad's Kirov Ballet mounted a triumphant production in January 1940.

Prokofiev's career as an iconoclastic piano virtuoso always rivaled his fame as a composer. As Donald G. Gislason wrote: "These pieces, then, are not mere orchestral reductions, but pianistically conceived scene paintings with the hands of the virtuoso pianist in mind." Many of the pieces are rep-

lications of numbers found in the orchestral suites, but several of the most famous—“Tybalt’s Death,” the glorious Balcony Scene, and Romeo and Juliet’s death scene—are omitted. Generally, the 10 excerpts chosen are lighter and more playful in character and throw the emphasis on keyboard brilliance rather than Shakespeare’s plot.

Thus, the composer opens with two scene-setting pieces for the corps de ballet, “Folk Dance” and “The Street Awakens,” whose strongly accented rhythms emphasize crisp dexterity. “Minuet: Arrival of the Guests” is a very grand, sweeping processional minuet as the Capulet’s guests enter the ballroom for Juliet’s birthday and gossip among themselves.

“Juliet as a Young Girl”: Shakespeare tells us that Juliet is not yet 14, and Prokofiev charmingly shows her innocence and frisky girlishness before she meets Romeo; here we also hear the first stirrings of her beautiful, arching love theme, the symbol of her passionate nature. In “Masquers,” rhythmically intricate music depicts the arrival of Romeo and his fellow Montagues, wearing masks to disguise their identities, at the Capulet ball. Here Prokofiev’s keyboard version emphasizes the impudence and mischief of these intruders even better than does the orchestral version. The heavy, aggressive music of the famous “Montagues and Capulets” excerpt portrays the swaggering macho dance of the Capulet men at Juliet’s ball. In a

lyrical episode in three beats, Romeo first spies Juliet dancing with Paris, the man her parents wish her to marry. The extreme contrast between these two types of music foretells the tragedy to come.

“Friar Laurence” and “Mercutio,” two musical portraits of secondary characters who are unwitting drivers of the tragic plot, follow. Prokofiev skillfully delineates the priest’s sober nature with calm, slow music. The madcap, reckless Mercutio, Romeo’s closest friend, is captured in the *Allegro giocoso* scherzo. In the delicately graceful “Dance of the Girls with Lilies,” Juliet’s friends gather at dawn to awaken her on the day of her wedding to Paris, unaware that they will soon find her apparently dead. The work concludes with “Romeo and Juliet Before Parting,” the scene in which they bid an anguished farewell after their only night together. In this fragile, rhapsodic music we hear reminiscences of their glorious Balcony Scene theme. The quiet, eerie epilogue, beautifully expressive of the lovers’ anxiety as Romeo goes into exile, provides an unexpectedly understated close to such a lengthy, virtuosic work.

—Janet E. Bedell © 2024

Janet E. Bedell is a program annotator and feature writer who writes for Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Caramoor Festival of the Arts, and other musical organizations.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Behzod Abduraimov’s performances combine an immense depth of musicality with phenomenal technique and breathtaking delicacy. He performs with many of the world’s leading orchestras and conductors, and his critically acclaimed recordings have set a new standard for the piano repertoire.

Some of the orchestras with which Abduraimov will perform in the 2024–25 season include the Bamberger Symphoniker, Or-

chestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg, Sinfonieorchester Basel, and Berner Sinfonieorchester. In North America, he appears with the Atlanta Symphony, Detroit Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony, Toronto Symphony, and Vancouver Symphony. Elsewhere, he performs with the Singapore Symphony and Tokyo Philharmonic. Conductors with whom he will collaborate this season include Anja Bihl-



Evgeny Euykhov

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maier, Lionel Bringuier, Stéphane Denève, Gustavo Gimeno, Hans Graf, Jakub Hruša, Stanislav Kochanovsky, Aziz Shokhkimov and Otto Tausk.

In August 2024, Abduraimov marked the 10th anniversary of his debut with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl. Later this week, he will appear in recital at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles.

Some of the leading orchestras with which Abduraimov has performed in recent seasons include the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Concertgebouw Orchestra, Czech Philharmonic, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Los Angeles Philharmonic, NHK Symphony, Philharmonia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Orchestre de Paris, and Wiener Symphoniker. He has collaborated with many renowned conductors including Semyon Bychkov, Gianandrea Noseda, Vasily Petrenko, Santtu-Matias Rouvali, and Juraj Valčuha.

Abduraimov regularly appears at Carnegie Hall, twice in 2024, and performs recitals in the major halls of cultural capitals, including Amsterdam, Frankfurt, London, Milan, Seoul, Shanghai, and Tokyo. International

festivals where he regularly appears include Aspen, La Roque Antheron, Lucerne, Ravello, Rheingau, and Verbier.

Shadows of My Ancestors, Abduraimov's second recording for Alpha Classics, which features works by Ravel, Prokofiev, and Uzbek composer Dilorom Saidaminova, was released in January 2024. It was recognized as a *Gramophone* Editor's Choice and named one of Apple Music's "10 Classical Albums You Must Hear This Month." The year 2021 saw the successful release of his first album for Alpha Classics featuring Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. In 2020, two albums were nominated for Opus Klassik awards: Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* with the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra, recorded on the composer's piano, and Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3 with the Concertgebouw Orchestra.

Born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in 1990, Abduraimov began piano lessons at age five as a pupil of Tamara Popovich at the Uspensky State Central Lyceum in Tashkent. In 2009, he won first prize at the London International Piano Competition. He is Artist-in-Residence at the International Center for Music at Park University, where he studied with Stanislav Ioudenitch.