
SCHOOL OF MUSIC • UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

FACULTY CONCERT SERIES

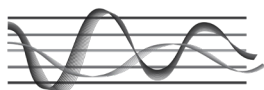
LEBEWOHL.

A FINAL RECITAL

BRUCE VOGT PIANO

WITH SPECIAL GUEST **JAN ZWICKY**

UVIC
music



SATURDAY, MARCH 2, 2024 | 8 PM

Phillip T. Young Recital Hall

MacLaurin Building, University of Victoria

PROGRAM

We acknowledge and respect the Lekwungen peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

- Goe From My Window** John Munday
(1555–1630)
- Sonata in D Major Hob XVI:42** (1784) Joseph Haydn
i. Andante con espressione (1732–1809)
ii. Vivace assai
- i. Les Cyclopes from Suite in D Major** (1706) Jean-Phillipe Rameau
ii. L'enharmonique from Suite in G minor (1729-30) (1683-1784)
- Two Meditations:**
- Andante in A Major, D. 604** (c. 1817) Franz Schubert
(1797–1828)
- Nocturne in B Major, Opus 62, No. 1** (1846) Frédéric Chopin
(1810–1849)

INTERMISSION

The late vision of Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

- Valses oubliéé No. 1** (1881)
- Bagatelle sans tonalité** (1885)
- Aux cyprès de la Villa d'Este: Threnodie** (1877)
- Reading by Jan Zwicky —
- Schaflos! Frage und Antwort** (1883)
- Resignazione** (1881)

Transcendence

Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude (Hymn to God in My Solitude) (1851)

All are welcome to join for a reception in the lounge.

PROGRAM NOTES

Munday: Goe From My Window

I have loved the music of the Elizabethan virginalists since first being introduced to it as an undergrad student, but I have never attempted a performance. Now seems to be the time.

Many composers wrote sets of variations on the popular song 'Goe From My Window' but the song itself is now lost. The identity of the composer of this set remains a bit of a mystery. It is ascribed to two different composers in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, which is the most important collection of English keyboard music from the Elizabethan and post-Elizabethan period. The first version has seven variations with the composer listed as Thomas Morley. But later, in the same collection, the composition appears again, this time with an added eighth variation and with the composer listed as John Mundy (or Jhon Munday — the Elizabethans evidently couldn't spell). Did this Munday/Mundy simply purloin the first seven variations and add another, claiming sole authorship? Perhaps the two composers reached an agreement over a flagon of ale. Certainly, the additional variation concludes the composition much more satisfyingly.

But rather than getting too involved in this mystery, we can instead simply ascribe the authorship to Francis Bacon.

Haydn: Sonata in D Major Hob XVI:42

Haydn often included in his sonatas a variation movement, with alternating tonic major and minor variations. This two-movement sonata begins wistfully with such a movement. The second *vivace* movement takes a very long time to make up its mind that it truly is in D Major. The wit, along with the full-hearted humanity of this composer, remain for us a great gift.

Two pieces by Rameau:

Les Cyclopes

The solitude, strength and clumsiness of Cyclops were at that time a frequent theme on the stage, here rendered with style and continuous invention. And even after the many pianistic developments in the 19th century, *Les Cyclopes* retains the ability to astonish both the performer and the listener: Here, Rameau the theorist, is also a man of the theatre. He wished the "pleasure of the eyes" to be matched with the "pleasure of the ears". And to support this show of virtuosity, he indicated directly on the score when to rotate the thumb or where to cross hands with little circles and precise fingerings — dramatic movements that challenge the performer and catch the eye of the observer.

L'Enharmonique

At a time when keyboard music was increasingly free from a dependence on basso continuo, Rameau imagined that *L'Enharmonique* would baffle a contemporary audience with its extreme chromatism and striking harmonic progressions. In the present day, these qualities gently disorient and charm the listener, while they somehow anticipate the romantic tradition of 19th century piano music. We are perhaps no longer confused by its harmonic audacity, but the sustained uncertainty has a role in surrendering us to its emotion.

Two Meditations:

Schubert: Andante

"Schubert's tonality is as wonderful as star clusters, and a verbal description of it is as dull as a volume of astronomical tables." [D. F. Tovey]

At the time of Schubert's death, only his own circle of friends was familiar with his music — and even they knew him mostly as a song composer. Most of his instrumental music had not yet been published. Many of these works would not be heard for decades. His 9 symphonies (7 complete), 15 string quartets, many other chamber works, 21 piano sonatas (13 complete), masses, other choral works and many more — were almost all unknown then. And when these works were finally being heard and pondered over, too often they were patronized as structurally flawed. Even 50 years ago it was not uncommon to hear that many of Schubert's instrumental works were undisciplined. There were, however, a few champions of note. Liszt and Brahms were among the first to recognize Schubert's achievement as an instrumental composer. And in 1894, Antonín Dvořák wrote: "[He] is never at fault in his means of expression, while mastery of form came to him spontaneously... Schubert's musical individuality is unmistakable..."

Of course, his audience long ago grew far beyond a small circle of friends, and yet the sense of intimacy with Schubert's music remains. It can feel as if each work has been written for us personally, moving us all the more profoundly. That has been very much my experience: Schubert's music has been a constant companion throughout my musical life.

This seemingly unprepossessing *Andante* brings to this programme the enduring depth of his presence. It is an early work, likely unmoored from an unfinished sonata. Thus, it reflects the fate of much of his music: to be discovered late and understood intimately later still.

Chopin: Nocturne, Opus 62, No. 1

The Irish composer and pianist John Field (1782–1837) may have been the first to use the title "Nocturne" for a single solo piano work. The genre was young and free when Chopin took from Field the characteristic device of creating, with the left hand, a web-like accompaniment by means of intricate broken chord figurations, which sup-

ports and enriches an aria-like melody above. And all of this unified with the use of the sustaining pedal. To this, Chopin added his own original harmonic language and his command of long sustained lyricism.

The two *Nocturnes*, opus 62, were written very near the end of his compositional life and three years before his death. In this first of the pair, one scarcely notices the contrapuntal richness which is unobtrusively everywhere, yet discreetly absorbed into the ongoing vocal texture.

The Late Vision of Franz Liszt

In his last years, Liszt spent his time teaching and composing, he did nothing to make these late compositions known and even discouraged his students from playing them. The works I chose for this program were all written in those later years, works surrounded by silence, and addressed to an uncertain future. They represent a radical break from his earlier compositions, and he expected no success for them in his lifetime. Composing them was a means — in his words — of 'hurling a lance into the future'.

In 1873, he wrote to his friend, the Hungarian composer Mosonyi, about his continued dedication to composing, despite contemporary indifference: "Yet there still remain several things for me to say, irrespective as to whether they may be quickly understood or recognized. Sometime when I am no longer of this earth, the rest will find itself. I can calmly await the event while I go on working, and meanwhile composedly expiate my virtuoso reputation with the disapproval my compositions have excited." And so it was. Not until the enthusiastic advocacy of Bartók, Busoni and others, were these late works recognized for what they are — a most astounding anticipation of major new paths which Western music was to follow. In their radical simplicity, obsessive rhythms, and strange harmonies, they take the listener to the very brink of tonality.

But these works are more than anticipations of the future, curiosities for music historians, or the ruminations from the composer's last years. Liszt's biographer, Alan Walker, focuses on their expression of depression and despair — and Liszt did describe his last years as a time when "exuberance of heart turned to bitterness of heart." But I hear in these late works an extension of Liszt's life-long spiritual inquiries, a courageous and unrelenting gaze into the abyss. He finds much terror there but also much beauty. They represent the achievement and the sum of a life devoted to music and spiritual questioning.

For me, these are works which meditate on the human condition. To live our lives fully and truly is to face, at every turn, our own mortality: how we must die and how everything that we hold dear — those we love, the things that resonate throughout our lives — will disappear, often painfully and in a protracted way. The preciousness of the things we value will not change this reality. The gap between the meaningfulness, the preciousness of life and its fleeting grain-of-sand nature cannot be closed by thought or by argument.

Nor can it be put aside by what D. H. Lawrence calls "the dead vanity of knowing better ... the blank / cold comfort of superiority, [the] silly / conceit of being immune."

Surely, it is a privilege of art that it can hint at a way of closing — or at least lessening — the gap.

Liszt wrote three *Valses oubliées*, or “forgotten waltzes,” between 1881 and 1885; a fourth was left almost completed. All of them share a kind of other-worldly strangeness. The first, the most familiar of the three, has the giddiness of the waltz — yet something sinister is perhaps suggested. It seems to come from afar, and to be vaguely out of tune, unattainable.

The Fourth Mephisto Waltz: *Bagatelle sans tonalité* was written sometime between 1883 and 1885. It remained unknown until 1956, when it was finally published in Budapest. This publishing history demonstrates both the incomprehension with which these late works were received and the composer’s listless indifference to their fate. Now, more than a century later, this work fascinates us for the very reasons that made it incomprehensible in the 1880s.

Liszt spent a good part of each year from 1864 onward in the Villa d’Este — a 16th century castle in a park in Tivoli near Rome. It is famous for its elaborate fountains, but it is also renowned for its ancient cypresses, which became the inspiration for two *Threnodies*. The two *Aux Cyprès de la Villa d’Este* (Among the Cypresses of the Villa d’Este) are ruminations on the ephemeral nature of existence. “For three whole days, in September 1877, Liszt spent every hour of sunlight and as much of night as was made visible by the moon, in admiration of the cypresses. They obsessed his thoughts to the exclusion of all else” — words of one of Liszt’s biographers, Sacheverell Sitwell.

Schlaflos! Frage und Antwort (Sleepless! Question and Answer) was inspired by a poem by Toni Raab, which is now lost. The distinguished poet and philosopher, Jan Zwicky, has generously agreed to reverse the original process: instead of a composition inspired by a poem, she is giving us a poem inspired by the composition.

As is the case with so many of Liszt’s late works, nothing is known of the origin of the simple and touching *Resignazione*.

Transcendental Vision

The greatest of Liszt’s many religious compositions is *Bénédiction de Dieu: Blessing of God in Solitude* — based on a poem by Lamartine. Surely this is one of Liszt’s most moving masterpieces, but also one of the few religious works of the 19th century that is not suffused with a kind of stained-glass sentimentality. It describes a mystical experience, bringing a sense of harmony with the universe, a freedom from doubt and despair.

One does not need to share Liszt’s religious convictions — or indeed, any religious conviction — to feel the power of this vision. Such moments of clarity seem to be found in all religions, and even among those who would call themselves atheists. Perhaps, as Carol Shields suggests, we all have some intimation of these moments in time: “...those... rare transcendental moments when you suddenly feel everything makes

sense and you perceive the pattern of the universe. I think we all get a few of these minutes."

My brother Gordon, who died more than 40 years ago, once told me of his own such mystical experience:

I had gone for a walk in the autumn heat, through the vibrant air of the woods. As I was returning from the woods, my head filled with fresh air, I watched the slanting beams of the setting sun turning the grey brush gold where the light had managed to penetrate the trees, and I felt drawn to get as close to the sun as I possibly could before it disappeared across the lake. I picked my way down as close to the edge of the water as I could and still stand comfortably. I am not a religious man. But balancing there, the dry scent of dead leaves and the heady essence of pine and cedar in my nostrils, and with the dying sun of the dying year still warm on my face, I had as close to a religious experience as I am capable of imagining. As I stood there, eyes closed, I felt my arms slowly lift' from my sides until they were slightly above shoulder level, my palms open to the sun, fingers yawning. I don't know how long I maintained that position, but I know that when I felt the sun's last beams cool on my forehead I felt utterly and strangely full. I have no idea why but I suddenly found myself sobbing uncontrollably, my whole being full of an indescribable feeling of joy.

Blessing of God in Solitude

Whence does it come to me, O my God!

 this peace which floods over me?

Whence comes this faith

 with which my heart overflows?

To me, who so recently was uncertain, restless,

 and tossed about on the waves of doubt,

Searching for the good, for the truth,

 in the dreams of sages,

And for peace in hearts resounding with turmoil.

It is but a few days that have slipped by,

Yet it seems that a century and a world have passed away;

And that, separated from all of that by an immense abyss,

A new man within me is reborn and begins again.

(Alphonse de Lamartine)

BIOGRAPHIES

Bruce Vogt is a Canadian pianist and teacher who has received praise internationally for his mesmerizing performances, inspiring audiences across Canada and abroad. He has given recitals across Europe, as a soloist and with chamber ensembles, in such major centres as London, Paris and Prague, as well as in venues in Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania. His upcoming visit to Japan in May of 2024 will be his sixteenth Japanese tour. He has also performed and taught in China.

Vogt grew up in Southern Ontario where he studied with Damjana Bratuz and Anton Kuerti. Later, he studied in the U.S. and Europe with Gyorgy Sebok, Louis Kentner, Fou Ts'ong, Dario de Rosa and other notable musicians. In addition to his career as a soloist and chamber musician, Vogt is Professor at the University of Victoria. Because he sees teaching and working with young pianists and teachers as an important commitment, he leads masterclasses and workshops and adjudicates for festivals. In recent years, he has received many invitations in Canada and abroad to indulge another of his passions — improvising accompaniments to great films of the silent era. He has played for and lectured on films by Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd, Griffith, Murnau, Sjöström, Lubitsch and others.

Jan Zwicky is the author of over twenty books of poetry and prose including *Songs for Relinquishing the Earth, Wisdom & Metaphor* and, with co-author Robert Bringhurst, *Learning to Die: Wisdom in the Age of Climate Crisis*. She was educated at the Universities of Calgary and Toronto and, in the 80s and 90s, developed the first courses in environmental studies at several Canadian universities. Her poetry has been published in translation in several European languages, and she has read and lectured widely in North America and Europe. Zwicky grew up in the northwest corner of the Great Central Plain on Treaty 6 territory and currently lives on Quadra Island, unceded territory with a complex history including Coast Salish and Kwakwakan influences. She is a serious gardener, a musician, and an amateur naturalist.



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