

BIG ARTS
2020-2021 Series

Sunday, January 10, 2021

The Hirsch-Pinkas Duo

SALLY PINKAS and EVAN HIRSCH, *pianists*

J.C. BACH Sonata for Piano, Four Hands in A major,
Op. 18, No. 5, W A19

Allegretto
Tempo di Minuetto

SCHUBERT Rondo for Piano, Four Hands in A major, Op. 107 (D. 951)

RAVEL *Ma Mère l'Oye ("Mother Goose")*

Pavane de la Belle au Bois dormant
Petit Poucet
Laideronnette, Impératrice des Pagodes
Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête
Le jardin féerique

– INTERMISSION –

BRAHMS Waltzes, Op. 39

BARBER *Souvenirs*, Op. 28

Waltz
Schottische
Pas de Deux
Two-Step
Hesitation-Tango
Galop

Notes on the Program by Dr. Richard E. Rodda

Sonata for Piano, Four Hands in A major, Op. 18, No. 5, W A19 Johann Christian Bach

Born September 5, 1738 in Leipzig.

Died January 1, 1782 in London.

Published in 1781.

Johann Christian Bach, the so-called “London Bach,” was the youngest son of Johann Sebastian, and probably the most famous while he lived of any of the members of that venerable clan. Christian was fifteen when his father, Johann Sebastian, died in 1750. He left Leipzig to continue his education with his older brother Carl Philipp Emanuel in Berlin, and moved to Italy in 1754 to study composition with the renowned pedagogue Padre Martini. Christian began writing Latin church music, and by 1757 he had been received into the Roman Catholic faith. (His staunchly Lutheran family might well have dubbed him the “Renegade Bach” for such a heretical action.) His appointment as organist at the Milan Cathedral in 1760 was quickly followed by the composition of his first opera, and it was not long before his church duties were neglected in favor of the more glamorous opera house. Reputation followed success, and in 1762 he accepted an offer to compose operas for the King’s Theatre in London, a city that was to be his home for the rest of his life.

Though Bach’s earliest operatic efforts in England met with considerable acclaim, political intrigues soon forced him from his position. He turned to instrumental music, and established himself in the favor of the German-born Queen Charlotte with such effect that he was appointed Master of the Queen’s Music within two years of his arrival. Also at that time he renewed his friendship with Carl Friedrich Abel, a German composer and performer who had studied with Johann Christian’s father in Leipzig. They organized the famous Bach-Abel concerts that were such an important stimulus in the establishment of the public instrumental concert. Their first concert was given in February 1764 and the series of January-to-May weekly programs continued for almost twenty years, with much of the programming devoted to Johann Christian’s instrumental music. The modish currents of British taste began to flow away from Bach in his last years, however, and he suffered several difficult financial reverses, including his overextended investment in a new hall for the concerts. His health began to decline in 1781 and he died on New Year’s Day 1782, deeply in debt. It is said that only four people attended the funeral. Queen Charlotte, however, remembered her Music Master, and she enabled Bach’s wife, an opera singer, to return to her native Italy and live on a royal pension for the rest of her life.

London during the twenty years Christian Bach lived there was a mecca of performances, music publishing, instrument manufacture, and a prosperous middle class who made home music-making one of its favored pastimes. A piano in the home was a necessity of the genteel life, with performances on it by members of the household providing a focal point for a family’s private and social lives. This burgeoning market demanded something to play, and a lucrative industry of music composition and publication developed to meet the needs of amateur players, from novice to virtuoso. Christian Bach contributed some two dozen piano sonatas to this repertory, four of them for two players at one instrument — a configuration desirable both for its conviviality and because few households had two pianos. Bach’s Six Sonatas, Op. 18, published in London in 1781, contained two four-hand sonatas as well as four solo sonatas that were fitted with rudimentary “accompanying” parts for violin or flute for *amateurs* of those instruments who might like to play along (and increase the volume’s sales).

Bach’s Op. 18 Sonatas are all in two complementary movements. The Sonata, Four Hands in A major, Op. 18, No. 5 opens with a sonata-form movement that takes an elegant melody with trills and dotted rhythms as its main theme and a motive with quick triplet rhythms as its second subject. Both themes figure in the development section before they are recapitulated to round out the movement. The *Minuetto* is gracious at beginning and end and a more animated at its center.

Rondo for Piano, Four Hands in A major, Op. 107 (D. 951)
Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Composed in 1828.

Franz Schubert died too soon. He was three months shy of his 32nd birthday when he expired from the complications of syphilis on November 19, 1828, and just beginning to establish his reputation beyond his home city of Vienna. During the last three years of his life, he devoted himself to the large public forms of composition — symphony, ambitious chamber works for professional performance, extensive song cycles — that he hoped would allow his renown to approach that of his creative hero, Ludwig van Beethoven. On March 26, 1828, he gave the only public concert entirely of his works held during his lifetime, and the event proved to be a significant artistic and financial success. Two months later the famed soprano Anna Milder-Hauptmann, who originated the role of Leonora in Beethoven's *Fidelio*, asked for a brilliant concert piece that she could perform on her concert tours through northern Europe, and Schubert created for her the soaringly lyrical *Shepherd on the Rock*. He was also assiduously fostering relations with publishers in Germany and Austria at that time, sending them scores, responding to their requests, inquiring about works that they would like to have him write.

In the early 19th century, when the demand for music for home performance was exploding, publication was among the most important means for a composer to secure fame and financial success, and Schubert wrote a spate of piano compositions during his last two years: *Impromptus*, several sonatas, *Moments Musicaux*, *Drei Klavierstücke*, numerous dances and smaller pieces, and a half-dozen works for piano duet (i.e., two players at one instrument). Among the most pleasing of the duet pieces is the Rondo in A major, written in June 1828, shortly after Schubert made a brief excursion with the composer-conductor Franz Lachner to nearby Baden, where he composed 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. The Rondo was created in response to a request from the Viennese publisher Artaria, who issued the score with reasonable speed, though it still did not appear (as Schubert's Op. 107) until December, a month after the composer's death. The A major Rondo, lyrical and idyllic, follows the traditional form, with several returns of the limpid opening melody separated by complementary and contrasting episodes, one of which ventures through some wide-ranging harmonic regions to bring a more thoughtful and deeply expressive quality to the work.

Ma Mère l'Oye ("Mother Goose") for Piano, Four Hands
Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Composed in 1908.

Premiered on April 20, 1910 in Paris by Christine Verger and Germaine Duramy.

"I would settle down on his lap, and tirelessly he would begin, 'Once upon a time ...' It was *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Ugly Empress of the Pagodas*, and, above all, the adventures of a little mouse he invented for me." So Mimi Godebski reminisced in later years about the visits of Maurice Ravel to her family's home during her childhood. Ravel, a contented bachelor, enjoyed these visits to the Godebskis, and took special delight in playing with the young children — cutting out paper dolls, telling stories, romping around on all fours. Young Mimi and her brother Jean were in the first stages of piano tutelage in 1908, and Ravel decided to encourage their studies by composing some little pieces for them portraying *Sleeping Beauty*, *Hop o' My Thumb*, *Empress of the Pagodas* and *Beauty and the Beast*. To these he added an evocation of *The Fairy Garden* as a postlude. In 1911, he made a ravishing orchestral transcription of the original five pieces, added to them a prelude, an opening scene and connecting interludes, and produced a ballet with a scenario based on *Sleeping Beauty* for the Théâtre des Arts in Paris.

The tiny *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty*, only twenty measures long, depicts the Good Fairy, who watches over the Princess during her somnolence. *Hop o' My Thumb* treats the old legend taken from Perrault's anthology of 1697. "A boy believed," Ravel noted of the tale, "that he could easily find his path by means of the bread crumbs which he had scattered wherever he passed; but he was very much surprised when he could not find a single crumb: the birds had come and eaten everything up." *Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas* portrays a young girl cursed with ugliness by a wicked fairy. The tale, however, has a happy ending in which the Empress' beauty is restored. In the *Conversations of Beauty and the Beast*, the high woodwinds sing the delicate words of the Beauty, while the Beast is portrayed by the lumbering contrabassoon. At first the two converse, politely taking turns in the dialogue, but after their betrothal, both melodies are entwined, and finally the Beast's theme is transfigured into a floating wisp. The rapt, introspective splendor of the closing *Fairy Garden* is Ravel's summation of the beauty, mystery and wonder that pervade *Mother Goose*.

Waltzes, Op. 39
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Composed in 1865.

Brahms introduced himself to Vienna with a piano recital there in 1862. The city's charm, agreeable life style and ubiquitous musical activity attracted him immediately, and he returned the following year to conduct four concerts of the Wiener Singakademie, but then declined that organization's offer to become its music director so that he could continue touring as a pianist. By 1869, however, the lure of Vienna, with its rich cultural life and the many friendships that he had made during earlier visits, proved irresistible. After living for several months in a hotel in 1870, he moved into the apartment in the Karlgasse that was to be his home for the rest of his life. Brahms' first formal homage to Viennese dance music was the set of *Waltzes for Piano, Op. 39* that he created in 1865, harbingers of the two volumes of *Liebeslieder Waltzes* that he composed soon after settling in the imperial city. Though written by a composer who had to that time confined himself entirely to the most high-minded of musical forms and thoughts, the works were well suited to the mid-19th-century waltz craze, and Brahms issued them in editions for piano duet, piano four hands, and standard and simplified solo piano versions to make them as suitable for the parlor piano-bench collection as for the concert stage.

Sixteen miniature numbers comprise the Op. 39 *Waltzes*. They all follow the simple two-part form used for dance music since before the time of Bach, and are arranged to provide a pleasing variety of keys, modes, tempos and moods. The individual pieces range considerably beyond their titular domain to encompass the idioms of *Ländler*, *Csárdás* and Gypsy dances, and exhibit the influence as much of Schubert and Schumann as of the waltzing Strausses.

Souvenirs, Op. 28
Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Composed in 1951-1952.

Premiered on NBC Television in July 1952 by Robert Fizdale and Arthur Gold.

One of Samuel Barber's favorite relaxations after he was discharged from the Army Air Force at the end of World War II and settled in his new home at Mt. Kisco was traveling into Manhattan to hear the music at the city's nightclubs. Among the spots he visited most often with one friend, pianist Charles Turner, was the Blue Angel Club, where a two-piano team, Edie and Rack, played sophisticated arrangements of popular and show tunes. Turner encouraged Barber to compose something of a similar nature that they could play together, and in 1951, Barber began writing down some lighthearted numbers for four-hand piano in turn-of-the-20th-century dance styles that grew into the set of six *Souvenirs: Waltz, Schottische* (a round dance similar to a slow polka), *Pas de Deux, Two-Step, Hesitation-Tango, and Galop*. The

ballet impresario Lincoln Kirstein heard Barber and Turner play *Souvenirs* at a New York party early in 1952, and he suggested that Barber orchestrate them as a ballet. Though the ballet was not to be premiered for more than three years, Barber indicated the music's theatrical context in a preface to the piano score, published in 1954: "One might imagine a divertissement in a setting reminiscent of the Palm Court of the Plaza Hotel in New York, the year about 1914, epoch of the first tangos; *Souvenirs* – remembered with affection, not in irony or with tongue in the cheek, but in amused tenderness." Barber also arranged the work for solo piano in 1952, and the well-known duo-piano team of Gold and Fizdale recorded it in their own version for two pianos that same year.

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